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"Mr chairman, the Spanish government demands that this chamber votes on a resolution forbidding the thieving British colonials from declaring Gibraltar independent."

"I don't think that will be necessary," the British delegate to the United Nations responded. "We've wasted more than enough time on this trifling point as it is. Can we move on to more important matters, like our fishing rights and compensation from Madrid for infringement of them."

"Stuff your claims for compensation! We want our land back!" the Spanish delegate screamed. "I take it that a vote won't be necessary because you intend to return the rock to us?"

"Wrong again my brainless little bull fighter. Gibraltar will soon have a seat here in this forum. Would you like us to move a desk in beside yours?"

"We demand a vote on this subject!" the Spanish delegate called towards the chairman.

"We hereby veto any resolution," the British delegate responded.

"You can't do that!" the Spaniard challenged.

"We can and we have. Now let us stop wasting time and move on. I'm sure it must be time for a pot of tea."

"Arseholes to your tea! We're talking about giving us back what was stolen hundreds of years ago and all you're interested in is tea."

"Priorities dear boy, priorities," the British delegate calmly explained. "You seem a trifle agitated yourself. Maybe I could offer you a cup."

"I don't want any of your bloody tea. I want a resolution giving us Gibraltar back!"

"Already vetoed," the British delegate replied, lifting a tea cup to his mouth for effect.

"Maybe we could mediate here," the American delegate interrupted. "We have a carrier group in the Atlantic and could provide a peacekeeping force."

"No thank you!" both the British and Spanish delegates chorused together.

"That was close," the Spanish delegate whispered to his aide. "I thought we'd lost Madrid there. Who knows what would be destroyed if a bunch of trigger happy yanks were let loose."

Unfortunately the Spanish delegate had forgotten to mute his microphone, so a whisper to his colleague had effectively become a general statement to the United Nations forum."

"I second that motion," the Italian delegate joined in. "Even our cable cars aren't safe from them."

"What about our Belgrade embassy," the Chinese delegate added.

"We were hit by a so called stray missile during the Kosovo war," the Hungarian delegate contributed.

"What about our airliner, accidentally shot down!" another delegate shouted.

"I must say that we actually lost more troops to American bullets and bombs than anything else during the Gulf war," the British delegate contributed.

"Hang on a minute, you're supposed to be on our side," the American confronted the British delegate.

"Just stating facts dear boy. Nothing personal intended."

"All right," the American delegate conceded. "Occasionally we make mistakes or some times there are friendly fire incidents."

"You deliberately bombed one of our villages instead of a Yugoslavian army base," the Albanian delegate joined in. "You call that friendly?"

"We were only trying to help..." the American started explaining but was cut short.

"The American is quite right, they were only trying to help," the Russian delegate surprisingly interrupted. "What other country would not only kill you but dig six foot deep holes to bury you in at the same time."

"I thought we were discussing Gibraltar Mr Chairman," the American delegate addressed the Japanese leader of the United Nations.

"Sorry," a daydreaming chairman responded. "I was just thinking about my grandparents who lived in Hiroshima during the forties."

"That wasn't an accident! We aimed for that city."

"Am I supposed to cheer about your accuracy with city sized targets," the Japanese chairman replied.

"I give up," the American finally commented. "After all the help we've given the world, this is the thanks we get."

"I propose a resolution thanking the United States of America for accidentally bombing us," the Chinese delegate called out.

"I second that," came choruses of replies.

"Bleeding ungrateful people," the US delegate muttered to himself as he left the room.

Back in London the conversation in a Fleet Street newspaper's print room was considerably more simplistic than the debating arena of governments, but the relevance to world affairs was no less impacting.

"Hey Bert, seen Pratt around anywhere? Ed wants 'im agai!" the deep cockney accent of a print-room supervisor boomed out.

This call was interrupted by a tinny, wimpy little voice coming from the direction of the giant presses of The Weekly Global.

"How many times do I have to tell you my name's Roy, or alternatively King. I don't use the Pratt part of it."

Roy had in fact been christened Roy King-Pratt. Not because he came from an upper class family who thought double-barrelled names sounded very hoity-toity and well to do. Most certainly not, because Roy had in fact received his double-barrelled name by a very unconventional route.

When Donald King and Diane Pratt had unexpectedly produced an unplanned and possibly even an unwanted offspring, they couldn't agree on whose name he'd take. In fact they couldn't usually agree on almost anything. Tradition suggested they should marry and give him his father's name, but this couple were far from traditional. The last thing in the world that Diane wanted was to be betrothed to Donald for the rest of her natural life. A midwife had therefore been called in to arbitrate on the matter and eventually, after a very heated session, resulting in two broken coffee cups, one cracked window, Donald's black eye, and the early retirement of a 25 year old midwifery sister, King-Pratt was considered a reluctant but workable compromise. The nursing staff then proceeded to label his cot 'Boy King-Pratt', the drawing pin accidentally covering the lower curve of the 'B' in Boy, hence how he came by the first name of Roy.

It hadn't taken a budding child Einstein, with an IQ of 180, to deduce that going by the name of King was more beneficial to a quiet social life than the alternative of Pratt. Unfortunately as children barely qualify for membership of the animal species, leastwise society, Pratt became his usual name at school and from that day he was still unsuccessfully trying to find at least one person who'd call him by his chosen name of King.

"Call y'self what y'like mate," the print-room supervisor replied. "The boss want's yer in 'is office and it sounded pretty impor'ent t' me."

Roy was actually employed as a junior reporter for the national weekly newspaper The Weekly Global, situated in London's famous Fleet Street. He hadn't obtained this position because of his great journalistic talent, of which he had none. It wasn't even because of his vast knowledge of foreign lands. Following the A-Z out of Fleet Street was a feat in itself, and the underground map could just as easily have been rainbow

spaghetti, with a pot of gold in Mayfair. No, Roy owed his current career to the fact that Edward Rooter, editor in chief of the newspaper, was engaged to his sadistically psychopathic sister, Sarah Jane Pratt. (For some reason, which may become evident later, nobody ever called Sarah by the name of Pratt. Sadie was her common name and nobody ever disputed the fact).

Sadie, under threat of withdrawing any pre-matrimonial favours (at the very least) had insisted that her darling little brother be given a job, and Ed, in fear of losing his reproductive capabilities, had reluctantly given in to her demands.

"Roy, what do you know about the latest developments in Gibraltar?" Ed asked, knowing full well the answer was going to be nothing.

"You mean the bloodless overthrow of a mad dictator and its return to democracy?"

"No, no, Maggie was ousted from office ages ago. I'm talking about the government's latest decision to approve Gibraltar's independence and the Queen's final visit to the colony."

"Oh that," Roy answered. "Well if I'm really honest with you ... nothing."

That was precisely what Ed had expected, but as usual a ten-minute conversation with Roy had taken over an hour. If only he could send another reporter on this assignment, but alas his hands were tied, or at least they had been. It had to be Roy. Sadie had insisted that her darling little brother be given more responsibility and the last time he'd failed to comply with her request he'd found out the hard way that she'd put itching power in his condom.

It had taken days of various topical applications to cure the physical symptoms of Sadie's action but the psychological scarring would still take considerably longer to heal. To this very day Ed kept a magnifying glass beside the condom packet on his bedside cabinet but rarely was he sober enough to use it effectively.

Ed was not by nature a nervous individual, but for some reason caution was always a primary concern when Sadie was around. Although being loving and caring when it suited her, she could turn in a split second into a vindictive bitch and whoever happened to be nearby would suffer some unpleasant fate. Finding a happy balance with Sadie was like walking a tightrope. Ed somehow managed to wobble a lot but he usually kept his balance. (So far anyway).

No, it had to be Roy. There wasn't any choice in the matter. It was going to be a very simple assignment anyway. Even the newest kid out of school could do it. All he had to do was catch a plane to Gibraltar, photograph the Queen's visit, write a few lines about it, and fax them all to London. A piece of cake really. Catching the plane back again Ed wasn't too concerned about. Losing him in the international aviation industry would actually be a welcome break.

To eventually explain all the details of the assignment to Roy had taken considerably longer than Ed had anticipated though.

"Do you really understand what you've got to do?" he repeated for the sixth time, and to his surprise he didn't have to go over it again.

Comprehension at last and it was time for a stiff drink. It's funny how Ed always enjoyed a stiff drink after a chat with Roy. It must have been a family thing because he also felt like a stiff drink after a run-in with Sadie. If he actually thought about it he'd taken to the bottle quite a lot over the last few years, but he tried not to dwell on that subject too much. Sometimes during a heavy drinking session he even wished he'd never become involved with Sadie, but any attempt at breaking off the relationship now would be akin to suicide, and even Ed wasn't that stupid. No, he'd continue to put up with Roy. The idea of him being on the opposite side of the European continent had a nice ring to it. Maybe he should send him on international assignments more often. Maybe he should send him even further away, where he'd be gone for longer. Ed liked the sound of that idea and proceeded to make a note in his personal organizer to this effect.

The telephone on Ed's desk suddenly rang, interrupting his line of thought and he instinctively reached for the receiver.

"Hello Ed, I'm in town and I thought I'd pop over to see you. I need a little extra money to go shopping in Oxford Street."

Ed's hand had developed an obvious tremble as he listened to Sadie's voice. "Where are you at the moment darling?" he asked nervously.

"I'm just pulling up outside the office building. I'll be up there in a jiffy," she replied as she jumped out of a black cab clutching a mobile phone.

Ed's tremble suddenly became considerably worse and he poured himself another stiff drink, emptying the glass in record time. He'd quickly hidden both the tumbler and the whisky bottle in his desk draw before Sadie even reached the editorial office.

"Working hard as usual I see," Sadie commented. "How's my little brother getting on?"

"Marvellous, marvellous. I was only just arranging a promotion for him," Ed replied. "There's a special assignment I specifically want him to cover. It's very important. It involves the royal family."

"Sounds good to me. So long as you're not using him just to sweep the floors? He's a very intelligent, reliable employee is Roy. He'll be an asset to the company."

Intelligent wasn't the terminology Ed would have used to explain Roy, and anybody Roy worked with would probably have agreed with him on that score. Sadie was in a minority of one when it came to regarding Roy as anything other than an imbecile, but when the workforce regarded you as a sadistic psychopath, then one person could also be the majority voter.

Ed opened his wallet and produced two fifty-pound notes, which Sadie accepted without any further comment. She turned and passed through the doorway into the

pressroom as Ed visibly relaxed and reached once again for the bottle in the bottom draw of his desk.

Not even bothering to pour the liquid into a glass, Ed lifted the bottle to his mouth and took a large swig, before placing it back onto his desk. As his head lowered again from the upturned bottle he could see an image of Sadie in his blurred vision. It was too much to hope that he was only hallucinating and this was instantly confirmed by his sense of hearing.

"Don't go and get yourself drunk today," she instructed. "I want you fully functional tonight when I get home."

Ed clearly understood what she'd meant by that remark and quickly removed the bottle from his desk again. "Yes dear," was all he could manage to say as she swept out of the door again.

Armed with the knowledge that he was now being regarded as a real reporter, Roy returned to his flat in order to pack his meagre belongings for the short trip to Gibraltar. In reality though Roy didn't actually have a flat of his own as such. Where he lived was really a converted storeroom attached to the newspaper's sub-basement print-room.

Originally after his mother had died Roy had gone to live at his sister's flat in South London but the restrictions on her social life that a socially inept brother brought with him, became very difficult for Sadie to tolerate. After she'd met Ed at a singles bar, and their relationship had progressed from basic animal sex to a more stable format, a deal had been arrived at. Ed was eager to move into Sadie's flat after being thrown out by his previous lover (not an uncommon occurrence in Ed's life) and although not wanting to see Roy sleeping on the street, Sadie did feel like a break from looking after him all the time.

"How do you like your new flat?" Sadie had asked as they opened the door to the store-room, which Ed had reluctantly allocated as live-in accommodation for a new house reporter.

"It's a store-room," Roy replied. He may have been stupid but even he could tell the difference between the two.

"Look upon it as a bedroom," Sadie had reasoned. "You can eat in the staff cafeteria and look, the maintenance staff have kindly plumbed in a shower and a sink for you."

Roy now stood once again in the doorway of his new home, looking at it with some familiarity. It looked totally different from when he'd originally moved in. As Sadie had predicted he'd soon personalised the place with a few presents from herself. At first glance there was a similarity between this flat and a teenager's bedroom. There was the same level of untidiness, combined with similar interests and material possessions. Sitting below the large television he'd persuaded Sadie to part with, was his games console. Sadie had decided that although the television in her living room was expensive, it was worth the cost of replacing it if the end result was uninterrupted sex with Ed. Sadie's demands in this area were excessive to say the least.

As Roy rummaged through his chest of draws looking for suitable clothing, he tried to remember what Ed had told him about the weather in Gibraltar. This was a big mental effort for Roy's antisocial brain cells because no matter how hard Roy tried, his brain cells never got together and worked as a team. (Similar in a way to most local councils).

While Roy pondered over the more difficult decisions of life, (what to wear), the giant presses of The Weekly Global thundered into life. His whole room shook with the vibrations of the gigantic print machines, producing the weekly newspaper to which they all owed their livelihood.

One brain cell must have inadvertently collided with another at this point, because Roy's mind wandered onto the thought of leaving all this familiarity in order to travel to another part of the world. The extra responsibility and advancement of his new career quickly took a back seat to premonitions of loneliness and homesickness. He'd become familiar with London and the thought of coping with another country in some way frightened him. He didn't even know where Gibraltar was. Ed had said something about Spain and he vaguely recollected people talking of holidays there, but it could have been next to Timbuktu for all he knew.

The arrival of 'Fleabag' in his doorway distracted Roy's thoughts from the subject at hand, but it wasn't a difficult task to distract Roy at the best times anyway. The stray ginger tomcat, which had been adopted as the print-room mascot, still regarded this room as his own territory, and Roy as an invader. When it had been a store-room Fleabag used to sleep on top of the boxes of spare machine parts. It was his kingdom, nobody ever disturbed him there, and he was effectively out of reach of all but the most courageous of climbers. When they'd attempted to dust him with flea powder, he'd escaped there. If he ever saw a collar he knew he had somewhere to retreat to. He was a free cat. Now, since Roy's arrival, he'd been relegated to the shelf above the print machine. From a complete room of his own he'd been reduced to curling up on a narrow shelf, and to aggravate the situation even more, there was a constant draught coming from an old metal-framed window, which rarely closed properly.

"Hello puss puss," Roy said crouching down to greet Fleabag. "Have you come to visit me?"

"Hiss, spit, meow," Fleabag replied. Roughly translated this meant, "Get out of my room or it'll be war between us."

Roy hadn't heeded this obvious warning though and proceeded to stretch out his arm in an attempt to stroke the cat. The repeated hissing and spitting didn't register as a warning either. When Fleabag arched his back and his hair stood on end, Roy still didn't comprehend the danger and continued to reach forward.

"Right, you asked for it," Fleabag hissed. "Don't say I didn't warn you."

The speed with which Fleabag struck took Roy completely by surprise and the line of claw marks on his right hand had started to ooze blood almost immediately. Roy instinctively jerked his arm back in response to the pain and the effect of his arm's sudden movement overbalanced him and he toppled backwards. Fleabag just looked

on with a Cheshire grin across his whiskered face. This grin didn't last for long though because Roy's fall backwards was broken by a tall bookcase that contained his entire collection of cartoon videos, which was extensive to say the least. The effect of Roy falling into the bookcase caused the unstable towering structure to come crashing to the ground, narrowly missing his own empty head. Fleabag on the other hand hadn't been so lucky and had taken the full weight of videos and shelf together.

The noise of the crash had attracted the attention of the print-room workers and in seconds the room was full of printing staff.

"What happened here?" the supervisor asked.

"The cat scratched me," Roy replied in all honesty. "I only went to stroke him."

"When are you going to learn that Fleabag doesn't like you?" the supervisor commented. "Where did he go to anyway?"

"I don't know. He just kind of disappeared," Roy answered.

It was at that moment a soft meow was heard from underneath the bookshelf and after a few minutes of digging a rather flattened Fleabag was dragged out from underneath the pile of videos.

"He doesn't seem to be able to walk," a print machine operator announced. "He's all limp."

"You should be an expert on limp things," another print worker chided but a scowl from the supervisor soon silenced him.

"Somebody get the first aid box and the Yellow Pages," the supervisor instructed. "There must be an animal hospital around here somewhere."