

1

"What have we got for tomorrow's front page?" Sadie asked her senior editorial team.

"Well there's the disappearance of the Pope during his Saudi Arabian tour. Nobody knows where he is and the world's security services are going crazy about it."

"What's the latest statement from the Vatican?"

"No comment, Amen, was all we got out of them. I think they're just as much in the dark as anyone else is about it."

"So on the whole it's a dead end story then?" Sadie challenged. "We covered most of the known facts yesterday. Nothing new has happened. What else have we got?"

"There's the lead up to the King's coronation," the society editor offered. "I think he's nearly saved up enough money for the five percent deposit the banks demanded on a personal loan he needed to pay for the planned banquet."

"When's he planning this big event?"

"Next week sometime from what I gather."

"Any word on the disappearance of the Queen? Has her body washed up anywhere?" Sadie asked.

"Not yet. After she reportedly fell overboard from the royal yacht in the south Atlantic nobody really expected to ever find the body anyway."

"Funny that, being swept overboard by a freak wave off St. Helena Island. Who'd have thought it was possible," the assistant editor commented.

"I know, but her husband seems to have recovered from the initial shock. Raised the charges for royal events almost immediately he made himself King. Had all the paperwork ready as well. It was as if he knew she was going to be lost at sea."

Over the last few months the world press had been alive with theories about the Queen's disappearance as the Royal Yacht Britannia was returning from a schedule of royal visits to Africa and South America. When Britannia had docked back at Southampton, news was released about the Queen being swept overboard by a freak wave, while she was standing on the aft deck admiring the view. With the only information available coming from official sources many people treated it as dubious. (The same way you'd treat any information released by a government source). With no evidence to contradict it though, the story had finally been accepted as fact and her husband, in a break with tradition, officially assumed the title of King.

It was customary in the monarchy that the oldest son inherited the throne, but the Queen's former husband had hired a team of American lawyers to manipulate the

British divorce laws in a bid to obtain the position for himself. It was common knowledge that the royal family had been having a considerable amount of domestic disputes over the last few years and that the Queen had violently disagreed with the Duke of Edinburgh's views on certain family matters. The Queen, being of the quiet. 'Let them get on with it' approach, and the Duke of the 'Give them a good kick up the arse' brigade. This difference of opinion had led to repeated public disputes and considerable animosity amongst the royals as a whole.

The Prince of Wales had screamed and shouted about the press wrecking his marriage by reporting his extra marital relationships. He was quoted as having said that the press should concentrate their efforts on investigating more important issues, like finding a cure for Dutch elm disease or the Colorado beetle. He'd then left his comfortable apartment in Windsor Castle to live in a tree house on the proposed route of a new bypass. He'd always been partial to trees and he was now happy to have found an old oak tree with just the right size of knothole.

Other members of the family had walked out after the government cut the royal list for public funding to zero. This had surprised the royal family because they'd arrogantly supposed that the general public enjoyed paying them vast sums of money to take permanent holidays and have grandiose banquets at the taxpayers' expense. The British people had eventually taken offence at this spendthrift attitude, mainly because it meant there was considerably less money left in the kitty for their own tax cuts. For the general public though, the severing of the royal purse strings and the requirement that the royals compete in a free market economy hadn't brought the tax relief they'd expected. The government had found another bottomless pit to throw it down instead, namely the Westminster Hospitality Indiscretion Payment fund, (W.H.I.P. {For bribing certain people not to publicize MP's nocturnal indiscretions}) and the Senior Executives fund (S.Ex. {For funding those indiscretions in the first place}).

The eventual outcome of all this royal bickering was a situation bordering on a family feud, with King Dick as the feudal lord. With Queen Eleanor gone and her brood spread across the social wasteland the way was open for him to take over the household. His closest rival being regarded by the public as a borderline raving lunatic had helped his case no end.

"Changing the subject. How's Ed getting on?" the assistant editor asked.

"The last time I visited him he was out of the padded cell and into the rehabilitation unit," Sadie replied.

"Still having intensive therapy is he?" the assistant editor continued.

"If you're talking about the so called sex therapist or more accurately, the whore in a white coat, yes he is. That's probably why he always has a Cheshire cat grin on his face."

"It sounds like he's getting better, does that mean he might be discharged from hospital soon?" the assistant editor continued.

"You're not getting off the hook that easily. Ten o'clock, my apartment and don't be late," Sadie ordered. "As Ed had been in hospital now for a number of months, Sadie was starting to get frustrated and she'd decided that the assistant editor was the most suitable candidate for a deputy. He may not have looked much but Sadie could see an energetic body under the surface.

The assistant editor hadn't taken this news too well but was putting on a brave face, while attempting to find an excuse. Any excuse that could be seen as both plausible and safe.

"Back to business," he said. He'd have to think about it again. "What's Roy up to at the moment?"

"He's doing an in depth study of a report that the polar ice caps are shrinking. He should be on his way towards the south pole at the moment."

The World Fund for Geological Research had been studying an increase in the number of icebergs found in the Antarctic Ocean and reports from the ice research stations of a shrinking continent. The only research station that hadn't reported in yet was Ice Station Zeedonk. Their radio had broken down just as winter set in and the replacement transceiver was still in transit on the supply ship MV Bounty, heading down the South Atlantic at that precise moment. The researcher's preliminary report had confirmed a large increase in the number of icebergs and the estimated quantity of ice that was annually breaking off the ice shelves was three times than of previous years.

"You mean Roy has voluntarily boarded a ship for the coldest place in the world?" the assistant editor asked. "I thought he'd given up international assignments."

"He had but I personally assigned this job to him and he accepted it," Sadie replied.

Even Sadie had come to the conclusion that Roy was an idiot, but she was still devoted to him as a baby brother. Sending him on international assignments was a way of keeping him from getting in the way of the real industry, as well as her megalomaniac tendencies.

An article on the melting ice caps seemed a pretty innocuous subject to send him on. It would be two months at the ice research station and another few weeks transport time before she'd have to think of something else for him to do.

"That still doesn't solve our problem of what we're going to put on the front page," the assistant editor dragged the subject back to the immediate problem at hand.

"How about the hurricane which devastated Florida yesterday?" the meteorological correspondent offered.

"Pretty mundane, happens so often now, but failing anything else it may have to do. How many people killed this time?" Sadie asked.

"None as far as I'm aware. The police managed to evacuate everybody in plenty of time. Lots of property damage though."

"You call that news? Now if we could make it read 'ten thousand feared dead' then we might be getting somewhere."

Since Sadie had taken charge, the laid back honest style of reporting, which used to be the trademark of The Weekly Global, had been replaced by the sensationalistic hype preferred by the tabloid presses.

"I'm sorry but the American news has already reported no casualties, so there's no chance of twisting the facts on this one."

"Pity, but we'll probably have to lead with it anyway. I'll see if I can juice it up later," Sadie decided.

Everybody was fully aware of what Sadie meant by juicing it up later. Her usual trick was to wait until ten minutes before deadline then add a considerable amount of dubious material, which took no account of the possible libel action it could incur. The Daily Global had evolved into a standard format tabloid in this respect alone. The part they lacked was the enormous readership and vast profits, but Sadie was confident they would follow and her place in history would be made.