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At the 'Old Bailey' (officially know as the Central Criminal Court) all twenty of the mutineers had attracted considerable interest from the press. A charge of mutiny hadn't been heard in a British court for a considerable length of time. The novelty factor was high and most of the public interest was centred around what sentence the judge would give in the late 20th century, for a charge of this kind. In the eyes of the press and consequently the general public also, they were already guilty by virtue of the fact that they'd been arrested and charged.

Innocent until proven guilty was only a theoretical consideration in the eyes of the general public. The general consensus being that there wasn't any smoke without fire, so an accused person must be guilty of something. If a wrongly accused person just happened to be exonerated in a court of law, the usual gossip around town was that they'd just been sneaky enough to get away with it or rich enough to afford a devious solicitor. Innocence never became an option.

"Order please. All rise for His Honour Judge Lyncher QC!" the court clerk shouted.

In fear of being charged with contempt of court, rather than in deference to his social status, the whole courtroom stood up as instructed.

At the front of the courtroom, a door slowly opened and a withered old man slowly hobbled through using a walking frame. He slowly made his way from the door to his seat behind the ornately panelled bench. Dressed in his traditional red gown and curly blond wig, he looked like a beardless Santa Claus, who was ready for the knackers-yard.

"You may all be seated," the Clerk of the Court called and everybody sat down again, after what seemed like an eternity.

One by one the twenty men were led into the dock until they were all lined up in a row, like coconuts at the fair.

"Your honour, all twenty men have been charged with mutiny on a British ship," the clerk continued.

"Charged with mutilation of a bosun's dick. Sounds like a nasty business. I take it the man in the wheelchair, with his legs spread-eagled and the massive bandage between them, is the victim." Judge Lyncher indicated towards the first mate, who'd been called as the primary witness for the prosecution.

"No your honour. Mutiny, not mutilation," the clerk corrected.

"Sorry, what was that again," the judge replied while banging his hearing aid against the bench.

"Can you here me now your honour!!!" the clerk shouted as loud as he could.

"Of course I can hear you, there's no need to shout. Now lets get on with the trial. These ten men mutilated that man's penis. How do you plead?"

"No your honour, the case is nothing to do with penises. They're accused of mutiny on a British ship and there are twenty of them actually."

While Judge Lyncher cleaned his super thick bifocals on his red cloak, the clerk of the court pondered the question of how he'd come to draw the short straw for the day. At the start of every shift at the Old Bailey, the clerks ran a lottery to decide which two thirds of them were allocated the dodderly old farts. The ones who wouldn't accept retirement under any circumstances and just carried on in their jobs until they finally died.

For this particular clerk of the court he'd drawn the shortest straw of all and had landed himself with Judge Lyncher.

"Twenty you say," he put his glasses back on. "Oh yes, they must have been hiding behind one another. If you do that again I'll hold you in contempt of court. Now do you plead guilty or not guilty to mutilating this man's penis?" the judge continued.

"Your honour. The man with the bandages accidentally mutilated his own penis with a flare gun. These men are charged with mutiny," the clerk reminded Judge Lyncher once again.

"Why on earth would he mutilate his own penis with a flare gun. He doesn't sound quite right in the head to me," the judge whispered back.

"It was apparently an accident. It just went off after he shoved it down his trousers."

"Ruddy stupid thing to do with a flare gun, I must say."

"I totally agree with you, your honour, but it still remains a charge of mutiny, not mutilation."

"Right then, you've all been charged with mutiny..." Judge Lyncher looked at the clerk and received the expected nod. "Do you plead guilty or not guilty?"

"All the defendants plead guilty your honour, but they would like some mitigating circumstances to be taken into consideration." The defence barrister had stood up to address the bench.

Judge Lyncher beckoned to the clerk again, "With this new one, does that make twenty-one now?"

"No your honour. The one answering you is the defence barrister."

"I wish he'd say so when he starts. How else is one supposed to know?"

"For future reference your honour, the people wearing white curly wigs are the staff."

"Right, white curly wigs. I'll remember that."

Contending with an ageing judiciary had become a growing problem for the British legal system. As pension rights had been slashed on a cost cutting exercise, most high court judges had claimed their right to lifetime appointments and had steadfastly refused to be forcibly retired. The situation had therefore deteriorated considerably over recent years, to a point that many judges were now suffering from senile dementia and Alzheimers disease, not to mention two certified schizophrenics and one active judge on a life support machine in Guy's Hospital.

Judge Lyncher came under the medical classification of Severe Senile Dementia and if it wasn't for the patience, dedication and professionalism of the court clerks, the whole legal system in Britain would have collapsed years before.

"Where did we get to?" Judge Lyncher's mind had wandered off again. "It was guilty to something or other."

"Guilty to mutiny on the 'Bounty?" the clerk reminded him.

"Don't be daft, even I know the mutiny on the bounty ended last century. The mutineers pioneered a colony on Pitcairn Island in the South Pacific and Captain Bligh landed in his lifeboat at Timor. Nothing wrong with my memory," Judge Lyncher declared. As a symptom of his senile dementia, although his long term memory was fully intact, he was oblivious to the fact that his short term memory was only just about ticking over.

"Not that Bounty your honour. MV Bounty, the Antarctic supply ship commanded by Captain Albert Ross."

"They let albatrosses command Antarctic supply ships. I know the birds have a great sense of direction and in nautical mythology they're revered but it must be hell training them to run a ship."

"Why me," the clerk sighed to nobody in particular then turned to the judge again. "Captain ... Albert ... Ross. Not albatross," he said, emphasizing the gap between the two names.

"Who's this Captain Ross anyway?" asked the judge.

"I am, your honour," Captain Ross announced from the witness bench as he stood up.

"He's not wearing a white curly wig," Judge Lyncher whispered to the clerk.

"No your honour, he's a witness for the prosecution."

"Not a defendant then?"

"No sir, he's on the other side."

"If he's dressed the same as the defendants how can you tell the difference then?"

"A good rule of thumb is to assume the defendants are the ones in the dock, your honour."

"There's no dock around here. We're miles from the sea."

"The dock is that wooden platform with the spikes on top of it. The one situated at the back of the room."

"Got that now, the one with the penis mutilators in it. Must be bloody painful for that poor guy. I got mine stuck in the zip of my trousers once and the doctor had to break the zip apart to get it out. Excruciatingly painful, I can tell you. Always been extra careful since then you know."

Once again the short term memory had completely collapsed allowing the long term memory to rush in and fill the void.

This kind of discussion went on for the next few hours and a trial that could have taken minutes had so far lasted all day. Eventually the subject of the guilty plea had been resolved. Judge Lyncher had then called a thirty-minute recess and hobbled out of the court into his chambers.

"Can you pass me that jug over there," he asked his hard pressed clerk of the court and with the jug in his left hand he creakily stooped over and rolled up his trouser leg, exposing a small opaque plastic bag full of urine. "Ruddy prostate. Means I've got to have this tube permanently inserted up my penis." The clerk just listened; he'd heard it all before. "At least I don't pee myself before I get to the toilet anymore. Ruddy embarrassing that was."

"I can imagine, your honour," the clerk empathized. It was obvious now where the psychological fixation on penises had come from.

"No you ruddy well can't, you're too young to know. Wait until you're my age, then you'll understand what arthritis and incontinence really means. Now take this jug to the toilet and empty it for me, I'm going back to the court."

Back in the courtroom the defence barrister was waiting eagerly to present his mitigating circumstances, while the press were sitting in the public gallery with their notebooks at the ready. Nothing worth printing had happened yet, a senile judge was nothing new and that subject had been well covered in previous editions.

The courtroom stood for their customary ten minutes, while Judge Lyncher made his way back to his seat and reopened the proceedings. "Right where were we up to?" he asked the clerk.

"Mitigating circumstances, your honour. The defence barrister."

"I understand the defence wishes to present some mitigating circumstances for the hideous crime that these men have committed," he addressed the defence.

He hadn't actually mentioned penises but the clerk had a suspicion with the mentioning of the word 'hideous', that his mind had wandered back to the opening charge. If he was lucky the defence barrister would start presenting his argument, before they needed to revert to convincing the judge that the charge was mutiny again.

On this occasion, luck was with the clerk, as the defence barrister started speaking. "Your honour. As council for the defence, I would like to present a case for leniency in this matter. My clients fully accept that they acted in breach of maritime law but were driven by a natural lust for gold..." He went on to explain about the vast number of gold nuggets that were strewn across the Antarctic landscape, free for the picking. He argued that any sane man would have acted the same way under the circumstances.

In the public gallery the press had found the story they were looking for and furiously scribbled on their notepads, obviously eager to get to a telephone to catch their deadlines, but hung on just in case something else happened when the judge came to sentencing the twenty defendants.

"I've never heard a more pathetic excuse for a crime of this magnitude. Your actions have resulted in not only the psychological trauma to two officers of a British ship but to the unthinkable physical trauma of a fine man." Nobody was really sure still if Judge Lyncher was sentencing for a charge of mutiny or mutilation. "Your crime warrants a severe penalty. You will each go to prison for five years. You will go directly to prison, do not pass go, do not collect two hundreds gold nuggets. Court adjourned, take them away."

"All stand!" the clerk called as Judge Lyncher slowly made his way out of the court.

In the public gallery the press were tapping their feet, waiting for the judge to finish leaving the room so they could race to the only available pay phone in the hallway. Most had mobile phones with them but it was a requirement that they couldn't be used within the Old Bailey itself. It would have necessitated traipsing the entire length of the building and into the street outside before they could switch them on without being arrested.

That night the television news reported the outcome of the court case and the following morning the tabloid press printed a full transcript of the mitigating circumstances presented by the defence barrister. Most of the newspapers had even obtained a globe, to ascertain exactly where Antarctica was on the map and had pinpointed the exact point of the incident on their centre pages. Even the Financial Times had jumped on the band wagon with an article on the effect on the gold price such a revelation could mean.

As the British population were tuning in to the news at ten report on their activities, the twenty mutineers were being processed in the reception department of Wormwood Scrubs prison. After standing in front of a desk, while a prison officer asked them questions about their name, religion and other related personal details, the charge was once again explained and then they'd been instructed to move into the strip search area.

Following being stripped naked and searched thoroughly from head to toe, they were handed a towel barely large enough to cover their vitals and sent into the shower come delousing room.

The authorities had successfully ensured that no more lice could supplement the existing louse population of the prison, so the prisoners were then handed their regulation blue denim jacket and trousers, together with some blue and white striped shirts and a selection of scratchy underwear. The shoes pinched their feet badly, the clothes were way too small and everything smelt of mothballs. Luckily the prison service had discontinued shaving prisoners heads many years beforehand, so they were at least saved that indignity.

After a wholesome meal of porridge (they still served it) followed by thick vegetable soup, they were finally led to their last indignity before meeting with the prison population. In the medical room, the doctor was discussing the finer points of anal examinations with his pokerfaced nurse as the first mutineer was led into the room.

"Any medical problems?" the doctor asked.

"Well I've got this rash..."

"Taking any medication at the moment?"

"Not at the moment, but this rash..."

"Any operation in the past?"

"Only my appendix but at the moment..."

"What year?"

"I can't remember exactly but I'd like you to look at..."

"Any admissions to psychiatric hospitals?"

"No, I've never been in one of them."

"OK off you go. Send in the next one."

The same production line medicine was given to the remaining nineteen mutineers and ten minutes later, they were all taken to their cells on the reception landing for their first night in prison.

"I think we're in deep shit this time and it's going to get a lot deeper yet," one of them said.

"What do you mean? The judge gave us five bloody year. How much deeper can we get than that?" his cellmate replied.

They'd been divided into pairs and housed in different cells, two bunks to each one and not much room for anything else. The prison accommodation was particularly spartan and it didn't allow for much personal choice in decor.

"When we were in the reception, I overheard one of the screws commenting about us going to be in demand, owing to the fact that we're sailors. It doesn't take a genius to work out what he must have meant by that."

"What annoys me more is all that gold lying around on the ice and we're stuck behind bars for the next five years. If the bloody judge hadn't gaoled us we could have got a little boat of our own and gone back down to Antarctica to collect it."

These new inmates had slipped into the usual prison routine of fantasizing about lost opportunities for wealth and the commonplace 'if only' syndrome.

All twenty had had a restless night, partly due to the lumpy bedding and partly due to the gossip on the reception landing of the prison. It was only a matter of hours now before they were thrown to the wolves, or more accurately the sex starved occupants of 'C' wing.