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After a delightful breakfast of deep fried fish (better than the alternative anyway) Roy decided to explore the town. He had until the following morning before the supply ship arrived in port for its first visit of the year to Ice Station Zeedonk. The exploration had only taken a matter of hours, as it was only a very small town and he'd spent most of that time at the docks, checking that the supply ship was arriving on schedule. The harbour master had been very kind to Roy (similar to the sympathy you'd see given to a lost puppy) and had reassured him that he had nothing to fear. His ship was still arriving in the morning on schedule.

"Can you tell me where I can phone back to England from? I haven't seen any telephone boxes anywhere," Roy asked.

"That's because we don't have any. The only public phone on the entire island is at the post office. They should be open if you hurry. Lunch hour is from eleven until three."

Amazingly an hour can have many different interpretations. Lunch hour at a shop being anything from one hour to three, depending on the size of the town it's situated in. Even four hours sometimes on an isolated island. Happy hour in a pub was usually about three hours long and lunch hour in an office was only about thirty minutes. Silly of the author to think that an hour was sixty minutes or 1/24th of a day.

Roy gently strolled towards the post office to place his call. The size of the town made any journey possible in only a few minutes.

"Hello, I have a person to person call for a Sarah from a Mr Pratt in the Falklands," the telephone operator reported to The Daily Global switchboard.

"One moment, I'll see if she's available."

"It's not Pratt, it's King," Roy tried to explain with his usual success.

Sadie's voice replaced the operators on the other end of the line as Roy made a fruitless protest about his preferred name. "What's up Roy? Is everything going well down there?"

"I'm just reporting in like you told me too. The supply ship should be here on schedule tomorrow, then I'll be out of contact for two months or so."

"Good. Glad to hear you're OK?" Sadie replied. "I've got to go now. I've got a meeting with the editorial team. Call me when you get back to Stanley again. Bye."

Evidently even Sadie wasn't keen on talking to Roy for very long and once again he had the problem of passing the time in a one-horse town.

Time passed extremely slowly for the rest of the day but eventually nightfall arrived again and the resulting nocturnal activities with it. On this occasion though he'd been

offered a cut price deal by the proprietor, who'd taken a shine to his pathetic nature. The middle aged battleship, of obvious experience, had entered his room at 2am wearing only a thin negligee and nothing underneath.

Before Roy was completely awake she was lying beside him in the king size bed and she wasn't in the mood to take no for an answer. In all his thirty-five years Roy had never been approached by a female before, and being a coward of the first order, had never considered approaching them, for fear of rejection on the basis of his wimpish personality. Until this day the only sexual experience he'd ever had was with a pornographic magazine in the staff toilet and his overactive right hand. Lying beside a well-built and well-developed woman was making Roy extremely nervous and this agitated state had been instantly recognised by the expert beside him.

"Don't be nervous. I'm not going to hurt you," she reassured him. "Tell you what, I'm not even going to charge you either."

Roy was struck dumb, partly because of the shock of the situation and also because a certain part of her anatomy had manoeuvred itself into his mouth.

Her experience had shone through and by morning a satisfied, although exhausted, ex-virgin dragged himself out of the hotel and down to the port to meet his ship. Still on cloud nine from the experience of the previous night, Roy floated into the harbour master's office again.

"Good morning. Isn't it a beautiful morning today?" he commented.

"Have you been staying up at Karma's place, by any chance?" the harbour master replied.

"A wonderful woman of remarkable talent is Mrs Sutra," Roy replied in a dancing sort of voice.

"I can see you must have received her personal service. She always seems to pick the runts of the litter does Mrs Sutra."

Roy floated around the office for a few minutes longer before he finally remembered what he was there for. "Is my ship still expected on time? If not I could always stay in Stanley for a while longer," Roy asked hopefully.

"Sorry to disappoint you pal but it's just pulling into port right now."

Looking across the harbour, Roy could see an old hulk chugging towards the dock, rusting cranes towering over the cluttered deck and black smoke billowing out of its single stack. Suddenly coming down to earth with a massive thump, Roy's mouth dropped wide open.

"That rusted old heap is the supply ship?"

"That's the one. M.V. Bounty in all her glory. She's been coming into this port now for a good many years now."

"Are you sure you don't mean centuries?" asked a surprised Roy.

"No sir. Definitely only years. A fine old lady that one. They don't make them like that anymore. All fibreglass and aluminium nowadays, not good old solid steel like the Bounty?"

"It's very difficult to see any steel underneath all that rust," Roy observed.

"A little bit of rust don't do any harm. It's difficult keeping her painted when she's working all the time?"

"What's her crew like?" Roy asked, deciding to change the subject, as he didn't really want to discuss in depth the safety aspects of this old clunker.

"You'll get on well with the crew. You all have something in common."

"What's that?" asked a perplexed Roy.

"Mrs Sutra, what else."

At this point the ship in question had pulled alongside the dock and the harbourmaster had wandered off to greet the captain. Not only were they carrying supplies for the Antarctica bases but a selection of more personal items had been brought south from England.

Roy had followed the harbourmaster towards the ship, a little trepidation evident in his approach. This ship was nothing like he expected it to be. What he'd expected was something more like a cross channel ferry or a gleaming white yacht, not an old whaler converted into a freighter. The main reason it had been chosen for the task was because when originally designed as a South Atlantic whale hunter, it was equipped with a reinforced overhanging bow, to allow it to break through the ice floes common in these parts of the world.

The harbourmaster and the captain were deep in conversation as Roy approached the vessel.

"Hi, I think you're going to take me to Ice Station Zeedonk," Roy addressed the captain.

"Are you a Mr Pratt of the newspaper, Daily Global I think it's called?"

"Yes, but the name's King, not..." Roy started to explain.

"You've got a mutual friend," the harbourmaster cut in. "This is one of Karma's little projects no less."

"She always bounces from one extreme to the other. Last week it was the Royal Navy, this week it's runts," the captain replied turning to Roy, arm outstretched to shake hands. "I'm Captain Ross, your host for the next few days. I've put you in the first mate's cabin. He can bunk with the crew for a short while."

"When do we sail?" asked Roy, wondering when the feeling would return to his numb hand.

"We've just got to load the fresh meat onboard, then we'll probably be on our way," the captain replied.

Life aboard a loose freight ship wasn't as bad as Roy had expected. His first impressions of the ship had been far from flattering but although it didn't have any of the luxuries associated with passenger ferries; the basic facilities were at least adequate for the four-day journey. Captain Albert Ross had been true to his word and Roy was housed in the first mate's cabin. Spartan as it was, it was more than sufficient for his needs.

The planned departure had been delayed until the following morning but nobody seemed too concerned about it. The crew had spent the night at Mrs Sutra's hotel, while Roy and Mrs Sutra had the ship to themselves.

"What number did you get up to last night then?" Captain Ross asked Roy as they stood on the bridge of the Bounty as it chugged out of Stanley harbour.

"I don't understand," Roy admitted.

"You know, position number. Sex.... Oh forget it. I expect you're still on position number one."

"What's position number one?"

"It's when you lie on top and she lies underneath you," the captain tried to explain.

"Isn't it always like that then?"

"Not always, sometimes it's different."

"How different?" Roy was interested now.

"I'll let Karma explain that when you get back to Stanley. She's the expert on this subject." Captain Ross was trying to squirm out of the conversation as he'd ascertained Roy's level of knowledge. "What do you intend to do in Antarctica?" he asked in an attempt to change the subject.

"I'm researching the shrinking polar ice caps," Roy offered.

"Is that a major problem then?" the captain continued, obviously relieved to be off the subject of sex.

During the following days Roy had been given a guided tour of the ship and was introduced to all the crew. His liaison with Mrs Sutra had scored him a lot of points on the ship and although the crew still regarded him as a pillock, he was their pillock, and they'd taken a shine to his simple ways as well.

"Is that Antarctica?" Roy asked as they negotiated a narrow passage between the ice floes.

"It certainly is, and that little collection of huts in the distance is Ice Station Zeedonk, your new home for two months. Until we return again on our next supply run that is."

The captain slowly eased the Bounty against the wooden makeshift dockside. The inhabitants of the base had spent the last week reinforcing the slatted walkways that were laid across the ice floes, until they reached the floe nearest to the open sea. A collection of people had accumulated alongside the supply ship, eagerly awaiting the first fresh food of the year.

The rusted old crane was making light work of hauling sack after sack of produce onto the ice, which was then carried away by lots of eager hands and stored in the base warehouse. When it came to the last boxes and sacks being transferred to shore and the mail being hoisted onboard, Roy was on the deck with his backpack.

"Just out of curiosity, how do I get off this ship?" Roy asked. "I don't see a gangplank anywhere."

"It's easy, you just hold onto the cargo net and we hoist you over the side."

"No bloody chance, I don't want to die."

"It's the only way down. This is a freight ship. We don't have the luxuries of a cruise ship. It's the cargo net or nothing."

"What if I fall?"

"Just don't fall in the water."

"Why not?"

"If you land on the ice you'll only break a few bones, but if you fall in the water you'll be an icelolly in seconds. Remember what happens to brass monkeys in cold weather. We don't want to disappoint Mrs Sutra now do we."

Despite considerable coaxing the crew had found it impossible to get Roy to hold onto the cargo net. Eventually somebody had come up with an idea and, tied securely with a solid rope, Roy had been hauled inside the cargo net itself, onto the makeshift dock.

The Bounty left as fast as she had come and Roy was guided to the collection of huts, while the remainder of the men pulled the slat board walkways back within the camp's perimeter.

"Hello, I'm the base commander here, Scott Accold. You can call me Scott if you like, we're pretty informal around here."

"Hi Scott. I'm Roy. You should have been expecting me. My newspaper arranged with your office in London for me to stay with you for two months."

"I don't know anything about that. We haven't had a radio transmitter since last autumn, but I don't dispute what you say. Captain Ross told me all about you."

"You mean he told you everything?"

"Everything. We have no secrets down here. It's a small community."

During the conversation Scott had made a cup of tea with the supplies they'd just received. "I've been looking forward to a nice cup of tea for weeks now. Ever since that stupid cow thought the tealeaves were a garnish and sprinkled them in the pasta. Do you take sugar?"

"No sugar for me thank you," Roy replied. "What silly old cow are you talking about. I didn't know you had any women on this base."

A smile had crept across Roy's face. He was like a kid with a new toy and he wanted to play with it all the time.

"We don't have any women on the base anymore," Scott declared. "Not since the last one pissed off into the wilderness. Always whining about the poor conditions here and having to do manual labour. To top it all, her cooking was absolutely diabolical."

"When you say she went off into the wilderness, who do you actually mean?" Roy enquired.

"Queen Eleanor she called herself. Dropped off by her royal yacht as the winter set in, and if she cooked for the King like she cooked for us, it's not bloody surprising he got rid of her. She couldn't even make a cup of tea properly. We were supposed to get a cook for the winter but she cancelled, then old Queenie offered to take the job as she happened to be marooned here. How were we to know she was a disaster in the kitchen."

"You're saying, the Queen of England was here all winter and not washed overboard in the South Atlantic as the British public thought?"

"Of course she was here, that's why we haven't had a cup of tea for the last month. I'm sure I've already told you that."

"Yes, yes, you just did," Roy replied. "But I'm having some difficulty comprehending what happened here."

"If you'd had to eat that stupid cow's cooking you wouldn't have difficulty comprehending anything."

"OK I think we've covered that more than once," Roy replied. "Tell me, where did she go?"

"As soon as the weather broke last week, she told us that she was fed up with our complaints about her inadequacies and that she wanted to go off and live on her own. Can't say enough how glad we all were to hear it. We even sacrificed a whole dog

sled and our best team, fully equipped with supplies as well. That's how much we liked the idea of getting rid of her."

"And do you know where she went?" Roy continued.

"Sure we do. Headed for the mountains to find a nice cosy little cave she did. Whether she made it that far is debatable though."

Roy was shocked by this revelation as everybody in England had been led to believe that the Queen had perished after being swept overboard by a freak wave in the South Atlantic. Her husband, now the self appointed King Richard (Dick) IV was supposedly devastated by the news. Now Roy wasn't so sure, but unfortunately the Queen was no longer available to answer his questions and Scott Accold seemed to be only interested in the increased quality of the cuisine since her absence.

The occupants of Ice Station Zeedonk had made Roy feel very welcome and he'd collected all the data he needed for his report on the shrinking polar ice caps. A nagging question still remained in his mind about why the Queen was in Antarctica and not drowned as had been officially reported. But she hadn't returned to the base, which meant he hadn't been able to question her.