

# Shamed Into Skirts



Liz Jamesguard

A "Her TV" Novel

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# Shamed Into Skirts

**By Liz Jamesguard**

Bartholomew Wingate groaned as the huge ship heeled over again, caught for a moment in a trough in the rough seas, then climbed the next wave. Wingate loosened his celluloid collar but it didn't help the passage of air. His stomach roiled, then tried to shoot its contents up. Wingate gagged, then retched, but all that he had eaten for the past few days had long since left him.

His pulse pounded at his temples and pain surged between his eyes as he crawled from his bed and stumbled to the door of the stateroom, waited for the ship to slide to port, then jerked the door open. He studied the corridor with red, burning eyes, his legs weak, his guts knotted. Spotting the crisp, white livery of a steward, he rasped, "Steward. You there, man."

The man stopped. "Yes, sir," the steward replied with practiced courtesy.

"I demand to see the Captain. This is quite untenable, you hear me?"

"I'm sorry, sir, but the Captain is busy at the moment. If you're not feeling well, sir, may I suggest some brandy?"

"You may suggest nothing of the sort," Wingate snarled. "Take me to the Captain at once or I'll have your job, my good man."

The steward held anger in check. "That is impossible sir. If you will be patient, we should be through this storm in another hour or so. On behalf of the Captain and White Moon Lines, may I apologize for your inconvenience?"

“You may not!” Wingate hurled, his feet finally losing their tentative grip on the deck. From his knees he glared up and informed the steward, “Rest assured that you will all hear from my father. He can buy your second-rate line with the change in his pocket!”

“Very good, sir,” the steward muttered, turning his back on the arrogant youth and walking carefully down the rolling corridor.

Wingate slammed the door and crawled back to his bunk. Every time the ship rolled one way he had to hang on for dear life, the other, he slammed against the wall. He closed his eyes to staunch the knifing pain in his head and guts, but that made the hard rolling worse.

Bartholomew Wingate’s father could indeed purchase the prestigious White Moon Lines had he the notion. Franklin Wingate had been a moderately successful merchant in New York when the Civil War began. By the end of that great conflict, he had become wealthy and powerful beyond accounting by selling the Federal Army spoiled pork, swaybacked horses, uniforms that fell apart in the first rain, and boots the soles of which disappeared after one day’s march.

Franklin Bartholomew increased his fortune during Reconstruction, and by 1870 had married Mary Graham Turner, the daughter of another industrialist. 1875 brought the birth of their son, Bartholomew, and positions as the social, political and economic leaders of the city.

Young Bartholomew—none thought to call him Bart—had the finest his parents could supply. Two nannies were responsible for his first six years, the finest boarding schools and tutors for his next ten. Graduating from Andover with barely passing grades and a reputation as an arrogant young man, he boarded a liner for Europe and his Grand Tour in the summer of 1890.

Bartholomew found Europe, especially Paris, much more to his liking than New York. In Paris, wealth and privilege were properly recognized and people were properly respectful. Wingate was treated as the son of royalty and so grew more imperious. He didn’t understand that his fawning subjects simply wanted to be around to benefit when large sums of Wingate money were spent.

While Bartholomew was enjoying the Continent, his family home in New York City was among the first to be wired for electricity and illuminated by Mr. Edison’s light bulbs. At the same time, electricity was used for a more sinister purpose. On August 6, 1890, William Kemmler was the first man to be executed by electrocution.

At Wounded Knee, South Dakota, Federal troops fought the final battle with the American Indians on December 29, 1890. At almost the same time, Ellis Island was opened as the New York immigration depot. Much to the consternation of the elder Wingate, the Sherman Antitrust Act was passed that year.

In 1891, an earthquake in Japan killed more than 10,000 people; there was widespread famine in Russia and W.L. Judson invented the clothing zipper, but it would take more than 20 years before it would be put to practical use.

Two years abroad were deemed sufficient for young Wingate's education. He was summoned home early in the spring of 1892. He would attend Princeton that fall. After Princeton he would take his place in the aristocracy as an American prince, perhaps dabbling in business but with a sufficient income to guarantee him never a day's toil.

The S.S. Titanius was the finest liner afloat. Huge, four funneled and spotlessly white, it was the flagship of White Moon Line's Atlantic fleet. Presidents and kings had traveled on the ship and New York society scorned anyone who hadn't taken at least one voyage aboard her.

The crossing had been uneventful, the service for the privileged the very definition of first-class. Second-class passengers enjoyed service just a notch below and like all Atlantic liners, the bowels of the ship were packed with steerage passengers who had gladly given their last penny to get to America.

One day out, about 600 miles north of Newfoundland, one of those frequent, late spring, Atlantic storms caught the Titanius. The Captain and crew weren't concerned—the huge vessel could weather the tides at the Gates of Hell. The passengers would suffer, but they would be delivered safely to port.

Bartholomew Wingate cared little for the Captain's problems. He lay on his bunk and cursed God for not quelling the savage storm; frustrated that money, power and social position were ignored by the winds.

The huge ship climbed wave after giant wave, the helmsman skillfully holding her head into the wind. She hung poised at the top of a wave, pirouetted, then slid gently down into the next trough. At the bottom, sea water crashed over the bow, the wind ripping the spray into salty missiles.

The Titanius rode halfway up the next wave under the helmsman's steady hand. The Captain squinted through the dark night, his experienced eyes reading the sea like the Gospel. There were no lookouts aloft and even had there been, it is doubtful they would have seen the iceberg through the night and clouds of spray and mist.

The Captain picked the deadly white leviathan-like mass out of the fog and inky blackness and had only enough time to bark, "Hard over!" before the Titanius struck bow on. The impact shot the bridge crew forward like dolls, leaving only the helmsman on his feet thanks to his hands gripping the giant brass wheel like death's own talons.

Having met a floating mass much bigger than herself, the Titanius heeled over and skittered sickeningly to starboard. There had been sur-

prisingly little sound at the initial impact, but now the screech of steel tearing could be heard quite clearly above the howling wind and crashing seas.

Wingate had been bounced to the floor and his first thought was to lecture the Captain about steering his ship, but he noticed that the sickening rolling and diving had stopped. Shaking his head, his hand found a painful knot near his left ear, then bells began clanging.

The first day out, Wingate had attended lifeboat drill half- drunk and interested only in the young ladies tittering on deck. He vaguely recalled something about life jackets but hadn't concern himself. The lights flickered, then went out.

In the dark, the howling wind and mechanical sounds from within the ship were loud and sharp. Wingate crawled to where he thought the remembered the door ought to be, felt for and found the knob and giving it a twist, jerked open the door. The lights in the corridor were dim, the forms and sounds of running people like gray ghosts.

Wingate gained his feet and stepped into the passageway. One of the ghosts glanced off his shoulder, then another hit him full on, sending both to the listing deck. Wingate gritted his teeth in rage, heaved the gray mass away from him and snarled, "Watch where you're going, you damned fool!"

But the ghost was gone as quickly as it had come. Wingate got up and staggered after the ghostly throng hurrying to nowhere.

The Captain recovered quickly from the impact, ignored the pain of a fractured arm. He immediately knew that his ship was dead, but his voice betrayed none of his feelings. "All stop, please. Damage report, Mr. Boyd."

When his First Officer failed to respond, the Captain turned his eyes from the sea and found the man crumpled in a bleeding heap. The Captain looked around the bridge, noted no one standing, then calmly moved the engine telegraph to STOP.

Like terrified wild animals fleeing a fire or flood, the passengers scrambled along, ripping at the clothes of those ahead, striking at the grasping hands of those behind. One gray mass stumbled and fell. Those behind trampled the form, some tripping on the body.

Nothing mattered but getting on deck; out of the steel coffin.

Wingate shoved and thrashed and heaved his way through the masses, striking a woman in the head so he could gain the stairs first. All over the ship, from the engine spaces, the cabins and stowage, passengers and crew alike heeded the frantic need. Like drowning swimmers, their only thought was to reach the surface. Some officers tried to rally the men. They were ignored, in some cases they were beaten senseless.

Wingate was on a staircase when a deep rumble shook the ship.

The Captain grimaced, his weathered eyes narrowing a bit at the sound.

Two huge boilers exploded when sea water found them. Most of the engine crew and the steerage passengers were scalded to death or smashed into unyielding steel by the water rushing in.

The Captain allowed himself a moment of pity for himself and those he knew were trapped. A second officer suddenly appeared on the bridge, his white uniform blackened and torn, his eyes wide and shining. "Captain?" he gasped.

Taking a breath, trying to chew the bitter words he didn't want to say, the Captain ordered, "Abandon ship, Mr. Wilkins. Have the wireless send a distress signal and our position, please. Take charge of evacuation."

The wireless operator was already tapping the grim message into the ether. Twenty miles away, a freighter heard the plaintive clicking and made for the stricken ship.

Wingate gained the main deck, was pounded by the sea and wind but found he could at least breathe there. Crewmen were running blindly about dragging hoses, trying to forestall the inevitable. The clanging bell's cadence changed and the crewmen froze in place, looked in wonder to the bridge, then dropped whatever they were holding.

A steward rushed by and Wingate grabbed him by the arm. "What's going on here? What does that bell mean?" he demanded.

"We've been ordered to abandon ship, sir," the man stated, ripping his arm out of Wingate's grasp. "Please proceed to your lifeboat station at once."

The steward disappeared into the humanity. Wingate had no idea where his lifeboat station was but was confident that any lifeboat crew would be honored to have him as a passenger. Some minor personages could brag that they had adventured at sea with Bartholomew Wingate.

A deck hand rushed by, slamming a bulky, cork life jacket into Wingate's chest. Before he could snarl a curse at the man, he too had disappeared into the milling mass of bodies; Wingate struggled into the heavy, stiff, life jacket and pressed through the crowd, knowing that life boats would be along the rail.

At the davits, an officer was screaming above the wind.

"Don't panic! Don't shove!" A bosun scrambled into the swinging craft and freed the canvas tarp. Terrified humanity swelled forward, hands grasping for the boat, throats raw from screaming.

"Only fifty!" the officer shrieked. "Woman and children! Women and children!"



That seemed to slow the panic. Women in flowing skirts and children were handed into the boat. They sat, huddled like beaten dogs. The small craft quickly filled, the bosun and officer began to lower away. Women left behind screamed for it to wait, one woman flung her small child at the craft, wailing hysterically as hands took the child into the bosom of the boat.

The spoiled youth was stunned. From the cut of their clothes and their crude screams, it was clear to him that most of those in the lifeboat were from steerage! They were saving worthless peasants and bastard children while important people were made to wait!

Wingate rushed to another lifeboat station only to watch in horror as poor, coarse women and sniveling brats were hoisted away. Panic replaced the outrage in his mind when he understood that he could very well die while slatterns and serving girls were saved.

He flew through the crowd, making his way to the opposite side of the ship. There weren't so many on the low side, some lifeboats were still swinging in their davits. Spotting an officer, Wingate rushed to him.

"I must be on the next boat," he screamed.

"Sorry, sir," the man told him. "Women and children first off. You have a life jacket and another ship should be here within two hours."

The officer helped a poorly dressed woman into the boat.

"You don't understand," Wingate shouted. "I'm Bartholomew Wingate, of the New York Wingates."

"We're all the same in the eyes of God, sir. Now please stand aside."

Wingate tore his wallet from inside his coat.

"Here," he stated, thrusting a wad of soggy bills at the officer. "There's three thousand there. It's yours for a seat on a boat."

The officer turned on him, his eyes burning; his face twisted in disgust. "Put your money away, man. Where's your decency? Are you a man or what?"

The boat lowered away, the officer moving to the next station.

Cowed, Wingate tried to bribe some of the women for their seat, offering them riches beyond their dreams if they would sell their seat—their lives. But lives were not for sale that night.

Wingate let panic have him. He wasn't going to get on a boat— he would die. His money and position had never seen him denied anything but now he found it could not buy the one thing most important to him: survival. He let the wad of paper money fall to the deck, looked around and noted most of the other men were just standing, shoulders slumped, waiting to die.



Mind racing, Wingate realized there were only two more lifeboats left to launch, and then he and all these others would die when the icy sea washed at last over these decks. Some of the men were already dropping over the side, content to take their chances in the frigid, tossing seas.

Wingate moved back, afraid to face death bravely, enraged that he had to face it at all. Something bumped him. He turned and looked full into the face of a terrified woman clutching a woolen shawl tightly about her.

For Bartholomew, decision and action came in the same instant. He raised his arm and clubbed the woman several times until she lay still on the deck. He looked about; sure that no one had seen his attack. Seizing the woman under the arms, he dragged her into the shadows. Wingate quickly ripped the life jacket off; then his fingers tore at the buttons of his coat and shirt.

The driven sea spray stung his bare shoulders. He tore at his shoes and jerked his trousers off. Clad only in silk underwear, Wingate bent and unbuttoned the unconscious woman's blouse. When he had it free, he threw it over his own shoulders, his arms stabbing into the sleeves. It was hard getting her long skirt off, but Wingate finally snatched it from her like a prize.

He dropped and sat, pulling the heavy wool skirt up his legs. The garment was too small for his waist but he didn't care. Standing, the sodden skirt weighed him down. About to leave, he reached down and pulled the shawl from under the woman and pulled it over his head.

The ship was listing badly, the wind and rain tore words from mouths and flung them away into the night. The officer was drenched and cold, his hands icy as he helped a soggy mass in a wool skirt, head covered by a shawl into the last boat.

Wingate felt deep shame for a moment as he huddled near the stern. But it was only momentary. It wasn't right that useless people should be saved while he should be left to die. He pulled the shawl tight, hiding his face as the small craft swung wildly out over the inky, foam flecked sea, then dropped.

The bosun quickly steered the tiny craft away from the dying hulk of the ship. Some of passengers were mute, some sobbed, some stared wide-eyed into the emptiness of the dark. The roiling surface of the sea was covered with bobbing objects—deck chairs, some crates, and frozen bodies held afloat in life jackets.

Twenty minutes after the last lifeboat was launched, Titanus seemed to utter a metallic grunting groan and heeled over to port. Those left aboard, officers and crew, wealthy passengers and poor, were either thrown into the sea or trapped in the inky darkness of a world turned on its side and filling inexorably with icy water as she settled lower and

lower into the sea. Wingate peeked through the closed shawl at the spectacle; marveled at the huge brass propellers glinting in the ghastly glow lent to the scene by the dying flares launched by the captain in his final heroic gesture. Then he closed himself inside the shawl again.

Three hours and five minutes after receiving the distress call, the *Escapade*, a fifty-thousand-ton freighter steamed in to the area. The crew were astonished to see the giant *Titanius* on her side, exposing her bottom like a bawdy girl. The wind had weakened and the seas were subsiding as the survivors were taken aboard, wrapped in heavy blankets and handed mugs of hot coffee.

As the last lifeboat was emptied, the *Titanius* sighed and sounded a final whistling scream as air rushed from every opening; then she slowly raised her stern into the fearsome black of the now almost starry night and began the final dive which would send her crashing to the ocean floor at some seventy to eighty knots. The Master of the *Escapade* steamed his ship in circles, every crewman's eye peeled for survivors until a second ship arrived. Bodies were pulled from the sea, the faces calm and placid as though they were merely sleeping. The *Escapade* steamed for New York, the dead lining the deck in neat rows, the survivors taken below.

They were two hours out when a most scurrilous deception was uncovered.

Bartholomew Wingate was roughly hauled to the wardroom by a stoker who could not hide his contempt. Wingate wasn't worried—he was alive.

The Master and his officers were assembled at a small table, every eye hard and flinty as they regarded Wingate.

“Who are you, sir, and what is your explanation for this despicable charade?”

Embarrassed by his condition, Wingate drew himself erect and snapped; “I am Bartholomew Wingate, of the New York Wingates. I am a very important man, sir. Very important. It was imperative that I survive. I can assure you that my family will see you gentlemen well rewarded for your work last night and your, er, discretion.”

The seamen squinted at each other, some grunting, others chewing cold cigars. “We don't take kindly to your actions, sir,” the Master stated, barely hiding his rage. “In fact, we've a mind to cast you into the sea. Your people could then be told you died bravely and with dignity.”

Accustomed to dealing with people of lower stations, Wingate sneered and stated, “As I have told you, I am Bartholomew Wingate, by God. Now, the man who fetches me some proper clothing and a tot of rum will find himself handsomely rewarded.”

The officers blinked, studied their fingernails and one packed a pipe. They would not look Wingate in the eye. "I'm afraid you'll have to go ashore in the same condition you left the ship," the Master pronounced sternly. "Now get you below. I can't stomach the sight of you."

The docks of New York were packed with newsmen fighting for a story and with families of those who had been aboard the *Titanius* praying for the sight of a loved one coming down the gangway.

Wingate, still in skirt and blouse, pulled the shawl over his head and hoped to slip quietly ashore. But the crew of the *Escapade* had alerted the press. Bartholomew Wingate was surrounded by newsmen screaming questions and cameras recording his departure for history.

The Wingate family butler had drawn the big carriage close but Bartholomew had to fight his way through the quacking newsmen, the blinding flashes and the jeering crowds. Safely inside the brougham, Bartholomew was disgusted that his family would see him dressed as he was, but they would understand. He had committed no disgraceful act; he had only used his brains and pluck to save himself.

The press would play it up for a day or two—in a week it would be forgotten.

At the large city residence, Bartholomew was abashed at the reception when his father met him at the door.

"Get out of those ridiculous clothes," Franklin Wingate ordered, then turned and walked away.

Bartholomew took a long, hot bath and pulled on a dressing gown. He regarded the pile of soiled clothes on his floor, stepped to a speaking tube and demanded service.

A timid maid appeared at his door.

"Take these cursed things and burn them," he ordered.

As expected, the press was full of the tragedy:

TITANIUS SINKS.

890 SOULS LOST

WORST DISASTER AT SEA.

612 SAVED

*Complete list of survivors inside!*

Blared headlines in 40-point type. Beneath the fold, among the other important news of the day was a grainy photo captioned:

*Son of prominent industrialist escapes disaster disguised as woman*

The accompanying article went on to describe how Bartholomew Wingate of that city had averted certain death by masquerading as a woman and gaining a seat in a lifeboat. The press was uniformly critical, most were openly contemptuous.

Two days after Bartholomew had come ashore in a woman's skirts, he came down to breakfast.

His father was at the table, head buried in the newspaper. When Franklin saw his son, he grunted and folded the paper to the next page.

Angry and hurt by his father's attitude, Bartholomew finally stated, "Those jackals. You'd think they have nothing better to report. They're all Liberals, you know."

Franklin Wingate ignored his son.

"I won't stand for this," Bartholomew said sharply. "I demand that you speak to me."

"What would you have me say?" the elder Wingate asked. "You've disgraced this family and placed a stain on the Wingate name forever."

"Would you rather I was dead at the bottom of the sea?" Bartholomew spouted.

"I would rather you had died like a man than to have soiled my house as a craven coward."

Bartholomew avoided the elder Wingate for the next week. He tried to explain to his mother and she treated him civilly if a bit distantly. Bartholomew still had no remorse for his actions. He resolved to pack up and spend the remaining time until Princeton at the family's home in Connecticut. He took his anger out on the servants.

The day before he was to leave, a constable appeared at the door, a warrant for Bartholomew Wingate's arrest in hand. The younger Wingate was taken into custody, booked amidst a journalistic circus, then released on bail. Late that night, he met with his family's lawyer.

"But this is ridiculous," Bartholomew repeated for the hundredth time, as though saying it could make that true. "How dare they?"

Joseph Fleming, a respected and skillful lawyer whose entire income came via the Wingate family, rubbed his nose with a long finger. He didn't like the arrogant boy; found him imperious and without his father's breeding.

"It is legally sound, Bartholomew. The Board of Inquiry contends that by taking your place in a lifeboat dressed in a woman's clothing, you denied one woman that place. They call that murder."

"But they can't make it stick, can they? I mean... this is incredible. I barely escape certain death by using my wits and they wish to charge me?"

"It's likely a political thing," Fleming admitted. "The State Prosecutor has petitioned the Board of Inquiry to have you tried under New York statutes and not Admiralty law. The Prosecutor is running for gov-

ernor next term and your father is on record as opposing him. This will not be a search for justice.”

“So I’m to be the Judas’ goat in a political game? Can’t you do something? What about all those politicians who owe us; the judges? Make this absurdity go away, Fleming.”

None of Fleming’s efforts paid off.

The story of Bartholomew Wingate’s escape from the sinking ship incensed the public, made his name anathema and he the most hated person in the city. The grifters and political hacks under Wingate patronage shrank away, not caring to buck public opinion.

“It’s fortunate in a way,” Fleming told the Wingates. “If Bartholomew were tried in Admiralty Court, they would surely hang him.”

Walter Barton, the State Prosecutor sucked all the political juice from the trial that he could. Survivors and surviving family members of those lost were put on the stand with their plaintive stories, each condemning Bartholomew Wingate’s act of cowardice. The trial became a referendum on the rich and privileged versus the poor but decent.

Instead of the tame judge on the Wingate payroll, for whom Fleming lobbied long and hard, the judge named to hear the case was one, Josiah P. Hunt, a tough and fiery old veteran of the bench.

The trial lasted three weeks. The press made it their lead story nearly every day. Throughout, Bartholomew retained his self-regard, refusing to be baited by the Fourth Estate.

The jury required only an hour to reach a verdict. As it was announced, Bartholomew Wingate could not believe his ears. They had found him guilty!

The press rejoiced. The public exclaimed that Justice had been done.

Brought before the court for sentencing several days later, Bartholomew Wingate was not contrite. His father was the most powerful man in the state—surely the travesty could be reversed; the misdeed mended with enough money and promises. After all, what was power and wealth for?

“Bartholomew Curtis Wingate,” the judge intoned from the bench. “You have been found guilty of manslaughter by a jury of your peers.” The Prosecutor had reduced his charge. He didn’t want Bartholomew Wingate to hang; he wanted him alive and humiliated. “Have you anything to say before I pronounce sentence?”

“You and all your cronies will regret this,” Bartholomew stated sternly. “You don’t know who you’re dealing with.”

“And you obviously are not aware of whom you are dealing with, young man,” the judge returned. “The crime you committed was un-

speakable; a slap in the face of every decent gentleman. Now, normally, a long prison term would be in order, but such won't do in your case."

Fleming, standing officiously next to Bartholomew, stiffened.

"Hanging you like an honorable man would restore dignity to your name and memory, as would putting you in a cell. Neither of those punishments seem fitting for you. No, not at all fitting. You made a choice when you donned some poor woman's skirts to save your wretched hide and that choice condemned an innocent woman to die in your place; and now, that choice has also sealed your fate. It is the sentence of this court that you perpetuate the masquerade you began on the Titanius."

Fleming coughed and shuffled his feet.

"I don't quite understand, Your Honor."

"It's quite simple, Counselor. Your client is herewith stripped of all the rights and privileges accorded a male citizen of this state and country. This court is ordering his legal status changed forthwith. In the eyes of the law, Bartholomew Curtis Wingate shall henceforth be regarded as a female."

"What!" Bartholomew erupted. "You're out of your mind!"

"Calm yourself," Fleming hissed, his arm on Bartholomew's. "Your Honor, this is most unusual and a bit, ridiculous—"

"Save your breath, Counselor," the judge stated. He looked sternly at Bartholomew. "From this day forward, you are Miss Wingate. This Court directs that you will maintain and affect the dress and mannerisms of a female and you shall conduct yourself at all times as a girl of your age and social class. You donned skirts and took on the guise and privilege of a woman in peril, therefore, because the appearance of womanhood has saved your worthless life you will hereafter honor the condition you elected to use to your own ends. Your sentence is to comport yourself as a woman until the day you die."

Bartholomew made an animal sound, coiled and lunged at the bench. "I won't do it!"

Husky bailiffs subdued him.

"Your Honor," Fleming interrupted. "This is a violation of my client's Constitutional rights. I shall appeal, sir!"

"Well, you go right ahead, Mr. Fleming. Go all the way to the Supreme Court. But we both know that until it should be overturned, my sentence stands."

"You're insane!" Bartholomew sputtered, shaking his fist at the judge. "Fleming, you worthless shyster," the young Wingate screeched. "Can't you do something?"



Fleming held up his hands and shrugged. The judge allowed himself a wry smile as he closed his orders.

“Bailiff, conduct Miss Wingate to her carriage, please. As there is no further business, this court stands adjourned”

The court observers howled and hooted, the local reporters ran for their offices; the out-of-state reporters for a telegraph. Bartholomew was pushed through the crowds and hurried into a carriage. Fleming clambered in after him. Neither spoke during the short trip to the Wingate estate.

Man sentenced to live as woman!", the headlines blared again and again, informing every citizen of the odd, but satisfying punishment:

BARTHOLOMEW WINGATE  
LEGALLY A GIRL!  
CONDEMNED TO FROCKS  
FOR LIFE!

Hundreds of telegrams arrived at the Wingate estate, all of them jeering and snide. Several proposed marriage, some invited 'Miss Wingate' to sample the sexual prowess of the writer. The more whimsical citizens sent boxes of candy and bottles of French perfume.

Though incensed, Bartholomew understood that he couldn't show his face outside the door and spent his time berating the servants and pouting; the perceived injustice gnawing away at him.

Franklin Wingate understood the game and had no rancor for his enemies. They simply saw an opportunity and made it pay. Wingate would do the same in their places. Aside from the unbearable insult to him and his family, Wingate actually appreciated the ploy.

Franklin Wingate and Joseph Fleming rode solemnly to the Prosecutor's offices. This meeting was the true purpose of the thing—the Prosecutor would specify what he wanted; Wingate would determine what he was willing to surrender. The Prosecutor, knowing he held a strong hand, would be demanding.

Wingate and Fleming entered the offices, slightly surprised that the Honorable Josiah P. Hunt was attending.

“So nice to finally meet you, Mr. Wingate,” Walter Barton stated courteously, shaking hands with Franklin. “I, of course, already know Mr. Fleming. May I present the Honorable Josiah Hunt.”

Hands were shaken, civilities exchanged. As this was a Saturday and not an official meeting, brandy was served; cigars distributed. When the cigars were all fired, Franklin said, “Very well, gentlemen. Let's get down to business.”

Joseph Fleming and Josiah Hunt understood that they were there as resources, not principles. They were present to confirm or deny facts and to provide leverage.

“This whole business is most disagreeable,” Barton began. “The city, in fact, the entire state is quite upset—”

“Save the campaigning for November, Barton,” Wingate said. Come to the point.”

Barton winced as if slapped. “The point is Mr. Wingate, I and only I, can remove this stain from your family’s reputation. For certain considerations, neither I nor Judge Hunt will oppose any appeals that Mr. Fleming might wish to file, nor would we be disposed to retry young Miss Bartholomew after his . . . er, her conviction is overturned.”

“Spit it out, Barton,” Wingate snarled. “What do you want?”

“Oh, not as much as you image. As you know, I intend to be the next Governor of this state. With your support, my election is assured.”

“But I don’t like your politics, Mr. Barton,” Wingate said slowly. “You propose everything I oppose. I don’t like the cut of your suit; I don’t like what you stand for; I don’t like your brandy and I particularly don’t like you, sir.”

“Your affection is not required in this matter, sir. Only your political connections and good name. You will turn your political machine over to me and my people and publicly campaign for me.”

There it was—the demand. Wingate pondered before he replied, studying Barton’s face. Walter Barton was a Liberal, violently opposed to business and particularly opposed to the wealthy and powerful barons of the state. Though he spouted equal rights and justice for the common man, Barton was no less greedy than those he spoke against. He didn’t want to destroy the aristocracy; he desperately wanted admittance.

“Do you realize what you’re asking?” Wingate asked, not because he thought Barton was confused, but to buy some time. Had it been only himself, Wingate could use his position and power to buy his son back, but as an acknowledged Grand Duke of American royalty Wingate had loyalties and obligations to his peers.

Should he break ranks and betray the other wealthy, powerful men, he would be ruined, of that he had no doubt; but personal ruin was not the issue. He had been poor before and could make his fortune back. No, the thing was deeper than one man. The very foundation of business would be cracked. If the railroad barons, the steel barons, the banking barons, the industrial barons, the very fabric of the Nation were weakened, anarchy would reign.

The thousands of immigrants pouring into the city would imagine they had rights; that they could be more than cheap labor. Negroes and

Chinese would think themselves as good as those of Wingate's ilk; slimy political hacks and office-seekers would begin appealing to the rabble for votes instead of selling themselves to Wingate and his peers.

The price was too high.

"I am quite certain I know what I'm asking," Barton replied, bringing Wingate back to the moment. "Just as I am certain that you have no choice."

That angered Wingate. He hated being beaten by any man, but despised those who told him he had no choices. They were weak and frightened little men who didn't know how to play a winning hand. "If you back a man to the wall, Barton, he may just decide to come charging out."

"Oh, I don't think you'll be charging, Mr. Wingate."

"Joseph," Wingate asked, ignoring the others. "What are my options?"

Fleming stopped doodling, put his pencil down and spoke carefully. "The conviction can be overturned without the cooperation of these gentlemen. Mr. Barton's influence does not extend to Albany."

"Perhaps," Josiah Hunt started. "I will be reversed. But how long will your appeal take, Mr. Fleming?"

"No more than a few weeks, Mr. Hunt."

"Something you have forgotten, Mr. Fleming," Barton stated. "96 women died in the Titanus disaster. It is impossible to determine which of those poor creatures would have lived had not Bartholomew Wingate usurped her rightful place in that lifeboat."

Fleming pondered a moment, then stated, "You wouldn't. That would be gross misuse of your office, sir."

"What're you driving at, Barton?" Wingate demanded.

"Explain it to him, Mr. Fleming," Josiah Hunt said.

"It's despicable. If I read Mr. Barton's thinly veiled threat correctly; he will charge Bartholomew with manslaughter for the death of each and every woman who died on board the Titanus."

"95 more trials, Mr. Wingate," Judge Hunt almost purred. "And each worse than the one before."

"Can they do that?" Wingate asked.

"Legally, they can," Fleming admitted. "I can get most of them dismissed, but there are some judges in this city in Mr. Barton's camp."

"And something else to consider," Barton said, licking his lips, his eyes twinkling. "Your son is now legally a female—"