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FROM FICTION TO REALITY

Morgan Robertson was an author. In 1898, he published a short book called *Futility*. The story was a warning about luxury ocean liners. Robertson felt ship companies cared more about money than their passengers' lives.

The ship in Robertson's story was huge. It was the biggest ever built. There were 2,500 passengers. Many were rich and famous. On a calm April night, it set sail.

Then tragedy struck. The ship was halfway across the Atlantic. It hit an iceberg and quickly sank. Many lives were lost in the icy water.

Robertson's fictional ship had 19 watertight compartments. Water could not move from one to the next. The big ship also had three propellers.

In 1911, work began on a real ocean liner.

It was very similar to the ship in Robertson's book. Both ships were about 800 feet long. The real ship was the first to actually have three propellers. There were also 16 watertight compartments. This was a new safety feature.

There was a problem with both ships too. Neither had enough lifeboats. If there was an emergency, not everyone could be saved. But this was okay. Nobody believed either ship could sink.

The real ship set sail on April 10, 1912. Many rich and famous people were on board. Five days later, the ship ran into an iceberg. It sank in under three hours. Over 1,500 people died in the icy waters of the Atlantic.

In Robertson's novel, the ship was called the *Titan*. The real ship was the *Titanic*. Many think this coincidence is quite strange.

THE STRANGE TRUTH

- ♦ Both ships were moving at a speed of around 25 knots when they ran into icebergs.
- ♦ The real and fictional ships both hit icebergs around midnight on their starboard side.
- ♦ There were some differences between the disasters too. The *Titan* turned over after hitting the iceberg and had 13 survivors. The *Titanic* split in half and had 705 survivors.
- ♦ A book published in 1886 by W. T. Stead also told the story of an ocean liner that sank in the Atlantic. It warned of the dangers of heading out to sea with too few lifeboats on board.
- ♦ Robertson says he did not predict the sinking of the *Titanic* in his book. He used his knowledge of ships to make guesses about what the future of ocean travel would be like.



A BLIND RESCUE

It was a dark night in March 2006. Jim Sherman heard someone call out. It was his 84-year-old neighbor. Annie Smith needed help. Her home in Grangerland, Texas, was on fire.

To make the situation worse, Smith was legally blind. She contacted Sherman on a baby monitor that they shared. Believe it or not, Sherman was blind too. But this did not slow him down. He left his trailer and hurried next door. His friend was in danger.

Smith had been in the bathroom when the fire started. Popping sounds could be heard. They were coming from the back of the house. Cautiously, she opened the bathroom door. Smoke poured in. The blind woman felt the heat of nearby flames. She called to her dog. Then Smith tried to escape.

Sherman was on his way. A fence ran between his house and Smith's. The blind man used it as a guide. This led him to the sidewalk. From there, Sherman navigated himself to Smith's front door.

The heat of the blaze was intense. He could feel it from outside. Fire raged through the house. But being blind meant Sherman could not tell exactly where. This did not deter him. Carefully, he opened the door and went inside. Just a few steps in, Sherman found Smith. She had been heading toward the front door.

Four weeks earlier, Smith had suffered a stroke. Walking was now difficult for her. Still, she had made it down the smoke-filled hallway. Sherman grabbed the woman's hands. They had to get out of the house.

"I was walking backward," Sherman said later. "She was walking forward."

The pair made it safely out of the house. Sherman then used his cordless phone to call 9-1-1. Firefighters arrived 12 minutes later. By then, Smith's home was engulfed in flames. Crews put out the fire, but her house was destroyed.

Firefighters investigated the cause of the blaze. An electrical overload had apparently sparked the fire. It began in one of the bedrooms.

Smith was very lucky. Without help, she likely would not have made it out alive. Thankfully, her neighbor got there just in time.

"I'm just glad I saved somebody's life," Sherman said.

THE STRANGE TRUTH

- ♦ Jim Sherman was 54 years old at the time of the fire. He had been blind since birth.
- ♦ Annie Smith had a dog, three cats, and three kittens. Sadly, two of her cats were killed in the fire.
- ♦ Smith's daughter lived with her, but she was at work when the fire started. The baby monitors had been her idea. She was worried that nobody would know if her aging mother fell.
- ♦ Sherman had also helped his neighbor the month before when she had a stroke.
- ♦ When Smith had her stroke, Sherman heard the sound of her falling over their shared baby monitor. He rushed next door and helped Smith onto her couch. Then he quickly dialed 9-1-1.