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Opening extract from

The Watch That Ends the Night

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April 20, 1912
SATURDAY
Aboard the cable ship *Mackay-Bennett*
ATLANTIC OCEAN
THE GRAND BANKS
600 MILES FROM HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA

JOHN SNOW
THE UNDERTAKER

Embalmers don't typically make house calls.
If not buried with a splash from their ship,
most casualties at sea are brought to me
at the family parlor on Argyle Street.

In Halifax the water is unavoidable as death.
And death is unavoidable as the water.
Raised as I was in a Halifax funeral home,
you might guess I'd grow up to accept them both.
But I find the dead preferable to the sea.
The dead are more predictable.

To ease my queasy stomach,
I am lying down atop the empty coffins
stacked neatly across the *Mackay-Bennett*'s decks.
Waves toss our small vessel as if it were a toy.
The journey has been cold and slow,
three days' steaming with half a day to go.

As night falls, Captain Larnder informs me,

"We should be among the wreckage soon—
better sleep now, while you still can, Mr. Snow.
The sun will be up soon enough."

Yes, I think. The sun will always come up.
Even after the entire ship of humanity
has struck its berg and sunk,
the sun will rise.

"Good night, Captain Larnder," I say.

"Good night, sir. Rest well," he replies.

Later that night, in my berth below,
I hear the ship's engines finally quit.
Silence fills the dark, and I know
we have reached the spot where the *Titanic* foundered.
They are out there in the water. The bodies. Among the debris.

My name is John Snow.
You could say that my living is death.
I am the undertaker.
I have come for the bodies.