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After boarding the Environmental Challenger, Anne had retreated into her darkroom while the two old sailors mulled over the good old days. Kia had taken his watch on the bridge and the crew were once again on shore leave in the town of St. Anne's.

Alderney may not have had coffee shops like in Amsterdam (they actually sold coffee) but the island lived up to its own reputation. An island known as 'two thousand alcoholics clinging to a rock' had just acquired a dozen or so more. Barren, treeless and windswept, with only a few semi-reasonable beaches, Alderney didn't have much to offer the budding tourist. Being the northernmost of the Channel Islands and not sheltered by the Cherbourg peninsular made it the coldest and least desirable destination in the group. The island was in fact used as a concentration camp during the Second World War and mass unmarked graves of Polish and Russian prisoners were located on the southeastern headland. Massive concrete block-hut defences stood as a reminder to the atrocities that had taken place there. Never achieving the notoriety that Auswitz received, probably because soldiers were buried there and not civilians, the victim's souls still lived on in the bleak landscape and an eerie sense of resentment pervaded throughout the island.

The people of Alderney had plenty to drink for and they accomplished their designated task with zeal and gusto. The crew of the Environmental Challenger had done likewise for totally different reasons. Theirs was a case of not knowing when the next chance would arrive. As sailors they were expected to cram months of drinking into just a few days of shore leave. Over the years they'd had plenty of practice doing just that and now was no exception.

Being perched on top of a hill, St. Anne's was ideally placed for drunken sailors. The road down to the harbour facilitated a convenient ramp to stagger back down again after attempting to drink the locals under the table. Alongside the little harbour-front, a little freighter which plied the Weymouth, Alderney, Guernsey trade route loaded its usual cargo. When empty beer bottles and barrels make up the predominant export of a community then a branch of Alcoholics Anonymous might be considered a necessity. A Salvation Army citadel or Mormon Church would be last on their list of priorities.

In the Rose & Crown public house the crew of the Environmental Challenger were engaged in a drinking match with a group of locals. It was a close fought competition between hardened seamen and chronic alcoholics, but so far the seamen appeared to be winning. Years of practice in the bars of numerous foreign ports had honed their alcohol tolerances to a fine point. Even the locals were surprised by the abilities of their opponents.

Randy on the other hand had elected to remain onboard the ship under the pretext of servicing his helicopter. Being both the pilot and the mechanic on the ship, he had no other responsibilities apart from taking his turn in the galley. Penny had also been forced to stay onboard and still hadn't dared to venture from her hiding place inside Randy's helicopter. Fighting off this middle-aged Vietnam veteran's attentions was

becoming a constant problem for her. Randy was a red blooded American male and as such regarded himself as the all time stud. In his mind he was the most handsome, eligible bachelor on the ship and a stunning girl like Penny must obviously be dying to get into bed with him. At least he thought so any way. Being 5' 4" fat and only able to converse about helicopters, in his mind weren't negative qualities. From Penny's perspective he was a definite improvement on her usual clientele, but she still lacked the essential anatomical alteration to make such a liaison with him possible.

"How long do you plan on staying with us?" Randy asked in the way of making polite conversation.

"I don't know," Penny replied. "I can't stay in this helicopter for the rest of my life. How about flying me back to London?"

"I can't do that my little beauty. The captain would want to know why I was using our precious aviation fuel for a start," Randy argued. "Anyway, if you leave now we won't have time to get closer acquainted."

"Believe me Randy, you wouldn't want to get closely acquainted with me."

"That's where you're wrong gorgeous. I see a bright future for us. Mr and Mrs Sowers, working together to right all the world's wrongs."

"There are a few reasons why that's not a possibility," Penny tried to explain. She could instantly think of one big reason and a couple of small ones. "Why don't you ask that girl I saw boarding the ship a short while ago?"

"Which girl was that?" Randy asked in all innocence.

"The one climbing off that little cabin cruiser," Penny explained.

"You mean Anne?" Randy queried. "I tried that avenue a long time ago. Not a hope in hell there. She's in the darkroom as we speak."

It was true that Anne was still in the darkroom developing her photographs of the French dump-ship. The red light was still illuminated above the door and it was bolted from the inside. Nearly an hour had passed since she'd entered the room and even the captain knew she was going to be at least another two more. The crew may have been a small one but they originated from many different countries and cultures. The general seamen, who were currently competing in the Alderney beer barrel emptying handicap, were as diverse as the ship's officers and specialists. Anne, the only British officer in the crew, regularly took three hours to develop a single roll of film. At the same time the junior engineers were left to service the huge diesel engines by themselves while the chief engineer assisted her. It was an open secret that Anne and the chief engineer were a couple, but they hadn't declared it officially.

Vis Plaaggeest, the chief engineer, had been fairly open about her sexuality in the past. She was a Dutch tomboy in all-possible aspects of the term. She currently had her finger in the dyke and Anne was enjoying every moment of it. While the red light outside of the darkroom door glowed brightly, they had all the time in the world, or at

least until the tactical planning meeting scheduled for three hours hence. At that time Anne would have to use her tongue to orate the interpretation of her photographs instead of its current usage. Where some environmentalists depressed themselves over the state of the world, these two anarchists had the problem licked.

At the little airport on the far side of the island, the final member of the ship's team of specialists had just landed. Flying in via Jersey in a little yellow ten-seated aircraft which provided the island with its international link, Velocito Gondolo had returned from a visit to his parents back in Italy. He'd left the ship in Rotterdam with the intention of rejoining her in Alderney, which was one of the reasons for their presence there in the first place. As the designated small boat commander, his expertise was in using the small inflatable craft to harass any opposition. His years of driving a taxi in Venice had given him considerable experience in this field. Nobody was better than Velocito when it came to manoeuvring small boats in and out of a target area. The only problem he had was controlling his natural urge to con his passengers out of their money. Having such an international crew sometimes triggered his Venice taxi driver's instinct to profit from them, but he usually managed to control this urge, especially since the time he was asked to transfer the chief engineer to shore for spares. Vis had taken offence at his attempt to relieve her of her purse and a heavily tattooed arm had wrapped itself around his neck.

Velocito followed the nine other passengers across the tarmac towards the little terminal building with 'Welcome to Alderney' painted in large white letters across the roof's edge. Waiting in the shoebox arrival hall, it had taken thirty minutes for the airport staff to unload the ten suitcases from the small plane. The first twenty-five had been taken up with a coffee break, Gaelic style. At passport control his Italian papers were eyed with suspicion but eventually he was allowed to pass through into the reception area.

"Welcome back," Kia greeted. "I've got a taxi waiting out front. We should get back to the ship just in time for the planning session."

"Thanks for the opportunity to go home," Velocito replied. "Mamma was over the moon to see me and I even got to drive my old taxi. One day you'll have to come to Venice and meet Mamma."

Over the years Kia and Velocito had become very close friends. Once again the small size of the crew, together with a shared purpose and commitment, had instilled a sense of camaraderie into this little band of ecological-warriors.

"Enough reminiscing, you've only been away two weeks and we've got a new mission to accomplish. Anne's already castrated the nuclear plant's head of security after he stupidly tried to arrest her."

"I bet she enjoyed that. I can't say that I'm not concerned for my own manhood being around those two girls. Don't get me wrong, they're wonderful people but definitely a little bit unstable when it comes to men."

The two friends took the short taxi ride down from the airport, passed the old fort and the hospital and onto the dockside. Minutes later they were in the mess room of the Environmental Challenger and Karl was bringing the meeting to order.

The deck hands by this time had won their contest with the locals of the Rose & Crown. They were never included in the planning stage of any mission and on the whole they weren't really interested. They would much rather be drinking or coffee shopping than sitting around a table arguing about what was the best way to stop a nuclear dumping or how to save a whale from an exploding harpoon. Their job was to stand in front of the harpoons and underneath the barrels and how they were going to do this was explained to them after the bickering had already taken place. It was an amicable arrangement that suited all the parties concerned and even at the latter stage of informing the crew, they could raise any valid objections, but they rarely felt inclined to do so, or more accurately, were rarely sober enough to do so. On the whole they felt a lot better about sitting beneath one-ton barrels of nuclear waste if they were still inebriated. Only Velocito performed this trick completely sober but then he was a lunatic Italian taxi driver.

"How much did we win?" one of the sailors asked.

"Six hundred and fifty British pounds," the bosun replied. "It looks like we're going to have to drink it all lads."

"It's a pity Penny couldn't come with us," the youngest sailor commented to nobody in particular. "She's cooped up in that helicopter with Randy making a play for her all the time."

"I think you've got a soft spot for that thing, haven't you Paul?" the Bosun chided. "Ever since it wrapped its legs around you."

"I wish you'd stop calling her an it. It's not her fault she can't afford an operation..."

"It's not ours either," the Bosun cut in. "It's bad enough having two dykes onboard the ship, now we get a she-male as well." The Bosun's homophobia was well known by all onboard the ship and the girls themselves treated him with the contempt he deserved.

"She's also the closest thing to a girl we've got on the ship and with a little bit of help she could be extremely grateful to us."

"Are you suggesting that we pay for its operation?" the Bosun spat out. "We don't have that kind of money."

"We've got six hundred and fifty pounds, which is a good start. It shouldn't take us too long to raise the rest as we call into other ports. How much do you think an operation like that costs anyway?" Paul asked.

"I don't know and I don't care. We're not using this money to pay for its operation," the bosun declared.

The consensus of the crew had been different though. After a vote on the subject the Bosun found he was in a minority of one, as all the other sailors considered the possibility of having a grateful Penny, fully functional and willing to please. Their hormones were working overtime while their brains blanked out her present abnormalities. Any port in a storm, the saying goes and with the other two women off the market, (not even the Bosun relished crossing Vis openly), Penny could be their homeport.

"We have a slight problem," Anne started addressing her planning colleagues. "I've just developed the photographs of the dump-ship and it's worse than we suspected."

"In what way is it worse?" Karl asked. "We know it's the biggest ship they've used so far but we can still outrun them."

"It's not the size of the ship that's the problem," Anne continued. "It's the type of ship. Look at these photographs for a moment," she flipped on the light for the slide projector. "See this mounting at the back of the hold here," she pointed to a large post, which stopped above the level of the bridge structure but apart from that was nothing spectacular.

"It doesn't seem to have a function," Kia added.

"It doesn't now because the rest has been dismantled in an attempt to disguise the identity of this ship. I suspect it's been renamed to prevent us obtaining a history and I'm sure if we check it'll be listed as a loose cargo freighter. Hence the tiny crane on the bow here."

"If it's not a freighter, then what is it? From the looks of it it's a freighter now."

"Sure it's a freighter now but that post used to hold a massive crane and claw bucket. If you look closely at this picture of the hold you can just make out the top of an inverted V shaped arrangement. That gentlemen is the lever array for opening the hull doors."

"What hull doors?" it was Kia again asking the question this time.

"This ship is a converted dredger. It used to have a grab bucket crane that scooped silt from the shipping lanes and deposited it into the hold. To off-load this cargo out in the deep sea they just broke the hull in two and it dropped out of the bottom. When they get to their dumping ground they won't be dropping barrels over the side, they'll just push a button and good-bye cargo. We won't have a chance to stop them."

"This will make my boats useless," Velocito declared. "There's no way I can dodge barrels underwater."

"I understand why you say we've got a problem," Karl concluded. "Have you got any ideas how we can combat this new tactic of theirs?"

"Nothing specific Karl. The only way I can see around it so far is to prevent them getting into deep water. We've got to stop them leaving Cap de la Hague."

"Well it looks like we've got our work cut out this time. The enemy is getting awfully sneaky all of a sudden. How long do you think before they're ready to sail?"

"Judging from the stage of loading, I'd say they'd be leaving tomorrow. If they go with a full cargo that is."

"What you're saying is that if they decide to go with just 75% cargo, they could in fact leave anytime now."

"That's about the situation captain. My guess is that they'll fill her to the brim, but you never can tell, they're being extremely sneaky this time, you said so yourself."

Karl turned to his first mate but Kia had already anticipated his question. "The crew are just rolling down the road from town," he informed Karl.

"I'll go and get the diesel engine started," Vis said as she strode towards the mess-room door.

"It looks like this meeting is concluded," Karl surmised. "Battle stations everybody, we've got a French dump-ship to piss off."

In seconds the mess-room had cleared with the exception of Karl, Anne and Randy. "What are the chances of using your helicopter to slow them down?" Anne asked.

"And just how do you expect me to do that?" Randy replied. "Tie a rope onto her stern and pull them backwards?"

"There's no need to be facetious, I'm just trying to find some new ideas. I thought you might be able to hover in front of them and make them stop."

"Do you expect them to stop in case they scratch their paint-work or to pick up the wreckage?" Randy obviously wasn't in agreement with Anne's idea.

"There's got to be a way of keeping her in the port and we need to figure it out fast," Anne commented to nobody in particular.

She sat back down at the table, her head in her hands. She was the Tactical Planning Officer and everyone was expecting her to come up with the ideas but she couldn't think of anything.