

4

Captain Ross and the M.V. Bounty had slowly negotiated their way back towards the open sea, totally oblivious to the Queen's presence on the ice. As they sailed between the ice floes and the Antarctic Peninsula the sun gleamed iridescent blue off the cool pack ice.

"That's strange, I've never seen that before," one crewmember remarked.

"What haven't you seen before?" another asked.

"Well the light usually glows blue off the ice but for some reason it's yellow now."

"Let me see," a third crewmember picked up the binoculars. "Hey, there are yellow nuggets scattered all over the ground out there."

Interest was rapidly growing amongst the crew of the Bounty and the binoculars were being passed from hand to hand, as each member of the crew looked at the multitude of yellow nuggets littering the landscape.

"It looks like gold, that's what it looks like," one exclaimed. "What's more they're bloody huge nuggets as well."

"I'd always heard that Antarctica was rich in minerals but I didn't realise it was this good. It's no wonder the government won't let anybody but scientists down here. They are probably secretly collecting all the gold and hoarding it for themselves."

"We ought to get our share while we're here. The amount of time we've spent in this inhospitable part of the world, we deserve it more than the government does."

"Hear, hear," chorused the reply.

Captain Ross had noticed the collection of sailors on the deck and had decided to investigate. It wasn't immediately evident what the subject of their curiosity was but he soon asked.

"There are gold nuggets scattered all over the ice. We've decided to get our share as the government appear to be hoarding it for themselves," replied an outspoken deckhand.

"Oh, you've decided this have you? Since when did I stop being the captain of this ship?"

"Don't worry, we'll bring you back your share. We understand that someone has to stay with the ship."

"That's nice of you but I'm still the captain of this ship and I decide where we go, not some democratically elected crew committee." The captain was starting to lose his cool. "This ship stays on course for England!"

"We don't agree. We're collecting some gold before we go," the outspoken crewmember repeated.

"This is mutiny!" the captain exclaimed.

"Call it what you like but we're not losing our chance to be millionaires. We deserve it."

Suddenly Captain Ross was left standing in the middle of the deck, while his crew took over the bridge. Minutes later the ship was turned about and heading towards the pack ice of the mainland.

"You don't even know if the channel's deep enough to get alongside the pack ice," the captain argued. "You could sink us all, and in waters of this temperature we'd have no chance of survival."

"Well worth the risk for a fortune in gold," the self appointed leader replied. A normally rational crew had lost all sense of safety under a golden spell.

"I'm with you captain," the first mate was by his side on the deck.

"Thank you. I was beginning to think I was the only sane member of this crew left."

"I'm just as keen as you not to be an Antarctic equivalent of the Titanic. That iceberg their steering us towards will sure as hell sink us."

"We need to regain control of the ship again and fast, if we don't want to feed the fish that is," the captain stated. "Mutiny on the high seas is a criminal offence. We're empowered under maritime law to arrest the crew. Are there any firearms on this ship?"

"No firearms as such but I suppose we could use the flare guns, I know for one I'd shit myself if someone pointed one at me," the first mate replied.

"If that's all we've got, it'll have to do. Let's get moving, we haven't got much time left."

On the bridge the crew were discussing their long-term plans as millionaires, as in their minds they were already counting their fortunes, before getting their hands on the gold.

"What are you going to do with your fortune when we get home then?" the first man asked.

"You can drop me off in the Canary Island as we pass. The last thing I intend to do is go home with a fortune in gold. The missus will be off to the shops with the bloody

lot before I know it. No, a villa in the sun and you lot keeping your gobs shut about where I am. That will suit me fine."

"I'm going to buy myself a Lamborghini and a mansion in the country, just for starters. Then I might consider buying a seat on the board at my local football club. I always thought they needed a good kick up the arse and now I can buy myself into a position to do just that."

"Sorry to disappoint you chaps but you're under arrest for mutiny." The captain and first mate had appeared in each of the bridge doorways, both brandishing two flare guns apiece.

"And what do you intend to do with those? Signal for the cavalry," one of the mutineers commented.

"I don't know about you but I for one wouldn't want a burning flare embedded into my chest. Could be rather an exceedingly painful way to die."

"How about if we increase your share of the gold? You could retire on that much money."

"Not much good if I'm not alive to spend it. Have you considered the likelihood of us sinking if we hit an iceberg trying to reach the shore. Now get down below with the rest of the crew."

"Where are you putting us?"

"In the hold with enough supplies to last for the journey home. The police can deal with you when we get to Stanley."

Captain Ross and the first mate escorted the two ringleaders down the steps to the hold and locked all the doors tight. Leaving the first mate to check on the security the captain had returned to the bridge and safely manoeuvred the ship back into the deep channel again. After a short while the first mate joined him back on the bridge, just as the ship was leaving the frozen wastes of Antarctica behind them.

"That was a close one," the first mate commented. "How are we going to manage the journey home without a crew?"

"Half the crew only operate the cranes and clean the decks anyway. We can do without them. We'll just have to hope the engine doesn't play up and we'll be fine?"

"What about watches. How are we going to organise them?"

"We'll split the night watch in half and during the day, one of us can check the engines and sort out the galley, while the other's on the bridge. The crew have sufficient supplies to stay put for the entire journey and I for one don't want to risk opening the doors to the hold again, not until we have the police onboard in Stanley." Captain Ross had considerable experience at sea and could sail the ship blindfolded.

"And what's more, don't keep waving those bloody flare guns around. The crew are under lock and key, so put them away."

"Sorry captain. It's not often that you get a chance to play the sheriff of Dodgem City."

In Port Stanley the Governor Sir William (Willie) Ovine was in conference with his Chief of Police and the Commander of the Military forces in the dependency.

"We're all here to decide what to do about the mutiny on the Bounty. From the information we've received from the captain, he's arrested all but his first mate after they took over the ship by force. When do we expect them to make port, harbourmaster?"

"From his last message, he expects to make port by midday tomorrow. He's requesting to be met at the docks by the police and an ambulance."

"Why the need for an ambulance? I was led to believe the mutineers had all been captured without any violence."

"The first mate apparently suffered third degree burns to his penis when he put a flare gun down his trousers and it accidentally went off." Every man at the table could be seen to grimace as they subconsciously imagined what it felt like.

Undercover cops and cowboys stuffed guns into the waistband of their trousers on a Hollywood movie all the time but in real life there were inherent risks in this course of action. The first mate of the Bounty had found this out the hard way when he'd holstered his flare gun in the manner he'd observed on all the videos he'd seen over the years.

"How is he now?" the Governor enquired.

"Captain Ross informs me that he's comfortable in his cabin, but it sounds like he might need airlifting back to England for plastic surgery."

"Well, that's hardly surprising," the Army Colonel, commented. "I can have a burns unit from the base on standby at King Edward hospital here in town if you want."

"You'd better liase with the Chief Medical Officer at the hospital about that. My prime concern at the moment is what we're going to do about the crew."

"The cells at the police station aren't sufficient to house them for more than a short while and we haven't got a prison. We've never needed one before," the police chief explained. "I think we need to hold a trial as soon as they dock and ship them back as well."

The law enforcement services in the Falklands rarely had to deal with more than the occasional bar brawl and the usual drunks. Mutiny was a totally new subject and the Governor had to get his law books out to review the legality of arresting these men.

"Are you sure we can legally arrest them?" the police chief asked, obviously having the same reservations.

"I looked that up in the law books and the main question is what country the Bounty is registered in. Harbourmaster, what have you got to offer on that one?"

"She flies the red ensign of the British Merchant Navy governor."

"That's what I thought. In that case she falls under our jurisdiction and mutiny by one or more members of the crew on a British ship is a criminal offence, punishable in a British court of law. I think we should place these men under arrest and fly them as soon as possible to London. This matter is far too complex for us to deal with down here."

"That's fine with me," the police chief agreed. "I can do without twenty sailors cluttering up my cells."

"What about transport, can the military arrange a special flight under the circumstances?"

"I'll check with Brize Norton but I don't envisage any problem with it," the colonel replied.

"Right, this meeting is concluded. Report back to me when all the arrangements have been made."

The next morning Captain Ross sailed the Bounty into Stanley harbour and was met by a squad of three regular and thirty special constables, an ambulance and military burns team. Also present were the military police and a local newspaper reporter, who's biggest story until now had been Mrs Sutra's cat being stuck up a tree (He'd missed the war with Argentina as he'd gone for a holiday to Wales the day before).

The Governor watched the small band of mutineers being escorted from the ship into a waiting police van. Being a politician he'd decide to watch from the safe distance of three floors up in the air, in a hotel room. Mrs Sutra was standing beside him, a touch of concern in her voice.

"Did they mutiny before or after they got to Antarctica?" she asked.

"From what we know so far, it was on the way back, after they'd unloaded all their supplies. Why?"

"Oh, no reason. I just wondered if that little reporter got caught up in it, that's all."

"No, he should be comfortable at Ice Station Zedonk at the moment."

While the police van transported the subdued mutineers to the local police station, for booking prior to being flown off the island, the burns team were in the first mate's cabin examining his penis.

"He's lost a lot of blood nurse, start a transfusion of 'O' negative, one unit stat," the doctor ordered.

"Can I start a morphine infusion doctor?" another nurse asked and received a confirmation.

"I think we need to get a supra pubic catheter in. He's been trying to kill the pain with brandy and the swelling in his penis is stopping him from peeing, his bladder's fit to burst," the doctor announced.

The first nurse had stuck a needle into one arm for a blood transfusion and the second had started a morphine infusion for the pain on the other. The doctor meanwhile was busy cutting a hole in the first mate's lower abdomen and inserted a large plastic tube directly into his bladder. As gallons of urine gushed out into a bag, relief was evident on the first mate's face. He hadn't considered the fact that all the brandy he'd drunk as a painkiller would need to come out again and the exit route was the part of him that was badly burnt.

With a temporary dressing in-situ he was transferred directly by ambulance to the airport and into the air, heading for a specialist burns centre at the Oxford Radcliffe hospital. In the neighbouring cabin, the crew of the Bounty were each handcuffed to a police special constable and more than worried about their forthcoming prospects also. At R.A.F. Brize Norton the two parties went their separate ways. The first mate towards months of skin grafting, to rebuild his mutilated penis and the mutineers towards the old bailey and criminal charges.