



## Every Man for Himself

*Beryl Bainbridge*

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The sinking of the world's greatest luxury liner, the invincible and magnificent S. S. Titanic, has captured people's attention ever since that tragic April night in 1912, when 1500 people lost their lives. And no one has better dramatized this memorable event than Beryl Bainbridge in *Every Man for Himself*.

## Every Man for Himself Details

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Author : Beryl Bainbridge

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## From Reader Review Every Man for Himself for online ebook

### Courtney Johnston says

I wonder if reading this book before Cameron's calculated tear-jerker came out was even more affecting than it was reading it afterwards. Like re-reading *Pride & Prejudice* these days and trying to keep the text separate from the filmic palimpsest that's layered over top of it, reading '*Every Man for Himself*' without seeing Kate and Leonardo running about the place is almost impossible.

The protagonist - an un-named young man closely but mysteriously attached to J Pierpont Morgan - also reminded me hugely of the ill-starred young people of Waugh's '*Vile Bodies*'. He half-sees and half-understands the complex relationships he moves through as he negotiates the first-class passengers, and observes those on lower decks. His role is primarily to tell the stories of those around him, and over four short, feverish days he holds you gripped until the inevitable end.

Next I'm seeking out '*The Birthday Boys*'.

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### Philip says

The multiple Oscar-winning film, *Titanic*, appeared in 1997. Whether Beryl Bainbridge's novel, *Every Man For Himself*, was already in the planning before that movie was conceived is a matter open to conjecture or the biographer. Even if the novelist chose the subject deliberately to coincide with the launch of a blockbuster, the novel has to be read on its own considerable merits, which did indeed include a Whitbread Prize, a nomination for a Booker and a Commonwealth Writer's Prize. The book's subject matter, however, might at first sight, and especially now that we are so familiar with the feature film, suggest repetition or mere cliché. After all, what more is there to be said about an event that has already been done to death in multimedia? In attempting such a project, a novelist of the stature of Beryl Bainbridge might have run the risk of being seen to court populism or, even, worse, triteness. But *Every Man For Himself* succeeds. It transcends all such possible criticism by virtue of its refined literary style, the subtlety of its characters and ultimately the credibility of its scenario.

The bones of the *Titanic* story are covered, but unlike the feature film they do not form the very gist of the spectacle. Despite one of the book's characters having been involved in the ship's design and construction, here we are spared redundant detail of dimension, quantity and material. This is not a novel about a ship, despite the almost continual sense of visual opulence that pervades the experience. On the contrary, this is a novel about the people on board, or more accurately a particular class, who sailed in her. In Beryl Bainbridge's novel we are among the upper crust, or at least those who aspire to join them, many decks above the steerage who, just like they do anywhere, populate a level of society that the 'comfortable' know to exist but only rarely acknowledge.

Thus *Every Man For Himself*, despite its brevity, successfully addresses the vast minefield of British social class relations. At the start of this voyage, those class relations seem to be rigidly contrasted in lower versus upper decks, in steerage dorms versus plush cabins. And these differences are not merely economic, since identity and assumption are also in play. But when crisis materialises, the price of a passenger's ticket contributes nothing towards the ability to survive. A vision of new equality arises when, clearly, the planned facilities cannot cope, and never could have doped, since those who conceived the boat could not conceive of its demise.

But it is in the book's metaphorical mode that this short novel transcends and exceeds much of what has been written or shot about the fate of the Titanic. In the same way that the ship's designers could not conceive of a collision so catastrophic that it might sink an unsinkable vessel, perhaps those who assumed existing class relations were permanent could also not conceive of a war so devastating it would ruin a continent and simply erase convention. It was not just a ship that sank on this voyage, but also the rigid societal divisions that inspired its very design.

Of course we already know the plot of *Every Man For Himself*. Eventually even the book's scenario makes sense. But the real danger of writing such a novel is that it becomes subservient to those events we already know, destined merely to repeat them. But Beryl Bainbridge is several cuts above this class of writer and the book transcends the familiar to address universal themes simply through its intense study of character. Thus clichés, even the less obvious, are all avoided.

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### **Jennifer says**

I always think I like Beryl Bainbridge's writing. Then I read one of her books and I find myself struggling to stay engaged and I wonder what is wrong with me - because it can't be her. She's Beryl Bainbridge and I'm just me. It must be me.

I had moments of enjoyment but this was one of those books that once it was put down I had to do a little mental battle to pick it up again. Perhaps it's not a good choice when you're on holiday and there is so much else going on that is fun and distracting?

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### **GoldGato says**

This book puzzled me. How can you screw up the Titanic story? But it just did nothing for me, which seems to put my review in the minority. Lots of bland talk, blah blah blah. Yup, way to make the greatest maritime incident in history bee-oar-ing...with three syllables. I had to smack myself awake.

Book Season = Winter (maybe the cold will lead you to a gentle sleep)

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### **Bruce MacBain says**

This is a fictionalized account of the sinking of the Titanic, originally published in 1996 and now reissued, as have been so many other books on the subject, to coincide with the centenary of the disaster. Beryl

Bainbridge was a distinguished writer and this book either won, or was a finalist for, a number of prestigious awards. It is with some diffidence, then, that I confess that I didn't like it. The book is nine-tenths over before the ship hits the iceberg and I found myself increasingly impatient with the convoluted relationships of a cast of fictitious characters whom I could neither believe in nor care about—despite the fact that they are all doomed but don't know it. The first-person narrator is a callow young American who is born and raised in poverty until it is discovered somehow that he is related to millionaire J. P. Morgan. His fellow passengers include a caricatured Jewish tailor, an international man of mystery, an opera diva with a dark past, and a number of interchangeable bright young things. How much more interesting were the real passengers—the Astors, Strauses, and Guggenheims—who here only flit through the background! And when the catastrophe does finally occur, the narrative is, to my ear anyway, surprisingly flat. This is, in my humble opinion, a book to forget about the Night to Remember.

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### **Susan says**

This short, almost restrained, novel was shortlisted for the Booker Prize and won the Whitbread Prize when published in 1996. It tells the story of Morgan, a relative of J.P. Morgan, who feels, "destined to be a participant rather than a spectator of singular events". When a man dies in his arms shortly before he is to return to the States, he leaves his uncle's house almost secretly (a stolen picture of his mother tucked away) and gets the milk train to Southampton. For the young man is surely about to participate in a major world event by boarding Titanic on her maiden voyage.

Although we are soon aware that Morgan is not quite the same as his upper class friends, he fits seamlessly into first class. His family background is slightly troubled, unknown, but then other passengers have their secrets too. What is interesting about this novel is the way Bainbridge shows how all these people are almost trapped together - a large, unhappy family. They travel to the same places, went to the same schools, shared social lives and even mistresses. The novel cleverly tells the story of life aboard, with all the little intrigues, love affairs and gossip. The author uses many real life characters - Lady Duff Gordon, Thomas Andrews, Bruce Ismay and Astor populate the pages, but as we know what is coming that overshadows everything that happens. This really is a clever read, which recreates life on board and the pressure these young men were under when calamity happened to be brave and not get in a 'funk'; when to be a man was to feel shame at surviving.

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### **Priya says**

This is one of the most tightly written books I've ever read. With not one superfluous word, Bainbridge advances the story at an impressive pace and creates tension in a situation where we know the inevitable outcome.

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### **Mary says**

A very moving account of the privileged few aboard the doomed first and only voyage of Titanic, the unsinkable ship.

Beautifully written, you could almost feel the chill in the air and see the stars above!

The last few pages have you drawn into the despair and for some that were still convinced the ship wouldn't

sink and just carried on.

Recommended even if one knows what happens.

The writing is exquisite!

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### **Hugh says**

[ as he helps co-ordinate the evacuation and contrives an unlikely Hollywood

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### **Trelawn says**

Bainbridge is definitely becoming a favourite. In this short novel she chronicles the fate of the passengers of the Titanic on their doomed voyage to New York. She focuses mainly on the first class passengers (some real, some fictional). Bainbridge lays bare the secrets and relationships of the rich and privileged as they cross the ocean to return to wives or family or to embark on their career. The tragedy of the Titanic remains in the background for much of the narrative with the characters blissfully unaware of what lies ahead. If they were told they were about to make history they might assume it was for arriving in port ahead of time. Many believed, for far too long, that the Titanic was indeed unsinkable and that all would be well. Thus, when realisation dawned it was all the more tragic. It is a beautifully told story.

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### **Perry Whitford says**

An adoptee of the banker JP Morgan with an orphaned, uncertain past, takes first-class passage on the maiden, and of course only, voyage of the RMS Titanic.

Spent largely in the company of bankers, magnates, and his flighty friends -a vacuous bunch of young socialites, gauche sons and daughters of the great and good- he also comes into contact with members of the working-class from amongst the crew.

As the ship sails inevitably towards disaster, the callow narrator becomes increasingly in thrall to an enigmatic businessman called Scurra who, alongside the horrific incidents that followed the breaching and sinking of that fateful ship, illustrates to him some fundamental facts of life, best encapsulated in Bainbridge's chosen title.

As with any novel set on the Titanic, the ironies come thick and heavy. The socialites toast their youth and the joy of being alive, make some sport with supposed omens, even start a book on the estimated arrival time at New York *"barring accidents"*, which gets a laugh.

Then there are the occasional details of people and objects which were due to travel but didn't, such as JP Morgan himself and his art collection, *"all those wonderful Rubenses and Rembrandts"* which a change of plan saved for posterity.

And lastly, we get the seemingly incredulous (yet historically true) behaviour of some of the passengers as the end approaches, continuing their games of cards regardless, dancing the foxtrot as the orchestra plays on while the waters rush round, indulging in childish tiffs, rendered all the more pathetic by the gravity of the

real crisis at hand.

For all that though, *Every Man for Himself* is not really about the Titanic. Don't get me wrong, it tells the story of the sinking sure enough, and there are some highly visual scenes which would make for a stunning cinematic experience to knock spots off Cameron's overblown clunker (most especially when the narrator is finally washed into the waves), but the death of the ship is secondary to the death of something more personal, the narrator's illusions.

That's a difficult narrative undertaking when the drama of the disaster far outweighs any individual rites of passage, but Bainbridge is a bold, brilliant writer with a keen intelligence behind all she does, so against the odds she pulls it off.

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### **Hollie says**

Not the best book I've ever read, really hard going, I found that I didn't really care about the characters. I wanted to read about the Titanic, not a side story and then the last 80 pages or so of when it sank. I love reading about the Titanic but there wasn't enough about it in the book, to be honest it could have been set anywhere. The last few pages where it got to the part about the ship sinking was really good, just a shame about the rest of the book.

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### **Graceann says**

Please see my detailed review at Amazon Graceann's "Every Man for Himself" Review"

Please click that the review was helpful to you at Amazon so that my rating continues to climb!

Quite a letdown after the excellent prose in *Testament of Youth*. No character development and nobody worth caring about. I'm glad it was such a short book so that I didn't waste any more time on it than necessary.

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### **Sara says**

There is something endlessly fascinating about the sinking of the Titanic. Perhaps it is the idea that people were going about their business, enjoying their lives, until hours before they were suddenly swept away into oblivion. Perhaps it is the number of blunders that contributed to this disaster and how easily most of them could have been avoided. Perhaps it is the feeling you get that certain events are destined and nothing could prevent it happening, or the indiscriminate way some people survived while others died. Or perhaps just the unparalleled opportunity it gives us to glimpse man at his best and his worst, extremely courageous or abjectly cowardly, facing death with a bravery you cannot imagine, or scrambling to save only himself without regard for others at all.

Whatever the allure, I confess to being always willing to be drawn into another tale of the events of that cold April night. In that regard, however, I do not find this to be one of the better told accounts. I did not connect to Morgan, and certainly not to his rich and pompous friends, or find his behavior either before or during the

disaster to be particularly enlightening. The first half of the book plods, but the second half that deals with the sinking itself moves at a pace that takes your breath. I feel that must have been how it seemed to those on board--a slow and easy ride, right up until the moment it was excruciatingly over.

I enjoyed the book, but was not overly impressed, and I was astonished to know that it was short-listed for the Booker. If you want to read a tale about the Titanic, I highly recommend *A Night to Remember*.

To my own good fortune, this book was published in 1996, thus fulfilling a criteria for a challenge I have taken on for the summer...so, everything is good.

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### **Rebecca says**

The voyage of the *Titanic* as seen through the eyes of an adopted nephew of J.P. Morgan. "I was destined to be a participant rather than a spectator of singular events," he states. I had some trouble keeping his fellow passengers straight, but I enjoyed the little moments of dramatic irony where people are joking about accidents and praising the ship's stability. The whole book is strangely detached given its focus on a famous tragedy, but the last chapter, and especially the last paragraph, are terrific.

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