

CHAPTER 1

THE FUNERAL

Bill looked down at the glazed light-brown coffin as it slowly inclined its way down into the dark recesses of the grave. His eyes narrowed, and he thought of the time, only last week, when he had held his father's hand and told him words of comfort as the sharp intakes of breath indicated the final moments. Bill had told his father that he would cherish the old man's achievements—fighting his way out of hardship to buy his own house and raise his family. He promised to fulfill his own ambition and like his father, take a risk on new ventures when the time was right. Bill told him that he was the most wonderful person ever, until the breathing became so shallow that it was almost gone. And then Bill kissed his father's cheek and saw the faint flicker of a smile whisk across the wrinkled face, and Bill continued to talk. He said that his grandchildren would be told about their grandfather and all that he had done in his long life. And then it was all over.

Bill looked up from the grave and saw some of his neighbors, his tennis partners, a few old friends, and a group of colleagues led by his boss, Georgina, standing around the graveside. Each person eventually departed with a handshake or a pat on the back along with a few choice words of sorrow and condolence. His friend Jack stood like a soldier at the grave with his head bowed, hands behind his back, standing guard, his body rigid and still. Georgina came over to Bill and placed a hand on his arm as she mumbled.

“Bill. Let me buy you a drink. I know you've not organized anything—you know, a wake or such.”

2 CORPORATE FRAUD: A MANAGER'S JOURNEY

Bill nodded and replied,

“Well, yes. That’s it, really. The last of my family. . . .”

She guided Bill towards the high road with its sparkling lights, suggesting that drinks and laughter were on offer. Jack followed several paces behind, and the three of them sat around a small, dimly lit table towards the back of the bar. Bill stared at his hands as Georgina said,

“Take as much time off as you like. I’ll update you when you get back.”

Jack got up and headed for the bar.

Georgina looked closely at Bill and continued,

“Don’t worry about the new strategic transition project. Take time for yourself and your grief. I know you’ve a trip planned.”

Bill seemed to slowly come out of his trance and said.

“Yes. I’ve got this cottage in England. It was left to me by my aunt. So I plan to go out there and see what needs doing. But what happened at the board meeting yesterday? Wasn’t it about the big new change project we’re doing?”

Georgina looked away and shook her head.

“I just said don’t worry about work for a bit. Take your vacation and relax.”

Bill smiled and rubbed his tired eyes.

“I need to get back into things as soon as I return. Really I do. How did it go yesterday?”

Georgina seemed unsure about what to do, as Jack returned and stood three drinks down on the table. Bill spoke again.

“Really, I’m okay. Tell me how it went.”

Georgina sat back and assumed her chief executive look with mouth pursed and eyes focused on Bill. She wore a tailored skirt and jacket that hugged her small but shapely body. She crossed her legs and said,

“Okay. You get it your way, Mister Tough Guy. What’s your job title, Bill?”

“Head of Corporate Planning.”

“But what does it mean?”

Jack gently stood up to give the other two some freedom to discuss their work issues, but Georgina grabbed his arm and pulled him back to his seat.

“Jack, stay here. This may hit you as well.”

Jack finally spoke,

“But I don’t work for you. I’m okay to let you two talk shop.”

Georgina sighed.

“You know you do projects for Bill. And we may well need you on this one.”

Jack sat down and sipped his drink. Georgina’s eyes flashed as she started talking again.

“You’re Head of Mumbo, Jumbo, Bumbo. What you do, Bill, is take on our change projects and make them work. You’ve reviewed our internal controls, and you’ve got us set up with enterprise risk management, with help from Jack here. Right now, it seems that we urgently need to sort out our antifraud measures, and yesterday the board decided to throw this little baby at you.”

Bill tugged at his left ear to make sure he was hearing okay before saying.

“What about that compliance officer you took on last year? Isn’t that his job?”

“Oh yes. He works for Davis Middleton, the Chief Finance Officer (CFO). We need to widen the scope of things, and he’ll work for you to get a new fraud policy up and running. You know, policy, fraud response, staff-awareness seminars, and so on. The new chair of the audit committee reckons we need to do much more on this front. In fact, she said we were in the dark ages. I guess the truth is we are way behind. Look Bill, I’ll e-mail the minutes from the board meeting, and you can formulate a terms of reference for the project when you get back to work in a few weeks’ time. Jack, you can help, like you always do. You could start working with Snouter, our compliance man, and prepare the ground for when Bill’s back at work. Bill, when you get back from England you can get me a project brief and a budget for the work—okay? Look guys, I have to get back. Please accept my condolences for your great loss.”

4 CORPORATE FRAUD: A MANAGER'S JOURNEY

And with that Georgina got up, laid a firm hand on Bill's shoulder, and left. Her high heels clicked loudly as she swished out of the bar. Jack watched her move off with a smile on his face.

"You know," Jack said, still looking at her, "Georgie looks as fit as she was when we were at University together. By the way, this fraud job will be fine—I've got it covered. You know, I've got a background in fraud work, so we should be able to set things up quite quickly. When do you get back?"

Bill gazed at his glass and snapped his head back; he looked up at the ceiling and smiled, saying to Jack,

"I'm supposed to fly out Monday. With all that's been going on, I've not thought about things much. Tell you what. It's Saturday today. You stay with me and Ruth and the babies over the weekend, and we can do some background stuff. You can work with Snouter next week, and I'll be back the following weekend. That way, when I'm back we can hit the ground running. Sounds good?"

Jack frowned and visualized mountains of diapers and screaming babies before he finally said.

"But Ruth's just produced twins. Is that really a good idea?"

Bill got up.

"No problem," he said. "You can help out when we get tired."

Bill walked towards the exit, and Jack grabbed and downed his drink in one gulp before following behind with a worried look fixed firmly on his face.