

# THE NICE LADY

Roger Gillmoor stood at the quay side and looked at the liner; it towered above him and stretched the full length of the quay. This is supposed to be a medium size cruise liner; he said to himself, what, must the big ones look like then. A young man wearing a shipping company identification jacket said "Take your bags sir, it has a yellow label that means you are on C deck and your luggage will be delivered to your cabin very shortly". Roger then walked up a wide gangway into the side of the liner, and was met by a reception team who checked his boarding papers issued him with a ID card, much like a credit card, this he had to show every time he left, and returned to the liner, also on any purchases he made while on board. A young lady took him to a lift, this took them up to C deck, she then escorted him to cabin 42, unlocked the door and handed him the key. "This is your cabin, sir, you will find the restaurant and other facilities down on deck F, a booklet with information on dining times and a layout of the other decks you will find in the cabin".

Roger thanked the lady and entered his cabin, which will be his home for the next ten days; it was a single cabin and he was impressed with how nice it looked, there was a single bed down one wall with a three draw cabinet at the side, on which was a phone and a bottle of water and a tumbler. At the bottom of the bed was a good size cubical that contained a toilet, wash basin and a shower. Along the wall to the left of the door was a dressing table with four wide draws and a mirror fixed to the wall; a carpet covered the floor. As the cabin was an interior one there was no external light, but the electric light in the cabin and shower cubical gave out a light just like daytime.

Roger was impressed with the quality of the furniture and fittings, and the bed seemed very soft and comfortable when he sat on it. Just then Roger heard a knock at the door, when he opened it he saw a young man in a smart uniform who introduced himself as Karl, who was his cabin steward, and he had all of Roger's luggage. Karl asked if he could help with the unpacking, but Roger thanked him and said he could easily manage. It did not take long to stow all his clothes and things away and there was plenty of space, with the cases fitting neatly under the bed. When all was put away, he sat on the bed and studied the booklet, his deck had an open area at the front and back of the boat where one could sit, on deck F the restaurant was at the front and at the back was an open area where there was a swimming pool and seating areas, and in between them was an stage and auditorium, three lounges, a library and reading room, games room and what came as a surprise, shops. On the dressing table was a card, this showed what time he was to go to dinner, which was in the first sitting and that was at 1800 hrs, and table 26, it also informed him that dress on the first night was optional, but all other nights passenger were required to dress in lounge suits. Roger looked at his watch; it was a little after four o'clock, so he thought he would have a look round the boat to get his bearings; instead of taking the lift, he went down the plush stairway to, deck F, which was also numbered 6.

There were lots of other passengers exploring the layout of the boat, and it soon became obvious that quite a lot of them had been on the liner before. In fact a large portly man was acting as a guide; "Now this area is the Captains Club, and you can get your drinks in here, if we go through the lounge we can go out to the sun deck and the swimming pool, that shuttered kiosk over there is where you can get tea, coffee or cold drinks."

Leading the group that had attached themselves to him, he took them back through the Captains Club into another area. "This open area on our right is the Maritime Lounge, here you can get tea, coffee, cold drinks and alcohol, and if you go through the lounge you will find the library and reading room. This room on the left is the games room, you can play cards or scrabble and chess if you are that way inclined. Now we have the shops" the man paused so that the passengers could look through the windows at the range of goods on offer, from clothes to alcohol. "When we are out at sea the shops will open," the man continued, explaining that all goods were sold without any tax or VAT on them but they might have to pay up when the return home.

At that moment the passenger address system gave out the information that they would be sailing at 17-30 hours, and that in the evening, Pride and Joy would be entertaining in the theatre. Moving on the guide took them into an area that had palm trees dotted about between the tables. "This is the Palm Garden, a nice place

to relax and enjoy a cup of tea or coffee, and over on the far side is the ships information centre; just the other side of this area is the theatre".

Having done his tour the man walk away, Roger thought he would have a cup of tea in the Palm Garden so. moving to a table he sat down, no sooner was he seated then a waitress came up and asked if she could get anything for him, Roger asked for some tea, the young girl asked for his cabin number, while he was waiting the other tables started to fill with passengers, and an elderly couple asked if they could share his table. "Of course", I'm pleased to have your company, you are travelling on your own then, the man asked," Yes, this is my first cruise, something I have been looking forward too for a long time, my wife Jenny and I are old hands at it now, we have been going on them for the last eight years. Blimey, Roger thought to himself, you must have a lot of money to be able to afford to do that. We have been all over the world almost, haven't we Henry, even down to Australia and China. We have that Jenny, and on some of the big liners as well. The waitress arrived with a pot of tea; Roger wanted to pay her, but she told him that it would be added to his shipboard account, with that she gave him a receipt, when he looked, it had what he had ordered, the time and place and the cost, and cabin number, which rather startled him. "You don't pay for anything, you settle up at the end of the voyage" that was Henry speaking, if you buy anything big, such as in the shops, they will scan your boarding card as well as giving you a recite"

The couple had ordered tea as well, so for the next half hour or so Roger was treated to a narrative of all there cruises, what they thought of other places, and other liners, he soon learnt that they preferred to be on a liner the size of the one they were on now, the big ones were to crowded, it was like living in a town, Jenny said.

When Roger finally got back to his cabin, it was almost time to go to dinner, so after tidying himself up he made his way too deck 6 and found his way into the restaurant where a smartly dressed waiter asked his table number, 26, Roger informed him, "This way sir, your table is in the third row and your waitress is Mandy." The table was nicely laid out top quality cutlery and glasses. Within a few minutes Roger was joined by three large grey haired ladies, they were stern faced and did not even thank the waiter who had shown them to the table. Roger gave them a smile, "Hello, my name is Roger, we have now left the dock and are on our way to a nice cruise" none of the faces changed, then one of them, without any expression on her face, spoke, "my names is Ruth, and my sisters names are Joyce and Mary. None of the sisters made any sign of recognition, a right bundle of fun you are going to be Roger thought to himself, but he got the message that they were not the chatty type, so the meal was eaten in silence.

When he had finished eating, Roger left the restaurant and went into the Maritime Lounge to have a drink as it would be another hour before *Pride and Joy* were due to perform. Having got his drink he looked for a table, but they were nearly all full, so he had to share with a married couple. They were very nice and sociable and the conversation flowed easily. "I see you are sharing your meals with the Dolly Sisters" the man said, we have been on a couple of cruises with them and they are so bloody prim and proper, they don't join in anything, I bet they won't be at the show to-night. They are not married, they are just a miserable lot, his wife added. When the couple had finished their drinks they got up and said they were going to find a seat in the theatre as there were not enough seats for all the passengers, they advised Roger to follow them as soon as he could.

When he had finished drinking, he left the lounge and made his way to the theatre, and it did look as though all the seats were taken, then he spotted an empty one in the fifth row, so he made his way along the row and when he came to it he asked if it was vacant. A lady in the next seat said it was so he sat down and was pleased to have a good view of the stage. *Pride and Joy*, a man and a woman, were very good, singing all the old hits from the sixties and seventies, Roger enjoyed singing along and he noticed the lady sitting next to him was also singing along, in the interval he started to chat to the lady, and discovered she was a seasoned traveller on cruise ships. After the show Roger followed the nice lady he had been sitting next to into the Maritime Lounge, it was packed, so she went into the Palm Garden area, there were a few seats available, so she sat at a table were there two empty ones, Roger asked if she would mind him occupying the spare one. "Not at all," she answered with a smile, I must say that I don't mind having a cup of tea at night, and it's more comfortable in here than in the lounge. Roger said I'm the same a good cuppa always goes down very well.

When the waitress came up Roger asked for a pot of tea for two, and gave her his cabin number. The nice lady thanked him and said that was kind of him, Roger replied that it was a pleasure to have her company. Over tea they talked about the following day, as they would be at sea all day some entertainment and talks had been organised for them. The nice lady said she would be going to the talks and see shows about all the places they would be visiting, also the talk by one of our Ambassadors about his work in foreign countries. Roger said he was looking forward to that as well, as the responsibility he carried must be enormous. After they had drunk their tea the nice lady thanked him for the tea and said goodnight, Roger told her he was going to stretch his legs and have a walk round the deck where the swimming pool was. When he arrived the deck was quite crowded, but he could see that the liner was well out into the North Sea. Then he looked up, the sky was clear, and saw for the first time in his life the heavens in all their star spangled glory; even the lights on the liner did not diminish their brightness, and the streak of bright light that stretched across the sky must be the Milky Way, he thought to himself, the first time he had seen it for real.

An elderly lady came and stood by him, I remember during the war when there was a complete black out, and the sky was clear, you could read a news paper she told him, and I could pick-out all the constellations and the planets, but I've forgotten them now. This is the first time I've seen anything like this, only photos and on the TV, Roger informed her, you don't get the vastness or the brightness from them; I'm absolutely amazed by the sheer volume of it all. Roger stayed admiring the sky of a few minutes more then made his way to his cabin, had a shower then got into bed, which he found very comfortable, and was soon asleep.

Next morning he was up and showered and in the restaurant by 8-30, the three sisters were already having their breakfast, Roger greeted them with a cherry good morning, but all he got back as curt acknowledgement, after a hearty breakfast he went out on the deck and chatted to some of the people out there. Gradually people started to drift away, and suddenly Roger remembered the lecture about the places they were due to visit, he looked at his watch and saw that it was almost time for it to start. Making his way to the theatre he found it full but was lucky to spot an empty seat near the back, as he moved towards it, he saw the nice lady sitting a few rows in front; she gave him a smile and a wave. The lecture and slide's were very interesting, and he was looking forward to seeing the places for real. When it was all over it was time to make for the restaurant for lunch, and as with all the meals so far, there was a excellent choice.

After the meal Roger went into the Maritime Lounge for a cup of coffee, again there was little room, but he saw the nice lady and she beckoned him over to an empty seat at her table, all these lounges could be bigger she said as he took his seat. They chatted while they were drinking, Roger told her that he had been on his own for five years, which was one year longer than the nice lady. When they had finished their drinks, they made their way to the theatre, and again, all the seats seemed taken, all they could find were two separate ones.

The talk by the Ambassador was very interesting, and revealed just how much responsibility they had to shoulder. At the end the crowd in the theatre were slow to move out, but never the less, by the time Roger was able to leave all the seats in the Palm Garden, and the Maritime Lounge were taken, so he made his way out side to the pool deck. It was a warm sunny afternoon and there were lots of passengers out there, Roger got a cup of tea from the kiosk and leant on the ships rail, watching the waves go by. Dinner that night was a dressed up one, so Roger returned to his cabin, showered and changed his clothes and put on his dinner jacket; some of the men in the restaurant had lounge suits, and there was quite a variety of ladies dresses. At table 26 the three sisters looked as though they had stepped right out of the nineteen twenties, but Roger remarked how smart they looked, all he got back was a polite thank you. After an excellent meal Roger went to the Captains Club for a scotch and soda, and soon started talking to some of the other passengers in there. He stayed there so long that when he went to see the show that was being put on in the theatre all the seats were taken, so he had to stand at the back. It was a good show with some excellent singers and dancers, and was surprised when one of the ladies standing next to him told him that all the cast were members of the crew. With the show over Roger went into the Palm Garden only to find all the seats were taken, the nice lady was sitting at a table with some other people, and she gave him a smile. The only thing he could do was to go to the Captains Club, get a drink, and take it out onto the pool deck and look at the stars.

Next morning when Roger went up for breakfast he saw that the liner had docked at their first port of call. He had already made bookings to go on coach trips at all the places they were due to visit, and the one today was going to take them into the hills and glens of Scotland, but it was raining. As he was having his

breakfast, the address system announced that the coaches were going to depart at 10,00 hrs, that gave him about 30 minutes after he had finish eating to get ready. Back in his cabin, he got his raincoat out made himself comfortable, picked up his camera, because it might brighten up later, and made his was to deck D, from which they would be going ashore to board the coaches. As he was waiting, the address system announced that all the passengers going on the trips must have their boarding cards with them, otherwise they would not be allowed off the liner, they were also informed that coach A, would be loading first. He was on A, so he waited until they were instructed to leave the vessel, as he waited he saw the nice lady talking to a group of people near the exit door which was open, he knew she was doing the trip, but he was unaware which coach she was on. At last they were told to leave, they gave their cards to a security guard who swiped it and gave it back, saying that they must have it to get back onboard again. A short walk down a gangway, then they had to walk a hundred yards or so, in the rain to the coach; climbing up into the vehicle he noticed most of the seats were taken, but there was one with only one person in it, and that was the nice lady, "May I join you" he asked, Please do she answered giving him a bright smile. What a rotten day to go touring round the glens the lady said, I have been up to Scotland before, and the weather was perfect, sunny and warm, and the hills and glens looked wonderful. This is my first time up here Roger told her, and was so looking forward to it, everybody I've met who has been up to Scotland says how gorgeous the scenery is, but you have to have the right weather, and it looks as though we are out of luck today.

The coach took them through the town, and when they were in the country, the driver spoke to them over the radio system, welcoming them on board and apologizing for the terrible weather, but he hoped that they would enjoy the trip anyway. The rain seemed to be coming down heavier, and the tops of the hills were covered in mist, but the nice lady was a good companion and they chatted away quite freely. On several occasions the driver stopped and told them that this was one of the beauty spots where they could take photos, but as it was so wet and misty they would push on and make a stop at a place where they could get tea or coffee, then they would go on to the hotel where they were booked in for lunch. The Heather Cafe where they stopped looked like an old red brick manor house, the driver told them that it had once been the.

Inside the cafe Roger sat with the nice lady and brought her a cup of coffee, she said that it was her turn to pay as he had brought all the other drinks, but he said he was pleased to pay. In any case he did not believe in a woman paying for a man. Their coach trip continued in the mist and rain, excepting the driver's word that they were passing some beautiful scenery. The hotel where they stopped for lunch was on the outskirts of a small Highland town, it was rather grand, which surprised Roger, but the driver informed them that it was a favoured by the hunting set. The lunch was very good, and afterwards the nice lady and Roger had a walk into the town, although it was still raining they did not want to feel they had wasted a day. The nice lady had an umbrella so they did not get too wet; it was obviously an old town, with narrow cobbled streets, and quaint shops and houses. Back on the coach they continued through the rain, arriving at the quay side just after 4-30pm; getting on board, they passed through security, the nice lady thank Roger for his company and told him she was going to see the show later.

Roger went to the Captains Club and got himself a whisky and soda, and told some passengers there that he had been on the trip round the glens, but it was so misty they could not see anything. After his drink, Roger returned to his cabin to change for diner, which as usual was very enjoyable, except for the company; by this time the liner had put to sea on its way to their next port of call. When the meal was over, he went along to the theatre and found a seat; the nice lady was sitting a few rows behind, chatting to some ladies sitting next to her. When the lively show was over, Roger tried to find a place in the bar, but the seats were all taken with passengers, so he returned to his cabin, got ready for bed, then lay reading until he felt tired enough to sleep.

By breakfast time the next morning, the liner had already reached their next destination, where the passengers had the choice of two coach trips, one a ride around the hills and glens of that part of Scotland, and the other a trip to visit two ancient castles. Unfortunately, there was no quay for the liner to berth at so the passengers had to use the ships lifeboats to ferry them ashore. As they were having breakfast, the ships address system announced that the passenger going on the glens tour would be leaving first, and they were to assemble on F deck at 9-45, ready to be taken ashore. Those passengers on the castles coach tour had to be on F deck at 10-30. When breakfast was over, Roger walked out onto the pool deck, it had stopped raining, the clouds had lifted and it was bright but with a chilly wind. The liner was anchored some way from the shore, so there was a good view of the little fishing village that spread round the bay.

At the appointed time, Roger went down to F deck, after passing through security, he walked down a the gangway to the lifeboat; it was quite large, and covered over so those on board could be kept dry, when he was seated he saw a notice which said that the vessel could take 150 people, as there was eight boats on the liner, that meant that 1200 people could be saved. The journey to the small jetty only took a few minutes, then it was just a little way to where the coach was waiting, Roger did not bother to look for the nice lady as he boarded the coach as he knew she was on the tour around the glens, so he took the first empty seat, which was next to a large woman with untidy grey hair, do you mind if I have this seat he asked, the lady shrugged and said please yourself. At least we have weather today; we will be able to see the scenery and the Highland retreat of a Highland Lord, who lost all his money through gambling better. The lady just said yes. Did you go on the coach yesterday, No was the answer, not a very talkative person Roger thought to himself.. The journey to the first castle passed through some lovely glens, but Roger noticed that the lady spent most of the time with her eyes closed; what a waist, missing all this nice scenery. On arriving at the first call, he said to the lady that he hoped she enjoyed looking round the ruins, only to be told that she was staying on the coach. Not taking a look at this historical castle. The lady just shook her head.

The castle was built on the top of a hill overlooking a valley with a wide river flowing through it; the ramparts and the towers were still intact, but the main hall and other building were in ruins, the roofs had fallen in and the walls collapsed. Never the less, there was enough to see from the ramparts and rooms in the towers to make the visit worthwhile. Back on the coach, "Old Fatso" as Roger now called her did not say a word to him so he sat and enjoyed the ride to the next castle. This was situated in a bluff overlooking a small town, and it was there that they stopped for lunch; "Old Fatso" did get out of the coach for that. In the restaurant where the lunch was being served, haggis on the menu, Roger knew that it was a favourite of the Scots but had never seen it, let alone tasted it, so he decided to try it, and to his surprise he enjoyed the flavour of haggis.

After the meal was over, the coach took them up the steep hill to the castle, this one was in much better condition, the great hall was finished with a huge table, there were wooden chairs, and on the walls hung shields, amour, swords and axes. The old kitchens were there as well as a blacksmiths forge and barrack rooms. On the ramparts there were some old canons and rusty balls, the tour of the castle took two hours and when it was all over they returned to the coach." Old Fatso" was still sitting there with her eyes closed, and she did not open them when Roger sat down.

After another ride through the glens the coach deposited them on the quay side where some ships lifeboats were waiting to take them back on board. When he had showered and dressed for dinner, Roger made his way to the Captains Club and enjoyed a drink, then went down to the restaurant, the three sisters were already there so he said good evening and started to tell them about his trip to the castles, but there was hardly any response, so he was very brief in his account of his day; in fact the sisters did not talk among themselves at all. With the meal over he went straight to the theatre and was able to see the nice lady sitting next to some empty seats. Roger asked if he could join her, she gave him a warm smile and said of course. Until the show started they chatted about their day, he told her about the castles and the lady he sat next to, and she gave him an account of her ride through the glens and over the hills. The show was every bit as good as the previous ones, and after Roger asked the nice lady if she would join him for a drink, the answer was yes, but it was her turn to pay, Roger said no, but first they had to find a seat. Luckily they found two in the Maritime Lounge, when the waitress came over, Roger ordered the drink on his account, then asked the nice lady what trips she was doing at their next port of call. There were two; one was a walk along the coast, the other to see how tartan is woven, and a visit to a distillery. The nice lady said she was going on the tartan coach as there was too much walking on the coastal outing, and some steep hills to climb and her legs could not manage all that.

Roger told her that was the one he was going on as well, the coast walk would be lovely, but, his legs were not all that strong so he had settled for the coach tour. He asked the nice lady if he could join her tomorrow, and she said certainly, it will be good to have some company. When they had finished their drinks, they said good-night, and went to their separate cabins; the liner had put to sea, heading for their next destination, the sea was a little bit rough, so there was a slight rocking movement in Roger's cabin which helped to send him to sleep.

After breakfast next morning, the address system informed them that the tartan coach would be leaving at 10-30am, and they were to disembark from deck F. Roger returned to his cabin, collected his camera and raincoat, as the weather did not look too promising, and made his way down to F deck. There were already a crowd of people there, but he managed to spot the nice lady, so he slowly edged through the crowd towards her. The lady greeted him with a cheery "Good Morning" and he replied it would be better if the sun was shining, but he hoped the weather would not spoil the trip. On reflection, he thought that was not a very nice thing to say to the lady, perhaps he should have said it doesn't matter about the weather as long as he had her for company. By this time they were starting to leave the liner, passing their boarding cards through the security check they made their way down the gangway and on to the coach. Although it was drizzling, the clouds were not too low, so it was quite bright and they had a good view of the country as they sped along.

Their first call was at the tartan weavers, where they were given a talk about the kilt and how it came into being, then a talk on the various tartans. Then after coffee, they toured the weaving sheds, and Roger was fascinated, watching all the different coloured wools coming down at all angles to be woven into beautiful patterns, so quickly and easily. In the unavoidable shop, he bought a tartan hat and scarf in the Macdonald tartan, and a scarf in the Cameron tartan, for his daughter, and a tie in the same tartan for his son-in-law.

The distillery was only a short drive away and it was there that they had lunch, and a good spread it was too. The tour took in all the processes, from storing the barley to bottling, Roger had a good idea how whisky was made, but he was not prepared for the vast vats that seemed to be everywhere, and all the hissing steam. The nice lady he was with was quite interested in the process; she said her late husband was rather partial to nip. When the tour was over they were all given a miniature bottle as a souvenir, "A wee dram to help you on your way." the kilted man said as he handed them out.

The drive back to the ship was rather pleasant, it had stopped raining, and the sun was trying to break through. Roger and the nice lady chatted about their day and where they were going the next day. They were due to sail that evening for a bigger port, and there the passenger had a choice of making their own way around the town, or taking a coach trip out to see the country. The nice lady said she was going to look around the town, she wanted to see the shops, and see how prices compared to back home; Roger was going on the coach to have a look at the old prehistoric remains of villages that were in that area.

After dinner that evening, Roger made his way to the theatre, and was disappointed that the nice lady was sitting with some other ladies, and they were all talking away so she didn't see him. He was growing rather fond of her, she was so easy to talk to and they shared the same sense of humour. The next morning he saw the nice lady at breakfast, but was unable to speak to her. He himself went on the coach trip, and enjoyed looking round the old earthen forts and what remained of the very old buildings that once made up a village.

Back on board, he noticed that there was still some time before he needed to change for dinner, so he took himself off to the Palm Garden and there saw the nice lady sitting at a table all on her own, this pleased him, so he went over and asked if he could join her. Certainly, the lady replied, I've only just got here myself, and have not ordered anything as yet. At that moment, the waitress came over and Roger asked the nice lady if she would like tea or coffee, tea was the reply, so a pot of tea for two was ordered. While they waited, she asked Roger about his outing, and he told her how impressed he was with all he had seen and how hard life must have been in those far off times. The tea came up while he was still talking, but he insisted on it going onto his account; when he had finished, he asked about the nice lady's day, and was told that all the prices were a little higher, but overall the range of shops were as good as back home. After they had finished their tea and left to get changed for dinner, they agreed to meet in the theatre to watch the show.

As Roger was changing for dinner, the passenger address system announced that they were about to sail for their last port of call and that there were two coach trips arranged, and there would be further announcements made about them in the morning. His evening meal was eaten in silence, just like all the others, he had long given up trying to carry on any kind of conversation with the sisters, but he did wonder how they were enjoying the cruise.

When the meal was over, he went straight to the theatre and took over two seats in the middle of the fourth row; he did not have to wait long before the nice lady joined him. They enjoyed another good show and both were impressed by the fact that it was all the same crew members each time. After the show they were lucky to find two seats in the Captains Club, so were able to share a night-cap together, Roger learnt that the lady

kept bees, and was a member of her local bee keepers association. What pleased him most was that they were both going on the same outing tomorrow, visiting two seaside places.

At breakfast next morning they were informed that they would be disembarking from deck F, and his and the ladies time was 10am. They meet on deck F and went ashore together and boarded the coach. The first town they stopped at was a commercial seaside, with plenty of cafe's amusement places and children's play areas, they spent two hours there. After an hour's drive, they came to their second destination, this was altogether different, it was just a very small village around a wide bay, which had a lovely wide sandy beach, surrounded by high grassy cliffs. Roger and the nice lady walked along the beach and up some of the grassy walkway along the cliffs, they chatted and laughed as they walked, they also enjoyed a meal in the pretty garden of one of the cottages. For Roger it was the best day of the holiday, the nice lady reminded him of his late wife, and he felt so much at ease with her.

Arriving back on board, they agreed to met for the last show of the cruise, then Roger went to his cabin and started to pack as much of his stuff as possible into his case as he will have to be out of the cabin by 8am in the morning. When he had dressed for dinner, he made his way to the Captains Club for a drink before his meal. There he chatted about the cruise to some other passengers; they all agreed it had been a good and enjoyable holiday. In the restaurant, he made one last attempt to get the sisters to talk, but without success, all he got when he asked them if they had enjoyed their holiday was a curt "Yes thank you." During the meal, the passenger address system announced that, when they disembarked the next morning, they would do so by deck rotation, starting with deck A, and those on that deck should gather in the reception area at 09-30 hrs. Those passengers who were waiting to disembark should not go to the reception area until told to do so.

After another excellent meal, Roger went straight to the theatre and found that the nice lady had already got a seat for him. They sat talking, mostly about their families, Roger told her about his two daughters and their husbands, one had a DIY shop, and the other was a civil servant. He learnt that the lady had a son and a daughter, the son was an architect and worked for a big national building firm, and her daughter was a teacher at a privet school. After another lively show, they were lucky to find two seats in the Palm Garden, and there shared their last night cap together; they talked about the places they had visited and the sights they had seen. The drink finished, the nice lady thanked Roger for his company, and he thanked her for allowing him to accompany her and said it made all the difference being with someone that was so pleasant. The lady thanked him and said good night.

Back in his cabin Roger was getting ready for bed, when it suddenly came to him that he did not know the ladies name, or she knowing his; the only information they had exchanged was where they came from. He felt rather sad about that, he had got to like her, and if he had her address or phone number he could keep in touch, he thought about going up to her cabin and leaving his own details, but then realised he did not even know her cabin number. Then again, she did not show any desire to share her name and did not give any sign that she would like their friendship to continue. Roger felt a little downcast as he settled down to go to sleep. In the morning, after showering, he finished packing, and placed his case outside the cabin door with its yellow label on, then went up to breakfast. During the meal they were reminded again that passengers must not go to the reception area until their deck number was called. However, Roger was thinking of being there when the ladies number was called, and telling her his name and address and to see what her reaction would be. But then, would she think he was being pushy or silly and perhaps even acting like a school boy; he had a great desire to let her know he liked her, but at the same time, he did not want to appear to be pushing himself on her, or even acting like a hothead.

Roger kept turning the question over and over in his mind. He went out onto the pool deck and watch as the crew and the dock workers were getting the liner ready to disembark the passengers. There were several people out there and the sun was quit warm, but he just could not rid his mind of the fact that he wished he had thought about giving his name to the nice lady when they had been together, after all there had been plenty of time.

Then the announcement came over the address system that the passengers on the ladies deck should proceed to the reception area that made up Rogers mind. He went along to the area which was very small and already it was packed with passengers waiting to leave the liner, he was about to push his way towards the desk

when he saw her, she must have been one of the first to come down for she was just about to walk down the corridor that led to the disembarking point. His mind whirled, should he call out, but what to say, then he remembered he had some personal cards in his wallet, his hand went to the inside pocket of his jacket, got hold of the wallet, then he had second thoughts. The nice lady had shown no desire to strengthen or continue their friendship, and he did not want to do something silly at the last moment to make her think he was acting like a besotted teenager, so he put the wallet back inside the pocket. All he had to do now was to wait for his own deck number to be called.

But ,if only he had known.

By Alf