

Chapter 2: Bing

In which we met Bartholomew Bing and discover what's slowing the wagon down.

Byron's lips pursed into a twist considering his options. His mood had gone from foul to downright annoyed.

"Is there a third option?"

"Nope!" the little girl yelled as she kicked the sides of Tiger deftly and steered him to the front of the wagon and around the other side, showing off how easily they could move in the mud compared to the tired and hard working pony Horatio.

"Right," he muttered to himself "Third options are Bing's department." With the heel of his boot he gave three rapid taps to rouse his partner Bartholomew Bing from whatever he was doing back there.

The interior of the wagon was larger than it appeared on the outside. This was mostly due to Bartholomew Bing's meticulous ways. He had spent his youth working for the family business of watchmaking and at a young age learned that if everything was in the proper place and in correct working order, things would run smoothly and on time. If

they fell out of place, time was literally wasted. When he became a young man he joined the Navy and was assigned to a submarine. He requested the smallest one. He spent 3 years in the fleet's smallest two man submarine. It was about the size of your average dining room table. He and a young Russian officer named Fyodor Freedrich Dropovich lived quite comfortably. Bing was the sort of man who could pack a months worth of clothing in a backpack, a week's worth of lunches in a single lunch box, and 13 eggs in a carton built for holding 12. Due to his upbringing and skills, Bing had converted the interior of the wagon to a spectacle of organization and efficiency.

Bing himself wasn't what one could call a "small" man. He's been described as "portly" or "rotund" or "round"... "beefy," "chunky," "wide," "stout," "chubby," or even "large." Height-wise he wasn't all that tall, he was almost exactly half as tall as Byron, who stood a stiltlike 6 foot 7 inches tall. Shape and weight-wise, Bing most closely resembled a large friendly beach ball. When the two stood together it wouldn't at all be unfair to compare them, from a distance, to an olive and a toothpick.

At the moment of Byron's insistent pounding with his boot, Bing was just finishing up tea preparations for their afternoon tea service. His trademark bowler hat was hanging jauntily on the lever above the stove next to his head (this lever had a number of functions, pull it once and the lights turn on, pull it twice and the stove lights up, pull

it three times... well, we'll get to what happens if you pull it three times in a moment.) At the sound of the knocking, he instantly froze. Only his small mouselike eyes moved. Like Bryon, Bing also had a large and proud moustache, however his was more bushy and plump, like a hat for a walrus, and unlike Byron this prodigious moustache never betrayed his emotions. His small and mouselike eyes however were a constant show of his inner thoughts. Right now, they were alert and ready for action.

Three more thumps of Byron's boot resounded directly above Bing's head... this was important. Three thumps meant “listen up.” Three more thumps meant “we need to talk.... IMMEDIATELY.”

From the floorboards he pulled up the talking tube. It was a rubber hose fitted with a brass horn on either end that they could talk into. He blew into it to clear the line, blasting a billow of dust and wind into Byron's ear where the other end of the tube sat perched next to his head.

Byron grabbed the brass horn and opened his mouth, ready to deliver a shout of anger and frustration, but quickly changed his mind, closed his mouth, cleared his throat and in the most pleasant of voices requested “My dear Bing, I believe we should make use of the third option... there are crocodiles about.”

"Crocodiles?" Bing's incredulous tinny voice responded from the horn. "That's a metaphor I'm unfamiliar with."

"Oh, it's not metaphor my dear boy. I may have exaggerated using the plural, but it is a crocodile nonetheless, driven quite skillfully by a veritable Annie Oakley of the reptile kingdom." He smiled pleasantly down at the little girl riding Tiger dangerously close to their wheels. He gave her a quick nod of reassurance, and held up one finger in the universal signal of "just one minute, I'm on the line right now and will address your concerns in a moment, and please don't worry your concerns will be addressed and I'm certainly not planning on doing anything tricky, mischievous, or untrustworthy.".... at least, that's what he hoped she saw in his smile and raised finger.

"Third option then?" Bing's tinny voice prompted.

"I think that would be the best course of action at this time." Byron said casually while never breaking his smile or eye contact with the girl on the crocodile.

"I'd best weigh anchor then." Bing responded casually causing Byron's smile to crack and his moustache to twitch convulsively.

"Come again?"

"The anchor."

"...."

"Didn't you know we had an anchor?" Bing asked innocently enough.
"Or, did you not know that it was deployed?"

Byron spun his stool that he was sitting on 180 degrees around to face the rear. What he saw caused his eyes to bulge and his smile to turn into a downright frown. A long thick chain like the ones used on big ships was dragging along behind the wagon pulling an equally large ship's anchor behind it that was doing a wonderful job of plowing up a long trench in the muddy road behind them, also doing a wonderful job of keeping their pace roughly equal to that of a snail.

Byron adjusted his top hat, gave his moustache a cursory twist adjustment at the ends (this always soothed him), took a deep breath and turned back around.

"Yes, Bing. I think that would be a good idea."