

Jack Thayer stood with his friend Milton Long at the railing to keep
370 away from the crowds. He had become separated from his father in
the confusion on deck. Now Jack and his friend heard muffled thuds
and explosions deep within the ship. Suddenly the *Titanic* began to slide
into the water. The water rushed up at them. Thayer and Long quickly
said goodbye and good luck to each other. Then they both jumped.

As he hit the water, Jack Thayer was sucked down. “The cold was
terrific. The shock of the water took the breath out of my lungs. Down
and down I went, spinning in all directions.” When he finally surfaced,
gasping for air and numbed by the water, the ship was about forty feet
away from him. His friend Milton Long was nowhere to be seen. Jack
380 would never see him again.

Jack Thayer was lucky. As he struggled in the water, his hand came
to rest on an overturned lifeboat. He grabbed hold and hung on, barely
managing to pull himself up out of the water. Harold Bride had been
washed overboard and now also clung to this same boat.

Both Jack and Harold witnessed the mighty ship’s last desperate
moments. “We could see groups of . . . people aboard, clinging in clusters
or bunches, like swarming bees; only to fall in masses, pairs, or singly,
as the great part of the ship . . . rose into the sky. . . .” said Thayer.
“I looked upwards—we were right under the three enormous propellers.
390 For an instant, I thought they were sure to come right down on top of us.
Then . . . she slid quietly away from us into the sea.”

Out in the safety of her lifeboat, Ruth Becker also witnessed the end
of the *Titanic*. “I could look back and see this ship, and the decks were
just lined with people looking over. Finally, as the *Titanic* sank faster,
the lights died out. You could just see the stern remaining in an upright
position for a couple of minutes. Then . . . it disappeared.”

Then, as Ruth recalled, “there fell upon the ear the most terrible noise
that human beings ever listened to—the cries of hundreds of people
struggling in the icy cold water, crying for help with a cry we knew could
400 not be answered.” In Thayer’s words, they became “a long continuous
wailing chant.” Before long this **ghastly** wailing stopped, as the freezing
water took its toll.¹⁹ †

Jack Thayer and Harold Bride and a number of other survivors clung
to their overturned lifeboat, inches away from an icy death in the North
Atlantic. Numb from the cold and not daring to move in case the boat
sank under their weight, they prayed and waited for help. Then, as the
first light of dawn crept on the horizon, a rocket was seen in the distance.
The *Carpathia* had come to their rescue. ∞

ghastly (găst'lē) *adj.*
terrifyingly horrible

† **NARRATIVE
NONFICTION**

Reread lines 385–402
and decide which
quotation is most
memorable. Why
do you think so?

19. **took its toll:** claimed passengers' lives.