**A Well Frosted Sea**

A gentle sea breeze wafts through the hanging tangled frayed rope. A subtle crash of waves connects to the hull of a creaking aching old ship. A man dressed in slick black leathery coveralls topped by a stained yellow hat. He thrashes a net over the port side of the boat and reals in a long rusty chain attaching it to a weary winch. With his net cast he strokes his long coarse beard with his weathered battered hands wrinkles folding over his sun spotted gruff face. Taking a few steps, he makes his way over to a humble wooden bench taking a load off with a big huff.

Relaxed he sits peering into the deep blue sky above him spattered with lonely clouds. However, a loud bellowing sound rocks the boat breaking the silence of the cool waves. Startled the man jumps up and looks over his shoulder finding a pristine fishing boat teaming with fresh Cod. Seeing this the man puts on a menacing frown spiting its mere existence. Clearly upset the man screams:

“Those fools! Going further out every year to catch fish that are right under our feet! Have been for Generations now! I’ll out due those fishermen with my tried and true spot!”

In that moment the man tore open his fishing net to examine his fish. To his dismay only a couple small fish bounced about his net with most of the empty space being filled trash. Fuming the man sat in silence as the waves continued to strike his vessel. Although just as he began to settle himself his line began to vibrate jostling the winch creating all manor of loud screeching veering sounds. In a panic the man stood up and began to start pulling the line. Slowly but surly the line began to raise up. Breaching the surface of the water comes a huge haul of fresh cod clamoring to escape. With a loud yell the man jumped up rejoicing at his fortune yelling:

“Haha! I knew that I could show those land blasting fools what real fishing is like!”

However, as the line began to reach its final stretch a loud echoing creak could be heard roaring from the boat. SNAAAAAPPP!!! The line tore loose running the chain through the winch creating a large crash sheering the winch of its hinge. Distraught the man rushed over to the side of the boat as he watched his fish slowly sink into the depths below. Fuming the man clenched his fists and slammed them along the side of the boat. Slowly making his way to the captain’s quarters to head back to shore.

With a pattering boat the fisherman arrives at the port. He latches the boat to the dock and then begins to assess the damage. Peering up at the boat the man notices the damage in all of its glory. A huge streak lashes the side of the boat with a hole where the winch used to reside. With a scoff the man begins to set the rest of the lose rope handing his pitiful fish haul to a dock hand. After a long silence a man cheers out from across the dock with a huge grimacing smile:

“How’s the haul Tom!? I hope it’s enough to make your late payments for the month.”

Spiders crawling up his spine Tom stands straight up at attention and slowly turns around to face the menacing screech that greeted him. Now within yards a man cloaked in a pleated pinstripe suit with slicked back black hair approaches Tom now adjusting his stance. With a twitch of his neck the plastic man exclaims:

“Tom how wonderful it is to see you! I was just coming by to check on your haul. You do know that today is the final day on your late payments, don’t you?”

Tugging his coverall straps Tom replies: “Well you know how things are sometimes life just happens.”

With a creak in his neck the man’s grimace slowly twitches mixing his expression into a frown. Craning his neck, the man notices the damage on the ship.

“Well whether or not you know it that ship is mine now. It is what you put up for collateral after all. Even says so on your contract if you’d like to take a look.”

With his scrawny hands the loan shark hands Tom his loan contract as two large burly men come up from behind Tom. Reluctantly Tom reaches out and grabs the contract. With one swift move he tears it in half. In a fit of rage he begins to step forward toward the shark one hand grasping the contract and the other pointing at the shark right between the eyes. As he takes his final step he is jerked back by the two large armed guards behind him. Squirming Tom yells out:

“You’ll never get my boat you scoundrel! You need to take your scrawny jelly legs and get out of here!”

“If anyone will be leaving Tom it’ll be you.”

As Tom gets torn away from his boat all he can see is the deafening scramble of workers pealing over every surface of the boat to find anything of value. With a smirk the loan shark turns around and watches as Tom’s boat is slowly torn to pieces. Now at the entrance to the dock the two men hurl Tom smearing his face into the mud.

Hurt and defeated Tom stands up trying to wipe off as much mud as he could. Stumbling along he comes across a worn tattered phone booth. Reaching into his jacket he pulled out the last of the money he had to enter in a number. Slowly punching number by number using the cold metal buttons he finally reached the other end of the line. On the other end is old friend John. After Tom explains what had happened he hangs up the phone, jumps in his car and heads over to John’s house.

“Tom it’s just awful to think that something like that could happen to you.”

“What happened? I thought your secret fishing spot has never let you down?”

Snarling his face Tom looked down at the floor gripping his knees in anguish and replied:

“Well old salty just broke! I had the line and was reeling in a big haul! But then out of the middle of nowhere the line just snapped. Tore a hole in my boat as well… Then that mangey loan shark came and took it all away from me!”

Struggling to hold onto his squiring child John pulled him up to meet his patchy black haired loosely shaven face. As he looked at Tom the child yanked John’s messy hair and clutched to his displaced pajamas. In a lapse of focus John turned to face Tom still eyeing the shag carpet. Adjusting his grip and stepping closer john reached out his hand.

“You have still have your home and car don’t you?” John said with a smile.

“Even though fishing is your thing this might be a good chance to branch out to other avenues. For instance, my wife just opened a new cupcake store downtown.”

With a sneer Tom looked up and raised his voice slightly.

“If I’m not fishing I might as well be dead. All I need now is some money to get my boat back to build some capital and be stable again financially.” He replied.

“Tom this is hard for me to say but I can’t offer you any money right now… Between this little guy joining our team, Holly going to elementary school, and my wife opening her business we have had it rough enough ourselves. I can only offer you a position at my Rebecca’s new store if you’d be so willing.”

A cold silence filled the as the two looked at each other. After a moment Tom stood up with a grumble in his throat and headed for the door. Sadly, thumping his big boots along the carpet, he finally reached the door and paused. Grasping the handle, he looked back to John with a sulking face.

“Alright I’ll do it…But only because I need to get my boat back… If I don’t I might not have any place to live soon.”

A day later Tom arrives at the “Cake n’ Bake” a lovely modern pink bakery accented with white and all manner of cupcake paraphernalia. Waiting at the front door is Rebecca a slender red-haired woman tending to the front door as she prepares to open. Turning around she notices Tom approaching with a pungent green air about him. With a smile and bubbly attitude, she greets him.

“AH! You must be Tom. John has said so much about you. I’m sorry to hear about your boat.”

With a grumble and a sigh Tom replies: “I’m sorry about it too but it won’t change anything…”

Not to be deterred Rebecca smiles. “No use thinking about the past! First and foremost I’d like to welcome you to the family of the Cake n’ Bake. Our motto is ‘We will make every experience as bubbly as possible right down to the frosting’. Oh and before I forget let me give you your uniform as well. You’ll be starting with the counter while me and the chef bake our specials in the back.”

Turning completely around she unlocks the door and heads behind the counter. Tom reluctantly follows suit. From out beneath the counter Rebecca pops up and hands Tom a pink and white striped outfit complete with an apron and hat. Giving it a moment Tom puts the uniform on over his fishing attire as he nudges his way toward the counter.

“I’ll trust that you read the employee handbook that John gave to you. If you have any questions I will be in the back.”

In that moment as Tom was still struggling to get the uniform to sit right a young woman entered the store. Dressed in a beautiful gold and blue floral dress with short blond hair the petite woman approached the counter. Putting her finger to her lips she perused the assortment of ten or so cupcakes on display. With a cold frown and a furrowed brow Tom turns to her and greets her in a gruff voice.

“Looks like the weather is going to lead to rough seas today.”

Confused the woman looks up at Tom and giggles. Giving the counter one last run down she stands to meet Tom eye to eye. Clasping her hands behind her back and leaning in toward Tom she slightly tilts her head to let her hair run down her face. Kicking her heals she takes a deep breath and puts on a smile.

“I think the weather has been quite wonderful. It is what allowed me to come out here and meet you after all. I think for today I’ll get a box with one of each. You never know who you might be sharing them with.”

Pausing Tom’s macho fisherman gaze slowly turned into a confused delight. With one swift move he grabbed a box from the shelf labeled sampler and placed it on the counter. Without a word he starred at the woman as she gleamed back at him punching in her pin number. With a pleased jolt she gabbed the box as she slowly made her way out the door taking extra care to waft her dress’s frills. Turning around for one last look she smiled and walked out the door leaving the bell’s chime to fill the empty air. Scratching his face and slowly growing a smile himself, Tom began to lean on the counter in a haze. For the rest of his shift he couldn’t resist smiling to himself in the empty store.

Sun peaking the horizon Tom rolls into the parking lot fully dressed in his fisherman gear and cupcake costume. Glinting slightly Tom Makes his way to the front of the counter to start another day in hopes that he will see that woman once more. However, just as he settles in he can hear Rebecca rounding the corner.

“Oh, Tom your early. It’s nice to see you get up for cupcakes and not fish. Maybe something is changing for you?”

“I’ll still get up for fish, but I am here and ready to work just as hard as I would on my boat for my boat.”

“That’s great to hear! Sadly though if things are as slow as they were yesterday all that spirit might go to waste. However, fortune is in our favor! Just last night after we closed I received a booking for a party venue asking for you specifically to hand out cupcakes at the event. It’s lucky you’re here early because now you can go and get setup before the party starts.”

Before he knew it Tom was standing behind a rickety plastic table with a broken nervous smile streaming his face. He watched as one by one different guests arrived at the little suburban home. Frozen solid he nodded to guests forcing out a light hello through a slimy creepy smile. After it seemed like all the guests have arrived he began preparing serving trays with all manner of lightly colored fluffy cupcakes.

As he was finishing he noticed out of the corner of his eye a familiar face. It was the woman that he met his first day. Rolling up his sleeves he proceeded to lift the serving trays effortlessly in an attempt to show off. Stirring up a scene he reset his boisterous posture and began slowly making his way around the party. First he came across a group of girls with their moms. Slowly bending to a knee not to drop the cupcakes all the girls picked out their favorite flavor and thanked him. Doing this gave him quite a genuine smile seeing the joy it brought to them. Although the parent’s weren’t quite as convinced giving cold blank faces back.

Next, he made his way over to a table full of rowdy teens. Clearly, they were all good friends although they were pushing each other over to reach the delicious plate of cupcakes. Running off only one boy gave Tom a half-hearted thanks while he exchanged an annoyed expression with him. Apart from those who chose to avoid Tom’s weird plastered smile and opt for the table instead only one group remained. The host’s group.

Nervously approaching Tom gave the ladies a slight nod and his trademark smile. Not immediately impressed the ladies all choose a cupcake and began nibbling at the frosting. Slowly but surly the nibbles turned into bites, bites into more cupcakes. Pleased the women thanked Tom holding a now empty plater. Sheepishly he turned and made his way directly to the table. With a disappointed look on his face from the subtle laughs of the party Tom began to pack up. However, as he finished loading the last of the supplies into the company van he failed to notice the woman he liked from across the yard. She was smiling at him as he closed the door.

Upon arriving back at the Cake n’ Bake Tom noticed that the display box was empty. Learning this Tom’s feeling of defeat slowly changed to a subtle anger. To him the Cake n’ Bake was much more successful the second day without him. Angerly he clocked off his shift and made his way back to his dreary dingy home. Only one thought came to his mind. “I guess I am no good at anything. I break nets, I can’t sell cupcakes, and I’m not a good guest at parties… I might as well quit.” In a stupor he kicked a small letter sitting just outside his door step with words reading “Important: Final notice for payment”.

Days go by as Tom agonizingly fills orders, greets guests with his silly smile, and works the register. However, he is eventually greeted by an unwelcome guest on a cold slow afternoon. Filling the silence of the slow day the front door chimes as a man in a pin stripe suit enters the store.

“Looks like the weather is going to lead to rough seas today.”

Emanating a gloomy grimace, the man cricked his neck to the side and looked up at Tom replying, “Oh I sure hope not. It is a lovely day to send a boat out don’t you think?”

Previously being distracted by filling boxes Tom turns to face the screeching noise emanating from the entrance. It is the loan shark. Like a puppet the loan shark clacked his way up to the counter eyeing down the cupcakes. Licking his dry lips the loan shark places one hand firmly down onto the glass and veers his neck up to reach Tom.

“You certainly have quite the array of cupcakes here Tom. Although I am more interested in something a little more… green.”

Gritting his teeth and putting on a fowl frown Tom looks down at the shark as he removes his hand from the glass. Without a word tom points to a watermelon flavored cupcake decorated in pink and green with a watermelon decal topping its peak. Sarcastically the loan shark smoothly directed his gaze toward the brightly colored cupcake. Jerking mechanically the loan shark laughed at the sight of the cupcake. Stopping his fit of laughter out of nowhere he squints at Tom.

“After all the time we have known each other I have never known you to be a comedian. As it seems I too have dabbled in the art of comedy myself. Although I am more a fan of the tragedy drama if you ask me.”

Pivoting on his feet the loan shark drops a flyer onto the counter. Methodically he makes his way out the door with a skip in his step and a slight chuckle under his breath. Sensing the threat has passed Tom looks down at the small flyer the loan shark left. On it reads an add for an upcoming auction with a large picture of a boat right in its center.

Clenching his fist eyes turning blood shot and gritting his teeth Tom explodes into anger. His fists fly around the shop failing to connect with anything. Until finally after letting out a bellowing scream he slams his fists down onto the counter. Cake explodes everywhere coating the walls in a thick paste. In a panic Rebecca rounds the corner to find out what all the commotion is about. Prominently displayed is the destroyed front counter, auction flyer with Tom’s boat on its cover, and a red-faced distressed Tom.

“Tom I think you should take the rest of the day off. It seems as though you’re not feeling well.”

In a rage Tom storms out of the store slamming the door on his way out. Upon arriving home however, a new surprise rears its head. Stuck to the outside of the door is a big red paper with large dominating text reading, “Immediate Eviction Notice”. Outraged Tom slams his fist into the paper as a tear rolls down his cheek. Walking back to the parking lot Tom sees his car being whisked away by a rickety tow truck. Distraught Tom sluggishly saunters back in the direction of the Cake n’ Bake. Hours pass as he arrives at its front door locked tightly. Depressed Tom slumps down to the floor and falls into an immediate sleep from exhaustion.

Sun searing the sky Rebecca stands over Tom with a look of disappointment as a rooster can be heard off in the distance. Nudging him gingerly Tom’s crusty eyes open to disbelief. Rebecca offers a hand to Tom as he situates himself upright. However, still sulking, Tom refuses her hand turning away. With a slight whimper he stands and begins to gradually walk away from the store.

“I’m quitting… There is no hope for me in fishing now and there has never been any hope of me making this cupcake thing work. I’m sorry I wasted your time and made your business suffer because of me. Also make sure to tell John I’m sorry that I couldn’t be a better friend spending all my time out on my boat.”

As he creates some distance Tom begins to tear up struggling to stay upright. Hearing his distress Rebecca’s disappointed look transforms into a pout. Putting her keys back in her pocket she folds her arms and watches as he walks off. Eventually a salty glistening tear rolls down her face as she rushes to stop Tom. In a near sprint she jumps in front of Tom and stops him in his tracks.

“Tom you haven’t been a burden on my business! To be honest most of the customers show up because they like your rugged local attitude. Plus I know your lying when you say that there is nope hope of making this job work. I have personally seen you smile from ear to ear working here. You get along great with the customers as well. For instance, that delivery you made to the party became the talk of the town. Everyone loved you and your fun quirky smile!”

Frozen Tom’s tears began to stop. He shifted in his dirty fisherman cupcake uniform as he tried his best to compose himself.

“Tom I know you are intent on being a fisherman. Its been hard not to notice you showing up every day in your fishing gear. So how about this, we will go bakes a huge batch of cupcakes and sell them around town to raise funds for your boat. That way you can go back to being a happy fisherman and get out of debt picking those little buggers out of the sea. What do you say?”

With a new found hope Tom nods his head at Rebecca as he wipes his face off. Straightening his uniform, the two begin to head into the store arms draped over each other’s shoulders. In a flurry the two of them, with the help of the chef, whip up a huge batch of cupcakes. Towering six feet high the mountain of cupcakes snugly packs the company van to the brim. Giving the store and chef a hearty goodbye Rebecca and Tom set out to raise money for his boat and home.

First the duo head to the dock where all of Tom’s fishing compatriots reside. Upon arriving the brightly colored van greatly contrasts the green and browns that line the dock. Curious a group of fishermen approach the van to investigate the sweet-smelling treats. Bursting open the van the two begin haggling with the fisherman for the best price on the cupcakes making a generous sum in the process.

Van now half empty the duo head toward the neighborhood that hosted the party Tom catered to. Running door to door with cupcakes the duo meets the group of snarky teens all eager to take another bite of their cupcakes. Along their journey they also meet the little girls and their parents excited to use the cupcakes for the upcoming weekend. Lastly, they meet the group of ladies that hosted the original party thrilled to buy the remaining cupcakes for their upcoming book club.

Cash in hand the two screech into the parking lot of the auction house. Running wildly, they register to bid and force their way into the busy velvet lined auditorium. Luckily, they made it just in time as the workers roll in Tom’s boat. A frenzy of bids begins to pop up as the patrons’ gawk at the now refurbished boat. In a panic the two raise their card jumping the price. “One-thousand, two-thousand, three-thousand!” Cries the auction leader. “SOLD to our phone bidder Samantha Turnby number 34!”

Tom falls to his knees. He can’t believe it. All is lost. Now his precious boat belongs to some stranger on the other end of a phone call. Rebecca still breathing heavy from all the running to the auction house. Pats him on the back. Shocked the two sit on the floor in despair.

“Well if it isn’t you again!”

From behind the two a beaming girl in a blue dress looks down at them. It is the woman from Tom’s first day at the Cake n’ Bake. Stunned Tom jumps to his feet. At a loss for words he simply halfheartedly stares at her with his good old broken smile.

“What are you doing here?”

“I knew your boat would be up for auction today silly, so I made sure to drop a line in to place a bid. I am number 34.”

“Why would you do something like that!” Cried Rebecca.

“We have been running around all day trying to raise the funds to win him his boat back!”

With a smile and a somber voice, she relied.

“Well I can’t have my favorite cupcake fisherman be without his boat.”

Surprised the duo looked at each other in shock.

“You’re going to just give me my boat back?”

With a grimace and a wink in her eye she replied.

“No, I’m not.”

“I need to have my cupcakes after all. So I’ll make you a deal. I’ll give you back your boat if you promise to make it a mobile version of the Cake n’ Bake. I heard from my friends that at the party you said under your breath that you love your new job. So how about it? Why not make yourself a new career Tom? Or did I just hear a bad rumor?”

Excited Tom jumps up and screams, “YES! I’ll do it! That sounds like a great idea! But, you have to promise that you’ll be the first and only one on the boat with me when its finished.”

With a stark smile she gleamed back at him and answered, “I would love that.”

Waves crash along the side of a new sturdy hull as the seagulls can be heard chirping overhead. Tom and Samantha can be seen enjoying a cup of milk over a small plate of freshly cooked cupcakes. As the pink and white bubbly boat careens down the coast a car can be heard coming to a screeching halt. Off in the distance a man in a pinstriped suit can be heard yelling and cursing as the boat rides into the sunset.