

Ship to Shore

Robin Dee

All characters in this book are entirely fictional, and any resemblance to real characters, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

Copyright © Robin Dee 2017
All Rights Reserved

Front cover design by
Robin Dee

Published by
Robin Dee
Email: *gristudio@hotmail.com*

Table of Contents

Title Page
Copyright Page
INTRODUCTION
CHAPTER 1
CHAPTER 2
CHAPTER 3
CHAPTER 4
CHAPTER 5
CHAPTER 6
CHAPTER 7
CHAPTER 8
CHAPTER 9
CHAPTER 10
CHAPTER 11
CHAPTER 12

INTRODUCTION

During the swinging sixties, an event took place which was to shake up the radio business in the United Kingdom, and was instrumental in bringing legal commercial radio as we know it today into our homes.

A young Irishman, Ronan O'Rahilly, frustrated by the fact that he couldn't get any airplay for his own artists on UK radio as it was dominated by the BBC's monopoly, decided to start his own radio station. As commercial radio was not permitted in Britain and the BBC had a stranglehold on the airwaves, he purchased a ship, fitted it out in Ireland as a fully self-contained radio station and sailed it to the south east of England. He anchored it in international waters just outside the four mile territorial limit free from UK jurisdiction, and on Easter weekend 1964, turned on the transmitter, and Radio Caroline was born.

Over the next few years, many more offshore stations were established around the British coast, both on ships and abandoned former WW2 forts in the Thames Estuary, giving the listeners what they wanted – non-stop pop music, not available on the BBC. The stations were synonymous with the 'swinging sixties' and became affectionately known as 'pirate stations', staffed by real radio and music enthusiasts who brought their unbounded passion for what they were doing into the living rooms of thousands. It was also a means for new and unknown artists to reach the public's ears, and many would agree that if it hadn't been for the 'pirates', the Liverpool sound would never have taken off, and certainly the American Motown and Soul genres would never have been successful in Britain.

However, all good things always seem to come to an end, and after three short years the British government passed a bill in Parliament to outlaw the stations, moving the territorial limit to twelve miles and making it illegal to advertise on the stations, work on them, and, bizarrely, even *listen* to them! By August 1967, all of them had closed down. All, that is, except for Radio Caroline. It continued in defiance of the law for over twenty years, struggling to survive in many forms.

In the early seventies, a similar phenomenon took place off the coasts of Holland and Belgium when many offshore stations sprung up, following in the footsteps of the hugely successful and much loved Dutch pirate, Radio Veronica. By 1974, the Dutch government had introduced their own legislation, closing the offshore stations – except for Caroline which continued.

By the eighties and nineties, some intrepid entrepreneurs still believed it worthwhile to start up an offshore station even though legal commercial radio was, by then, well established on land in most European countries. It was a way of getting on-air immediately without jumping through all of the legislative hoops involving bidding for licences, battling for limited frequencies and adhering to various imposed broadcasting restraints, either relating to programme content, maximum transmitted power, or both. Many ingenious tricks were employed to get around the offshore broadcasting laws, including commercials being placed through US advertising agencies, tenders servicing the ships secretly from unknown sources, and staff who, in true pirate tradition, were willing to risk their freedom by defying all the rules just to play music on what was, in all

honesty, some of the best radio ever heard on the European airwaves.

While we now have legal commercial radio in the UK with hundreds of stations broadcasting around the country, the sad fact is that most of them are just dull, soulless clones of each other. That is, until you find a little gem of a station tucked away in the back of beyond. There are a few, especially in Aberdeenshire, which are staffed by real passionate enthusiasts possessed with that special 'something' which made the offshore stations so unique. There is also a multitude of modern-day 'cyber pirates' to be heard on the internet, many of them emulating the former offshore stations, proving that the spirit of free radio lives on.

CHAPTER 1

>PLAY>

“♪ You’re only one step away from that hole you want to dig, with an excavator from Benson’s ♪ . . . Now, Benson’s Plant Hire can offer you the very latest in Komatsu excavators – the mighty SR 22 Super Reach. With its amazing 22 metre reach, it just eats up any job it tackles. River beds? – No problem! Culverts? – Piece of cake! It will even dredge a dock – from the shore! The SR 22 is just the latest addition to the fine fleet of machines at Benson’s. Mini diggers, cement mixers, dumper trucks, JCBs, tracked excavators, and the full range of small plant and tools – we have them all at Benson’s Plant Hire, Mains of Clarty, Strathdee. Call now on Strathdee 450700.”

Dave Buckingham wished he had a tenner for every time he’d played that commercial. Any normal DJ on any normal radio station would be wondering why they were airing a commercial for heavy plant hire at midnight, but Dave was no normal DJ, and Strathdee FM was no normal radio station. Benson’s Plant Hire was advertised at midnight, midday, morning, afternoon, in fact, any time of the day or night because Frank Benson wanted it, and Frank Benson *always* got what he wanted. He owned the radio station. Dave felt like he owned him too, as he sat there in the swivel chair on that hot summer’s night in front of the control console, an ice-cold can of Coke straight from the fridge in his hand, ready to start a ninety-minute show. He often felt like that lately, as Frank seemed to be taking a never ending stream of liberties with him resulting in an undeniable feeling of being dumped upon from a great height. *Marvellous*, he thought, *it’s twenty-two degrees on a hot August night, my shirt’s sticking to me, sweat’s dripping off my nose, there’s no air conditioning, my overdraft’s the biggest it’s ever been, I live in a caravan with one wheel, and I’m forty-one next week. Can it get any worse? Oh, and I’ve got to sound cheerful for the next hour and a half on the radio. Give me a break! Oops! – the commercial’s finished, better do the station ID.*

“Broadcasting to you in the North-East on 104 Megahertz, this is Strathdee FM, where the correct time is now twelve midnight.” Then he fired the ‘play’ button on the Spotmaster cartridge player and played a jingle featuring the golden voice of Mrs Benson doing a station ID. *There’s just no getting away from her*, he thought. At least Frank had never modernised the studio, which pleased Dave. While other stations were now all PC-based with all the music on hard drive and jingles on a computer screen, Strathdee FM had two turntables for playing vinyl, a bank of Spotmasters for jingles, three cassette decks for commercials and a giant Ampex reel-to-reel tape deck on castors for trails, promos and commercials – and it was used a lot. The only ‘modern’ items that had been added, several years ago now, were three CD players, as the DJs had complained to Frank that they could no longer get any new music on vinyl! But Dave liked it this way. This was a ‘proper’ radio studio – the kind he had cut his teeth on.

Jingle finished, he fired the first track on the show, which was on CD. The opening lyrics were spoken, and said something about offering your throat to a wolf with red roses. Or something like that – he wasn't really listening, even though it was one of his favourite Meat Loaf tracks, and Meat Loaf was one of his favourite artists. He was already thinking that perhaps Frank Benson had been the wolf with the red roses and he had been the helpless victim. He was seriously thinking of jacking all this in and going back down to his home in Essex where he might get some work hosting some sixties revival shows, or at worst, driving a van. He was well and truly in a rut, but it was a comfortable rut in its own strange way.

He looked down at himself, and patted his stomach. At least things weren't too bad. He hadn't acquired a beer belly – he couldn't afford to! His Beatles 'mop-top' hair style had gone, though. It was already out of date when he had it twenty years ago. The fresh, boyish face now had its share of lines – laughter lines, he liked to call them. He was quite small, about five foot seven, although his mother used to say, 'quality is better than quantity'. If he had been born twenty years earlier, he could have passed for Davy Jones of The Monkees.

And he still missed Katharina like hell.

<<REWIND<<

Dave had met Frank in 1987 in Holland, when he had heard about a new offshore radio station that Frank Bentley, as he was then called, was starting up. Dave had graduated from the London School of Economics the year before, with no job prospects, and no plans to find any as he'd had a belly full of statistics, balance sheets and figures. He decided to bum around Europe for a while and take in the scenery, both geographical and female. *Never sell yourself short*, he thought, and he headed for St Moritz in Switzerland where he walked right into a job as a host in a glitzy top nightclub (after telling them he was a DJ in a top London club and he would get references sent on to them!) His first impression of the club had been that he had never seen so many Porsches all together all at the same time as there were in the club car park. After three months, the owners got somewhat agitated that no references were forthcoming, and Dave got the distinct impression that it was time to move on.

One of the kitchen staff, a beautiful blonde girl called Katharina, was from Vienna, and she was missing home so badly that she wanted to go back. Dave got chatting to her during her break and he felt something click straight away. She had come to St Moritz with her best friend to work in the nightclub, and now her friend had gone off to London with a man she met in the club, who had promised her a top job as a hostess in a casino. Dave went out with Katharina on one of their few nights off. They walked about the town, had a couple of drinks in a bar, and then walked down by the lake in the warm moonlight. Just for a moment, Dave turned to read a poster about a forthcoming rock concert, then he heard her shout, "Bet you can't catch Katharina!"

He turned round, and there she was, running into the lake, her shoes discarded on the bank!

“You’ll get us locked up!” he shouted back. “Come out of there now!”

“No, no, no!” she shouted back. “You come get Katharina!” *This was one crazy girl*, he thought.

“OK,” he shouted. After kicking his shoes and socks off, he ran in after her. As he was just about to catch her, she squealed, reached down and splashed handfuls of water up in his face.

“You little . . .” Before he could finish the sentence, they were in each other’s arms. His lips found hers, and nothing else mattered. He liked this feeling. He liked this girl. He liked her a lot. People were starting to stare, so they came out of the water, put their shoes back on and walked back to her apartment locked together arm-in-arm, Dave suggested that they both go back to Vienna as soon as possible – things were getting too hot for him to stick around St Moritz. Katharina’s father had always worked in the hotel industry, and knew someone who owned one of the top tourist hotels there. She was sure he would be able to get them both work.

Dave stayed at Katharina’s apartment that night. They packed their few belongings, and in the morning they made an early exit. It took two days of travelling on trains, buses and on foot, and after receiving a warm welcome from Katharina’s father, he suggested a small cheap back-street hotel he knew where Dave could stay until they made their plans. His own flat had only two bedrooms, and Dave didn’t want to appear too forward.

As it turned out next day, the work they were offered was kitchen maid for Katharina, and bingo caller for Dave, with the additional duty of hosting afternoon tea dances for the elderly coach parties. The only redeeming factor in this situation was that Katharina was eternally grateful for his help in getting her home from Switzerland as she couldn’t have done it herself, and she showed her gratitude in a way that Dave liked.

“Come to your Katharina and she will make you feel good,” she always said. “She is always yours – your very own Katharina.”

Katharina or no Katharina, the bingo and tea dances had to go, and after three months, he was making plans to head north. He wanted to go to Hamburg, and Katharina pleaded with him to take her along. He had to remind her of how homesick she felt in St Moritz, but she said she would never feel like that when she was with him.

“Katharina – she love you very, very much, my darling. She want to be together with you always.” The way she said these words in her broken English with her “little girl” voice was almost too much for him. As if the voice wasn’t enough, she only had to look at him with her eyes half closed, and that beautifully sculptured face topped by gorgeous silky blonde hair blowing in the wind, and he melted into a heap of emotional jelly. She was a masterpiece, and was he going to turn this down? That didn’t make sense!

This was going to be difficult – very difficult. He had heard through the grapevine about a new radio station that was starting up, based on board a ship anchored off the Dutch coast broadcasting to the Benelux countries and, more importantly, the UK. A man called Frank Bentley was in Hamburg to see a suitable ship that was for sale, and he was looking for DJs to run it. Dave wanted to be a part of this. He had always been excited by the offshore radio scene, and he was going to move mountains to make his dream come true. He also wanted Katharina, and she very clearly wanted him.

“OK”, he said as they sat at a pavement café the next day, sipping lattes and

watching the world go by. "I've decided I want to go to Hamburg to see the guy who's starting the radio station face to face. It's better than phoning. I've also decided I'd like you to come with me. What do you think?"

"Yes, yes! Katharina will go with you! YES!" She almost knocked the coffee cups over in her excitement.

"It won't be easy," he continued. "If I get the job on the station, I'll be working at sea for weeks at a time, and you will be left on your own. You do realise that?" He was trying to put her off, hoping all the time that she would ignore him.

"Katharina will go with you, darling. She will be with you when you at sea. She will listen to you on radio with your voice close to her cheek. She love you so much."

This was very unnerving - he wasn't just taking a big gamble with his own future, but involving someone else as well. Someone as nice as this very, very special lady. They both sat in silence for a while, with only the noise of the traffic in the adjoining street, and someone riding a scooter across the pavement to avoid the cars.

"OK, let's do it," he said. "This is Friday, we'll leave on Monday morning."

They spent their last weekend in Vienna pretending they were tourists and walked everywhere, arms around each other, window shopping, people watching in pavement cafes, walking and stopping every now and again for a kiss in a shady part of a park. They didn't even have to talk – looks said it all. Katharina's English was good enough to understand, and Dave thought it was so very cute how she always referred to herself in the third person. It was just so . . . Katharina! He loved that girl.

Monday had come round all too soon, and Dave was beginning to have doubts about his plans. It was a pure gamble, and to involve someone else in his hair-brained schemes just seemed too risky. But when did you ever get anything you really wanted without taking a risk? And who said doing anything worthwhile would be easy? After giving himself a good talking to, he went to meet Katharina. It was a lovely calm, sunny morning as he walked down her street. The birds were singing and he could smell fresh baking coming from some of the little pavement cafes, where the owners were sweeping around the front doors and arranging their tables and chairs for the day's customers. From an open upstairs window there was a loud crash and the sound of breaking crockery. Then a child started crying and a dog barked in sympathy. A scooter roared along the pavement narrowly missing him, the smell of the two-stroke exhaust hanging in the still air. A typical Viennese morning! But it wasn't for Dave and Katharina. She was already out on the sidewalk at six-thirty am with her suitcase, waiting for him. When he arrived, her father Leon came to the door and gave her big hugs and kisses. Then he took Dave's hand and shook it vigorously.

"Now, you will look after my precious girl, won't you," he said, with a look that Dave translated as "if you don't, I will track you down, rip out your heart, and turn your innards into mincemeat!"

"Don't worry," he said, trembling, "I'll look after her. I'll make sure she writes to you."

As they walked off down the street, Katharina kept turning round and shouting, "Bye, goodbye Papa, goodbye," until he was out of sight.

Leon went back into the house and straight into Katharina's room. He pretended it was to check if she had forgotten anything, but it was really to just look at her things. He picked up her pillow and held it to his face, inhaling deeply. He knew that smell so well.

It was a cross between the fresh air smell of washing just taken in from the line, and an ever so slight hint of fresh flowers. Katharina never wore any perfume, but she just seemed to carry this aura of fresh flowers about with her. Leon was convinced it was all down to her mother looking down on her and making sure her daughter always smelt sweet and pure. There was no other explanation for it. He was going to be on his own again, as his wife Anna had died in childbirth when Katharina was only five. The baby brother she was so looking forward to having, died too. She was all he had left now, and she meant the world to him. He slowly put the pillow back on the bed, and turned towards the shelf unit beside the bed. On the top shelf was a collection of cuddly animals consisting of four teddy bears, two cute puppy dogs, a big floppy-eared furry rabbit and half a dozen small furry creatures, exact species unknown. Leon could almost recall to the day and the exact time when each of these toys was acquired. Most of them came from the fairground. Katharina loved funfairs, and always pleaded with her Papa to take her. Before taking her there, Leon would always buy a furry toy from a little novelty stall on his way home from work. He would hide it in his pocket on the way there, and if Katharina was unsuccessful with any of the games on the stalls, he would kneel down in front of her and produce this toy, saying, "Look, my darling, you won after all! Here is a new little friend for you to take home." The look on her little face with her big eyes all lit up just made him so happy. He knew he was probably spoiling her, but as the years past she proved that he hadn't, by being a perfect daughter.

The next shelf down was dominated in the middle by a large leather photo frame. The picture in the frame was the demonstration picture supplied with it. It showed a very handsome man in a sharp business suit, holding a telephone to his ear and smiling at the camera, with perfect glistening teeth and immaculately groomed hair. Katharina had bought it because she liked the man in the picture, but later she told her Papa that she would put a photo of him in it.

"Oh no," he protested, "I could never look as good as that!" He never did get put in the frame.

Next to the photo frame was a fabric-covered glasses case with little pink butterflies on it. He picked it up and opened it. There, inside, were her first glasses she had got when she was nine. He took them out and inspected them. They had a pink and brown mottled frame, and he recalled how cute she looked when she first got them. She had other thoughts, though. He smiled when he remembered how she refused to wear them, but then had to, as her schoolteacher reported to him about her poor school work. This was, of course, because she couldn't see the blackboard. The teacher was instructed to make sure she wore them – or else! However, after she was fourteen and noticed boys noticing her, the glasses were abandoned and never worn again, except when she wanted to watch television or read her favourite magazines. Then she had to wear them. Leon chuckled when he thought that this was obviously why she failed every exam at school and ended up as a kitchen maid in clubs and hotels, instead of a doctor or a lawyer. But she would be the best kitchen maid there ever was, he told himself, and she was the best daughter a father could ever wish for, so what did it matter? Now, however, the poor eyesight which she had inherited from her mother had progressively become worse over the years, and she had to wear her glasses full-time to be able to see anything at all.

On the other side of the photo frame sat a twenty pack of Marlboro cigarettes, and on top of it, a solid silver lighter with the initials K.A.B. engraved on it; both birthday

presents from her best friend Johanna. Katharina Anna Bloch didn't smoke, but all her friends did, and on her eighteenth birthday it was expected that she would too – a sort of 'right of passage'. Everyone in Vienna did. Leon opened the pack, and he already knew there were three cigarettes missing. She had tried them on her birthday night out with her friends, and decided there and then that smoking wasn't for her. Rather than offend Johanna, she told her that she would just have the occasional one. Leon was secretly glad, as it would have made his little girl even more grown up than she already was. She didn't even drink much, her favourite tippie being either an illegal glass of cold beer, or a white wine, but more often than not, a Coke.

The next two shelves held various books such as, 'The Bedtime Book of Short Stories for Girls'; 'Dinosaurs of the World'; 'The Official Rolling Stones Fan Club Handbook'; 'Monsters of the Deep'; and a strange one for a girl – 'Giant Excavators and Monster Trucks'. There were also three die cast models of excavators still in their cellophane-fronted boxes on this shelf. She was fascinated by diggers and excavators and always pleaded with her Papa to take her to watch any that were working in the town. She saw them as big, fuzzy, yellow dinosaurs in her blurred world. She knew all the drivers by name, and was in her element when they sometimes asked her to come up and sit in the cab on their knees and pull one of the levers.

The bottom two shelves were full of single records – the majority of them by the Rolling Stones. Katharina was mad about the Stones, and loved Mick Jagger. It was a 'rebel thing'. There were also some Beatles, Moody Blues and Fleetwood Mac records, but they were all too tame compared to her beloved Stones. In the corner of the room, sitting on a small table, was her little Grundig record player with a red fabric-covered case, and cream plastic knobs.

Leon wondered when he would ever see her again, and he couldn't stop the tears welling up in his eyes. He coughed, cleared his throat, then went through to his armchair and settled down with his newspaper.

Dave and Katharina took a tram to the railway station, purchased their tickets, then, as they had plenty of time to spare, went to the station buffet and had breakfast. The journey was uneventful and took all day. They spent most of it reading magazines they had bought, sleeping in each other's arms or just gazing in each other's eyes. This was all new territory to Dave – not just geographical but emotional. He felt like he was on an unstoppable roller coaster.

When they arrived in Hamburg, they went to a small bistro and ate. They had the address of a back-street hotel which Katharina's father knew, and he had phoned his friend there to arrange accommodation for them. They made their way there, got settled in, and were so shattered that as soon as their heads touched the pillows, they were sound asleep right through till morning. Well, at least till four-thirty as far as Dave was concerned, as there were trees right outside the window and the birds had decided to start their choir practice. He got out of bed and looked down at Katharina. She had such a contented look on her face, with her tousled hair spread out over the pillow. He crept about so as not to wake her, and decided to go for a walk – he needed to get his thoughts together. It was unusual of him to be so thoughtful, but he wrote her a little note saying 'gone for a walk – back soon', and placed it on her bedside table, just in case she thought he had done a runner!

He went out into the early morning sunshine and started walking in no particular direction. This was serious stuff. He asked himself: *Do you really know what you're doing? Are you ready for this? Do you love this girl? Is this right?* The answer was yes to all of the questions. *Right, that's sorted then,* he replied to himself, *let's move on now to the next stage.* When faced with a problem or tough decision to make, he always held this sort of 'board meeting' with himself and thrashed out the pros and cons. It had always worked before, so he stuck with it.

He walked for two hours, stopping for a coffee at a small café, and then returned to the hotel. Katharina was up and dressed, and welcomed him with a big kiss. He could get used to this! They had arranged two nights accommodation, as Dave thought it might take a whole day to track down this man, Frank Bentley. He had the name and address of the shipping brokers who were selling the radio ship, so he thought that was as good a place as any to start. Let's face it; it was the only place he could start. They set off to Horst Grunwald Maritime, Shipping Brokers, Hamburg Docks.

The docks area was enormous, and there were so many checkpoints where they had to bluff their way through. It was good that he had Katharina with him as he could speak no German, and without her it would have been a difficult, if not impossible task. After following directions for three or four times, they came across a big brown sandstone building bearing the legend in big blue metal letters:

Horst Grunwald Maritime
Shipping Brokers

It would appear that whoever had erected the sign had under-estimated the strength of the fixings required for the heavier capital letters, as most of them had fallen off. *Very strange,* Dave thought, as he knew of the legendary high quality of German engineering. He had to justify this, so he told himself that this must have been erected by immigrant labour!

They entered a heavy oak swing door with a frosted glass panel in it, bearing the company name again, but permanently this time, etched in the glass, with no risk of letters falling off. The office had beautiful wood-panelled walls. A rather severe-looking lady of indeterminate age confronted them at a huge oversize desk, surrounded by an aura of furniture polish. She had an overbearing appearance, and her jet black hair looked as if it had been moulded from plastic and glued onto her head. She peered at them over the top of her glasses, and asked in German if she could help. Katharina took the lead and asked her, "Können wir mit jemandem über das Kaufen eines Schiffs bitte sprechen?"

"Kann ich Sie das Thema von Ihrer Erkundigung fragen?" the receptionist asked. By now, Dave was completely lost!

"Wir interessieren uns für Kaufen des Radioschiffs," Katharina continued.

"Bitte setzen Sie sich für einen Moment hin."

She lifted the telephone, dialled a number, and spoke to someone at the other end in a hushed voice.

After replacing the receiver, she looked over to them and said, "Unser internationaler Umsatzdirektor wird mit Ihnen in ein paar Momenten sein. Bitte bleiben

Sie dort.”

“What was all that about?” Dave asked Katharina.

“Katharina tell her that we interested in buying the radio ship and she tell us to wait here on seat and international sales director will come see us soon.”

They did as ordered, and after about five minutes, a man in a grey suit appeared through a side door. “Bitte kommen Sie zu meinem Büro durch,” he said, adding in English, “Please come through to my office.”

They followed him through, and sat down as directed. He was a friendly-looking man with neat, short white hair, a white beard and sparkling eyes, and probably about sixty, Dave guessed.

“Now, how can I be of assistance?” the man asked, punctuating the question with a big smile. *I'll bet he sells lots of ships with a manner like that*, Dave thought.

Dave took the lead now, and decided to be perfectly honest. “We’re not actually interested in buying a ship at all.” The sales director’s brows furrowed and a frown started to spread across his face. Dave continued, “We are very interested in trying to contact a man called Frank Bentley, who is interested in the radio ship you are selling, and we hope you can tell us where he is staying in Hamburg.”

The sales director’s expression relaxed. “I’m so sorry. I think you have had a wasted journey. Herr Bentley is no longer here, and he is no longer interested in the radio ship. He told me he has had a better offer in Holland, and he returned there yesterday.”

Dave’s heart sank.

Sensing his disappointment, the sales director said, “I can, however, tell you how you may contact him, if you so wish.”

Dave perked up. “Yes please, if you would be so kind.”

“The gentleman in question owns a night club in Scheveningen. I believe it is called the Mermaid Club, and he spends a lot of time there as I have always had success in telephoning him there. I will write down the number for you if you like.”

“That would be just fine. Thank you very much,” Dave said, feeling relieved.

This was both good news and bad news. Good because he now had a definite contact number for Frank Bentley and bad because it would take at least another day to reach him, and they only had enough money between them for a week’s hotel bills, not counting the train fares.

They made their way back to the hotel, walking all the way to save money. It took an hour and a half, including a stop to eat some fresh fruit purchased from a roadside stall. *Well, that’s today’s main meal taken care of cheaply*, thought Dave.

Back at the hotel, Dave decided to try phoning Frank Bentley as soon as possible, and suggested to Katharina that she sit in the residents’ lounge and relax on one of the well-worn chairs in front of the TV. He went to the phone booth out in the hallway and dialled the number. The phone was answered by a girl in Dutch, and all he could understand was ‘Mermaid Club’.

“Hello, do you speak English?” Dave asked.

“Oh, ya, ya, can I help you, please?” the girl replied. She sounded nice.

“Can I speak to a Mr Frank Bentley, please?”

“Who is calling?” the girl asked.

“My name is Dave Buckingham.”

“Please, what is it in connection with?” This was a tough cookie to get past!

“It’s about the radio station project.”

“Ah . . . ya, ya, I think he expects you. I put you through.” An extension rang. *Expects me? Expects me?* Dave was confused.

The phone was answered by an Englishman – *very* English. In fact, His accent sounded like it was straight out of a 1950s Ealing black and white movie.

“Hello, Rob you old scoundrel. Talk about keeping a fellow in suspense. You’ve kept me hanging on for a week. Do you want this bloody job or don’t you? The ship’s sitting out there waiting for you.”

After a few seconds, Dave nervously replied, “Um . . . Mr Bentley . . . er, I think you are confusing me with someone else . . .”

“Good Lord!” Frank exclaimed, cutting in over him, “Who on earth is this?”

“My name’s Dave, Mr Bentley, and I am phoning you about a DJ job on the radio ship.”

“Heavens above! That’s what I call great timing! Well, I’ve just been let down by someone who guaranteed me they’d take the job, and then they disappeared! Have you any experience, Dave?”

“Yes,” Dave replied. This was going better than he expected.

“OK, I like the sound of your voice on the phone, young man, so I’m going to do something which is very uncustomary for me. I’m in a spot, and I need someone right away, so I’m going to take a gamble and offer you the job on a six months trial. It’s yours if you want it. What do you say?”

Dave couldn’t say anything right then – he was coughing, spluttering and very nearly choked with excitement! Then he managed, “Yes, Mr Bentley. Yes, I’ll take it. Thank you very much.”

“Good! Superb! Wonderful! OK, where are you? I will want to see you tomorrow night.”

“I’m in Hamburg just now, looking for you!”

“Hell’s fire and damnation! I need you in Scheveningen tomorrow night. Think you can make it?”

“Yes. Of course,” Dave answered, “I’ll be there.”

“Good. Top man. That’s the spirit. Come to the Mermaid Club any time after seven pm. The taxi driver will take you straight here – they all know where it is. Charge the taxi fare to the Mermaid account. See you tomorrow.”

“Thank you, Mr Bentley, I’ll be there. Goodbye.”

Frank had the last word with, “And for God’s sake, don’t ask for Mr Bentley, ask to see Frank when you arrive and the girls will treat you nicer.”

Dave thought he would have a little bit of fun – he felt so good. He walked slowly through to the lounge with his tail between his legs, and with a glum, melancholy look on his face, he sat down next to Katharina. She took one look at him and her face fell. She said, “Aw, bad news my darling? Never mind, we find this Bentley man tomorrow. Katharina make you happy again.”

‘Mr Ed’ was on the TV. Dave said, “That’s all I need now – a talking horse, *and* it

even speaks German!” He moved close to her ear and whispered, “Mr Ed goes into a bar for a drink, and the barman says, ‘Why the long face?’”

She didn’t laugh. “How can you joke when it is bad news?” she said, almost crying.

With his lips right against her ear, he whispered, “I got the job!”

All hell broke loose! She let out a piercing squeal and shot out of her seat, a loose spring going “boing” and following her! The squeal was followed by another one, then uncontrollable laughter. At the same time, she started battering him over the head with the newspaper she had been reading, shouting, “Katharina hate you, hate you, HATE YOU! No, no, no, love you, love you, LOVE YOU! You pig! Pig! Lovely pig!”

Then she threw the newspaper up into the air and it floated down, page by page, while she leapt onto Dave’s lap and kissed him repeatedly.

The old couple sitting in the corner were aghast and couldn’t move. The hotel dog, which was in the room sleeping peacefully on the hearthrug, jumped up and ran for cover under the table, whimpering like a whipped puppy. A young couple who had been trying to pacify their troublesome child couldn’t believe it when their child froze to the spot, mouth wide open, then ran to his mother for a hug. To Dave and Katharina, nobody else was in the room. They kissed endlessly until Dave said, “I think we better go to our room.”

Up in the room, he told her all about the telephone conversation, and then said, “Right, young lady, bed-time now and no argument! We’ve got to go to Holland tomorrow. Hope you can speak Dutch.”

“No – no Dutch,” she replied, “only German and little English.”

After setting the alarm for five am, they fell asleep in each other’s arms.

The journey to Holland was fairly uneventful and they slept most of the way, waking up only when they had to change trains for The Hague. After arriving at The Hague Central Station, they went for a pizza and a coffee. Taxis were in abundance, and they picked a white top-of-the-range Mercedes to take them to the club. *Nothing like arriving in style*, Dave thought.

It was about ten pm when the taxi pulled up at the door of the Mermaid Club. The entrance was very impressive with cleverly concealed lighting making it look as if it was suspended in the water. In the full-length window beside the door, a beautiful girl with long waist-length blonde hair sat on a three-legged stool, her tail resting on one of the stool’s crossbars. This girl was a mermaid! She was blowing kisses to everyone who passed, beckoning them in. As Dave and Katharina opened the door, they were immediately met by another two girls dressed in fish-scale bikinis. They welcomed them in English, and asked what they could do for them.

“We’re here to see Frank – he’s expecting us,” Dave said, as instructed.

“OK, Please follow me,” the first girl said, and she actually took Dave’s hand. Katharina followed behind, and for the first time she felt a little threatened by this fishy

creature.

Dave was just gobsmacked by the whole place. In the middle of the floor was a circular bar, and in the centre of the bar was a giant circular aquarium with an assortment of exotic tropical fish swimming round and round, and a beautiful blonde girl who was dancing around a pole in the middle. Dave wondered how she could hold her breath for so long underwater, then he realised that the tank was like an elongated doughnut, and the girl wasn't actually in the water. She wore just two small seashells instead of a bra, just covering her and no more, and for panties, just a clump of seaweed which looked in danger of falling off. The sound system was the best he had ever heard, and it was pumping out 'Let's Dance' by David Bowie. The club was almost half full, and they cut through the dancers to a plain blue door on the back wall. The girl pressed a button, a CCTV camera up on the wall swivelled round to inspect them, then the door opened. They went up two steps, and the girl ushered them into a large room.

Frank Bentley was sitting behind a large oak desk, and he welcomed them with open arms. He was wearing a cream suit and an expensive-looking shirt. The neck was open well down, displaying a gold medallion. *Solid gold*, Dave thought, and that chest hair – was it real? And the shoes? – Definitely crocodile skin. Dave guessed he would be in his late thirties. After introductions were made, he guided them over to two large sumptuous cream leather sofas, with a smoked glass coffee table in front of them. Dave looked at the pictures on the walls. They were all of old sailing ships and galleons in full sail, some of them battling horrendous seas.

Frank spoke to the girl, "Tanya, love, pot of coffee for three, and some executive biscuits please." She nodded and went out the door.

Frank started the conversation. "Well, welcome aboard. Did you have a good trip?"

"Good, but hectic," Dave replied.

"OK," Frank continued after the introductions were made, "now let's get down to it. I'll give you a quick outline of what we're doing and what you'll be doing, and the rest we make up as we go along. Remember, there's a *lot* of give and take in this business, and I warn you now, it very often ends up more give than take. I tell you this now so that there are no illusions about the job. You will get stressed, fed up, tired, and sometimes so tired that you will want to chuck it in there and then. You will feel like killing me sometimes. Right, that's the bad bit over with. You already know the good bits or you wouldn't be here. Do you know why we are going to broadcast a radio station from a ship anchored in international waters?"

"Yes. I was brought up in Frinton-on-Sea, and my parents live in Walton-on-the-Naze. I missed all the sixties pirate radio scene, but I've kept up with the seventies offshore stations, Radio Northsea International, which was my favourite, Atlantis, Caroline and Laser 558."

The door buzzer sounded, and Frank pressed a button on the desk. "Come in, Tanya," he said as the door opened. He had been watching her on the monitor approaching with the coffee tray.

"Thank you, love, just put it down here. Why not take a break? Go down and have a drink and put it on the slate."

"Thank you, Frank, see you later." Tanya went out.

"Now, where were we?" Frank asked as he started to pour the coffee. This man

was completely in control and at home in his environment “Ah yes. Right, well, it’s almost impossible to establish a land-based commercial radio station legally in Europe right now, so we’ve bought a redundant oil rig supply ship, the Red Conqueror. When I say ‘we’, I mean the Mermaid Club. The ship is being re-named ‘Mermaid’, and the station will be called ‘Mermaid Radio’. This is going to be the mother of all offshore radio stations, because it is being done properly. To show you we mean business, I’ll give you some details.

“We bought the ship from the liquidators representing two Belgian brothers called Werner. They had converted it and fully fitted it out as a self-contained radio station, but they put the cart before the horse. They had no backers or advertising lined up. They thought the money would just flow in when they switched on the transmitter. Big mistake. Lucky for us there are still some naive people like that around in the world, and we managed to come along and take it off their hands for a bargain basement price. We have four clients who have each put up twenty per cent of the total cost in return for a year’s free advertising. They are: Super-Waffles – I’m sure you’ve eaten a few; Friday Girl – the chain of boutiques in Holland and Belgium; Poparama – the monthly charts magazine, who, incidentally, are giving us big publicity as part of the deal; and Media-Ads International in New York, the agency representing the clients, and they want to advertise in their own right. They’ve developed a package which blows holes in any legislation against advertising on offshore stations. Oh, and the Mermaid Club has put up the last twenty per cent, but we can advertise any time we want anyway. We also have our first outside client knocking at the door to come aboard, and that’s Music Maniac, the adult music magazine.”

Dave’s eyebrows kept rising higher and higher. He was impressed. Katharina just sat and listened, trying to take it all in. She felt completely out of her depth, but put her trust in Dave.

Frank continued, “You will be joining an organisation which is a success even before it’s begun. It can only go onwards and upwards. The ship is a beauty. You will have a clean, warm, modern cabin to yourself, excellent mess room with giant TV, stereo, and the station output on top-quality monitors as well.”

Dave dived in quick, “What about . . .”

Before he could finish, Frank came back with, “Pay? I know we haven’t mentioned it, so here goes. You will initially work three weeks on, and one week ashore. During the week ashore, you will be required to host at the Mermaid Club on two or three nights. You will be paid £100 per week.”

Dave frowned. He wanted this chance, but for £100 a week?

“Don’t forget,” Frank said, “all your meals will be provided both on the ship and ashore. You will have free supplies of beer and cigarettes on the ship, so you’ll have nothing to spend your money on.”

“We would need to find an apartment in Scheveningen for when I’m ashore, and also for Katharina.”

“Hmmm . . . let me think . . .” Frank looked very thoughtful, and was drumming his fingers on the coffee table while he was looking at Katharina intensely. “What are you intending to do, my dear?” he asked her directly.

She spoke for the first time, her voice quite husky with nerves, “Look for job in hotel, maybe, or club.”

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

