

## Chapter Three

The eight men remained standing until Emma had taken her place at the head of the table, an unfamiliar table, but then the ballroom had served a different purpose, only a few hours before.

The chairman faced her colleagues, none of them smiling. She opened the blue leather folder in front of her, a gift from Ham when she'd first become chairman. She glanced down at an agenda that had been prepared by <sup>Alan Webster</sup> the company secretary (Alan Webster the day before they set sail from Bristol). There was now only one item on the revised agenda and it would probably be the only matter discussed that day.

I'll begin said Emma by reporting in the strictest confidence everything that took place in the early hours of the morning. Twenty minutes later ~~Emma~~ double checked her notes, and felt she had covered everything in the past, but ~~what of the future~~ had no way of predicting the future.

Have we got away with it ~~was a~~ Admiral Summers <sup>said</sup> once Emma had invited questions.

Most of the passengers have accepted the Captain's explanation without question. She turned a page of her file. However, we've so far had thirty-four official complaints, of which all but one have accepted a free voyage on the Buckingham at some time in the future.

And you can be certain, there will be a whole lot more said Bob Bingham, his Yorkshire bluntness cutting through the outwardly calm ~~attempts~~, demeanor <sup>prompted by</sup> the older board members.

What makes you say that? asked Emma, once the other passengers discover all they have

to do is write a letter of complaint, and they'll be offered a free trip, <sup>most of them</sup> ~~will~~ will be sitting in their cabins ~~waiting those letters~~ <sup>(PM)</sup> ~~right now~~ that may turn out to be the least of our problems said Emma.

You said Chairman, that all but one had been ~~amplified~~ satisfied with a free trip said Answit looking down at the words on the pad he'd written on the pad in front of him.

Yes, said Emma, one of the American passengers is threatening to sue the company. Says he was out on the deck during the early hours of the morning and there was no sign of the home fleet, ~~and~~ as he'd served in American Navy, he knew what to look for.

Suddenly all the board members were speaking at once. Emma waited for them to settle before she said I have an appointment to see Mr. she checked her file cuttbert at twelve o'clock this morning.

How many <sup>other</sup> Americans are there on board asked Bingham

Around ~~one~~ a hundred said Emma, why do you ask Bob Let ~~not~~ hope that not too many <sup>of them</sup> ~~are~~ lawyers, a group were banned in Yorkshire as an unnecessary expense, laughter broke out around the table for the first time that morning. Just assure me ~~if~~ cuttbert isn't a lawyer. Emma that Mr

The chairman rechecked her file, worse, she said He's a politician. A local congressman from Kansas.

~~Then you'd better leave him to me said~~

~~Gita~~

one maggot in a ~~barrel~~ <sup>barrel</sup> of apples said Mr Dobbs, a board member who readily offered an opinion.









invitation. The Telegraph the Mail and the Express.

Three too many said Knowles

The man from ~~the~~ Express w/ <sup>PRO</sup> nearly sober ~~so~~ ~~we~~ ~~made~~ ~~sure~~ ~~that~~ ~~there's~~ ~~never~~ ~~been~~ ~~more~~ ~~than~~ ~~two~~ ~~bottles~~ ~~of~~ ~~Johnnie~~ ~~walker~~ ~~in~~ ~~his~~ ~~room~~; the Mail are sponsoring ~~the~~ ~~twelve~~ ~~free~~ ~~trips~~, on the next voyage, so are unlikely to be <sup>that</sup> interested in knowing why, however I confess Derek Hart of the Telegraph, has already been digging around, asking questions.

Hartley, <sup>as</sup> has known in the trade, said Giles, perhaps it'd better give ~~him~~ <sup>him</sup> an exclusive, which ~~will~~ ~~keep~~ ~~him~~ ~~well~~ ~~occupied~~.

What do you have in mind said Emma  
The ~~government~~ <sup>government</sup> ~~is~~ ~~about~~ ~~to~~ ~~announce~~ ~~a~~ ~~1.1~~ ~~billion~~ ~~loan~~ ~~from~~ ~~the~~ ~~IMF~~ ~~to~~ ~~haul~~ ~~the~~ ~~side~~ ~~of~~ ~~sterling~~. The Telegraphs readers will revel in that. A Lab hope so said Emma.

With so much at stake chairman, I think we'll have to prepare for a best case worst case scenario. <sup>said</sup> ~~After~~ ~~all~~, if our <sup>american</sup> ~~pol~~ ~~man~~ decides to go public, or the IRA have a follow up planned, or Mr Hart of the Telegraph stumbled across the truth, this could be the Buckingham Bunk and last voyage.

PRO Lab hope it doesn't come to that. ~~said~~ ~~Derek~~

Mr Knowles is right said Emma, if any of those three scenarios were to happen, no amount of damage limitation is likely to save us, our shares would collapse, and our reserves would be quickly drained, and as for the future, the bookmakers are unlikely to soar, if proper

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passengers think theres the slightest chance of an IRA cell being on board, with that in mind I suggest we all use the rest of the day, picking up any information we can, while assuring our passengers all is well. I'll be in my cabin, so if you come up with anything, you'll know where to find me.

Not a good idea, said Giles firmly Emma looked surprised. The chairman should be seen on the sundial, relaxing and enjoying herself, which is far more likely to convince the passengers that they have nothing to worry about.

Good thinking said the admiral.

Emma nodded, and was about to rise from her place, to indicate that the meeting was over, when Alan Webster, the company secretary said firmly any other business. who was now standing up.

I don't think so said Emma ~~resuming her seat~~. Just one other matter chairman said Giles as Emma sat back down ~~in her chair~~. She still hadn't got used to her brother addressing her as chairman.

Now that I am a member of the government I am left with no choice but to ~~resign~~ ~~as~~ as a member of the board, as ~~it is~~ ~~not permitted~~ as I am not allowed to hold a post of profit while serving Her Majesty. And in any case I only ~~was~~ joined the board to make sure Major Fisher didn't become chairman.

Thank God he's no longer ~~a member~~ of the board said Admiral, which was the first thing they had all been able to agree on.

Emma smiled at her brother. I like to place <sup>record</sup> on my thanks, both to you and my wife,



who has also sent me a letter of resignation. And as there will now be two vacancies on the board, perhaps you would advise me of any suitable candidate, she said looking around the <sup>table</sup> ~~table~~.

If I might be allowed to make a suggestion said the admiral. Everyone turned to face the old salt.

Barringtons is a family company with a long family tradition. Our chairman was Barrington, so perhaps the time has come, to look to the next generation, and invite Sebastian Cuffin to join us on the board, so ~~that~~ allow <sup>us</sup> to continue the family heritage.

But has only twenty five protested Emma, older than our beloved Queen when she ascended the throne, the admiral reminded her.

And don't forget that Cedric Hardcastle, no ~~shown~~ <sup>shown</sup> considered ~~good~~ <sup>suburban</sup> good enough to be our personal assistant at the bank. Bob Bingham ~~reminded~~ <sup>reminded</sup> them, and I'm told that he's ~~about~~ <sup>recently</sup> been appointed as second in command of Farthing's property ~~division~~ <sup>division</sup>.

And I can ~~see~~ <sup>see</sup> you <sup>know</sup> in confidence said Giles, that when I joined the government, I didn't hesitate to put ~~him~~ <sup>Sebastian</sup> in charge of the families share portfolio.

Then all that's left for me to do said the Admiral ~~summing~~ is to propose that Sebastian Cuffin be invited to join the board of Bannington shipping.

And it'd be delightful to second that motion said Bingham.

I confess that I'm embroiled said Emma. That will be a first said Giles which helped

lighten the mood.

Then all that is <sup>now</sup> required, is for a vote to take place. said Webster

Emma nodded, and sat back

Admiral Summer had proposed continuing the company secretary, and Mr Bingham had seconded that Mr Sebastian Clifton be invited to join the board of Bannington. He paused for a moment before adding those in favour. Every hand and nose except Emma's and Gita's.

Those against engraved the company secretary.

No hands were raised, which was followed by a round of applause. Bingham felt very proud.

I therefore declare that Mr Sebastian Clifton has been elected as a member of the board of Bannington.

Let us pray there will be a board for Seb to join. Emma whispered to her brother after the company had declared the meeting closed.

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