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In the Spanish capital of Madrid the Spanish parliament were in an emergency sitting following Britain's recent declaration of Gibraltar's forthcoming independence.

"What are we going to do about this latest insult towards our claim on Gibraltar?" the Spanish foreign minister demanded to a full cabinet meeting.

"We should put them all in the bullring," the finance minister suggested.

The Finance Minister's hatred for the British was more personal than just simply national pride. Not only had his department lost a fortune in revenue after the British government warned its citizens not to purchase timeshare options from unscrupulous touts on the streets of Barcelona (the touts were in reality finance ministry employees) he'd also personally been left with millions of pesetas worth of property that nobody wanted to buy. At the time the timeshare industry had been a financial boost to an impoverished nation and with compulsory purchase orders on the properties for a minimum of their worth (purportedly to build a new motorway) the government had even retained their original assets. The fact that the properties were found to be in the wrong location for a motorway (usually on a mountain top or on a soft sandy beach) was inconsequential. Another bonus was the fact that the properties therefore became available for sale on the timeshare market again, after the planned road scheme was later officially abandoned.

"I think the bullring might be a slight over-reaction," the prime minister observed.

"Not for me it wouldn't be," the finance minister replied. "I'm the one who has to balance the books at the end of the day."

"Maybe if you didn't keep attending conferences in Switzerland there'd be more money left in the treasury," the tourism minister offered. "What's more important at the moment is our tourist industry. If we upset the British the coastal towns could end up going bankrupt."

"You mean your chain of squalid hotels would be half empty, which would adversely affect your profits," the finance minister retaliated.

"There's nothing squalid about my luxury hotels..." the tourism minister started to argue but was cut short.

"The only thing luxury about your hotels is the en-suite facilities for the cockroaches," the finance minister interrupted. "Most of them were still situated on a building site the last time I looked."

"I'm just striving to improve the facilities offered, and consequently a certain amount of building work has to be undertaken."

"Striving to add an extra ten storeys onto a building with foundations for less than it already has," the finance minister retaliated. "At least my timeshares are structurally sound."

"What's the good of buying a solid structure only to find it compulsorily purchased six months later? At least with my hotels you get what you pay for."

"If you're talking about the price then I could see a modicum of truth in that statement. As far as the advertising is concerned though, I've seen what you submit to the glossy brochures. I don't know what angle the photographs are taken from to make them look so spectacular but the pictures look nothing like the actual buildings."

"That's because they are photographer's impressions of what the building will look like after the improvements are finished."

"How can you get photographer's impressions?" the finance minister challenged. "Artists can paint impressions but a photographer can't take a photograph in the future."

"That's quite true, so to compensate for that fact we photograph a completely different hotel which looks similar to what we're aiming towards..."

"And never arriving at," the finance minister finished the sentence for him.

"It's a long term goal," the tourism minister argued but he'd already lost the battle.

"We still haven't decided what to do about Gibraltar..." the prime minister interrupted but a reply was stifled by the door opening and a Spanish army officer entering with a sub-machine gun across his arms. "Not another bloody useless attempt at a coup!" he exclaimed. "The last idiot didn't get very far."

"It's OK Prime Minister, this is General Juanco of the Andalusia provincial guard. He's here to report to me," the defence minister informed them.

"Well put the bloody gun away then. I think we should consider banning guns from the Cortes," the Prime Minister suggested.

"I'll second that," the law minister agreed. "We need stricter control over the carrying of firearms. There's no need for anybody to have weapons except the police. Only then will we have law and order in this country."

"Only then will your goons have ultimate power," the defence minister accused. "There's no reason why my soldiers shouldn't carry their weapons. What good's an army without weapons anyway?"

"At least they'd be safer. Thousands of conscripts showing off with their new toys doesn't inspire me with confidence," the law minister counterattacked.

"Hundreds of British criminals sitting in luxury villas on the Costa Brava doesn't inspire me with confidence either."

"Most of them are technically innocent," the finance minister added, knowing full well that he'd made a good profit selling those houses to the escaped convicts. "Innocent until proven guilty in the eyes of the British courts anyway, so we shouldn't judge them too harshly."

"I expect making huge donations to the treasury hasn't influenced your opinion of them in any way at all. Anyway, General Juanco has just reported that the Andalusia provincial government favours closing the gates to Gibraltar again."

"It's the least we should do under the circumstances," the Prime Minister agreed. "I take it that we're unanimously agreed that we should in no way recognise this new country?"

The whole room nodded agreement and the stage was set once again for the isolation of Gibraltar from the rest of the European continent. The Gibraltar government had expected it and even the British population hadn't been surprised when it was announced in the press.

After the Spanish cabinet ministers returned to their respective departments, only the defence minister remained behind. Together with the heads of the armed forces they discussed the possible actions that Spain could take.

"We have a fleet in Barcelona doing nothing at the moment. We could at least make a token gesture and announce naval exercises off the coast of Gibraltar. With a bit of luck the British Queen will get cold feet and cancel her visit. At least then we'd have won a symbolic victory, which is better than just sitting here doing nothing," the naval chief suggested.

"I'd agree with you there," the Prime Minister replied. "Send the navy down there immediately and what's more we should also get the army to have a bit of practice in Andalusia as well. Before we know it the British ambassador will be knocking on our door demanding to know what's going on."

"I'll order Admiral Solumbus to set sail immediately," the navy chief replied.

"It won't be long now," the Prime Minister gloated. "I'm looking forward to turning the British ambassador away or then again I might even tell him it's none of his business."

"We haven't got a British ambassador anymore Prime Minister," the defence minister informed him. "They did a moonlight flit during the night. Their Madrid embassy is now empty."

"How do you know that?"

"They were seen slipping out of the country by ship this morning. The whole lot of them just packed up and left without a word to anybody. Boarded a ship in Santander and by now they should be in London."

"Pity, I was looking forward to throwing them out."

At the offices of The Weekly Global, the lights were burning very late but it wasn't because everybody was busy preparing for a forthcoming deadline. It wasn't even because some major news story was breaking in the world. No, Roy was on his way to Gibraltar and the reason everybody had stayed behind late was because this was his leaving party. Never in the entire history of the newspaper had there been such a party. Even Fleabag was drunk. This was mainly because in his post concussion stupor he'd decided to chase an imaginary mouse across the drink's table and ended up falling headfirst into the homemade punch.

Being a natural hydrophobic and hating fluid on the outside of his body, transferring it to the inside had seemed like a pretty good idea. Nobody at the party really minded this, partly because they were all too inebriated to care, but mainly because most of them were fully aware of the contents of the homemade punch and naturally avoided it in compliance with the health and safety at work regulations. Only Sadie was drinking the liquid, which for some reason nobody seemed overtly worried about.

A notable exception to the list of invited guests was Roy himself and he was nowhere to be found in the whole building. This was hardly surprising, as he was already at Heathrow Airport, hence the reason for a party of such mega proportions in the first place. It would have been very unfair to say that nobody at the newspaper actually liked him. It was just that a feeling of foreboding and catastrophe suddenly lifted whenever he was gone and the previously subdued feelings of fun and frivolity then suddenly surfaced in one colossal explosion.

"Great p'farty, who's gettin' 'itched dis time?" a drunken Ed splurged out.

"I think you've had quite enough for one night," Sadie observed.

"I'z aint even got star'ed yet."

"You had a head start on everybody else with that bottle of whisky in your office."

"It'z only juz gett'n varm'd up. sdon't be a par'y pooper."

"Party's over for you! You're going home, like it or not," Sadie wasn't at all impressed by Ed's condition in the slightest.

"But I can'nee find ma troo'sirs. I musta drop'tem some'tear."

Dealing with a chronic alcoholic womaniser was Sadie's bane in life. Dealing with Sadie's revenge was Ed's.

"If you kept your trousers on like any normal man, you wouldn't lose them would you?"

Sadie turned to compare him to the other men in the room but unfortunately the party had reached those rarely attained heights, where a mass orgy on the dance floor was taking place. There wasn't a pair of trousers to be seen anywhere, well at least not being worn anyway.

Eventually Sadie decided to cut her loses and dragged an unwilling Ed away. When he'd caught sight of the antics on the dance floor though it had taken all Sadie's strength to pull him in the opposite direction. Returning to join in had momentarily crossed her mind but with Ed's blood alcohol level he'd be useless to her anyway. Reluctantly therefore they slipped out of the main doors and into the hallway as they heard someone scream. "And the lord said unto his flock, position fifty six and be more than satisfied." Which proved the theory that there is always at least one Born again Christian in any room.

At Heathrow Airport the opposite effect was taking place. While psychically tuned in passengers were unexpectedly deciding to fly tomorrow instead of today, mechanics were having second thoughts about a repair they'd just completed and checked it once again, only to find that they really had done it right in the first instance. The Anti-terrorist police noticeably clutched their sub-machine guns a little tighter than usual. Much tighter and there'd be some work for the medical unit, who were rechecking their supplies of bandages for the forth time.

Roy casually strolled through the departure hall, oblivious to the chaos he was inadvertently causing all around him. Looking at his ticket he was trying to decide which check-in desk to go to, a nightmare in itself for a semi-intelligent traveller. Eventually after joining three different queues, only to find they were for planes going to entirely different continents, he finally managed to locate the check-in desk for his own plane. An airport cleaner had graciously escorted him there personally.

"Is this the check-in for flight 473 to Gibraltar?" Roy asked the always calm, but on this occasion slightly shaky, ground stewardess at the British International Airways desk.

"May I see your ticket and passport please," she replied. This was obviously one of the many standard replies to any question. If he'd asked what the capital of Zimbabwe was, he would as sure as day have been asked for his ticket and passport.

"How long is the flight to Gibraltar?" Roy persevered.

"Could you place your luggage on the conveyor belt please," she replied.

"Is this a direct flight or do we stop off on the way?"

"Here's your passport and boarding card Mr Pratt. Gate 29. Have a nice flight. Next!!"

"I use King not Pratt," Roy protested but she was already asking the next passenger for his ticket and passport. Well, it was worth the half-hour queue to have such an enthralling conversation. Maybe developments in artificial intelligence had progressed further than he'd realised. He made a note to do some investigative journalism on the subject when he returned to Britain.

Soon he'd relieved himself of his heavy luggage, leaving him with a small carry-on bag containing only comic books and boiled sweets. What he needed to decide was how to fill the two hours remaining before his flight took-off. A brief walk to the observation platform occupied him for only a few moments. Roy's attention span was

minuscule. He'd met a modern day variation of the train-spotter, collecting aeroplane details and writing them in a little black book. The shopping arcade and restaurants hadn't fared any better either. Eventually he returned to the departure lounge and fell asleep on one of the long benches provided.

Roy was finally woken by the sound of his name echoing from one of the overhead speakers.

"This is the last call for Mr Roy Pratt, flying on British International Airways flight 473 to Gibraltar. Could Mr Pratt please go to the departure gate immediately as his plane is waiting to depart," the metallic voice rattled out.

"Shit, I'm going to miss my plane!" Roy shouted at nobody in particular, while he charged headlong across the departure hall towards gate 29.

For once luck was with him and he arrived at the gate with only seconds to spare. The stewardess was still standing at the desk wearing her artificially pleasant expression. The real one would have been a scowl and 'where the hell have you been?' look, but instead he was greeted with "welcome onboard sir, may I take your coat for you?" and was soon seated ready for his flight.

While Roy's plane crossed the English Channel, back in the terminal building at Heathrow the airport security services were highly active clearing the entire complex. All flights were being delayed and planes that had just landed weren't being allowed to leave the taxiways. The underground service had also been suspended and trains were now terminating at Hatton Cross, to the disgruntled complaints of passengers expecting to fly out of the country. In the air planes circling in their usual holding pattern were gradually being redirected towards Gatwick and Stanstead, to further burden the already overloaded facilities at those airports. From the observation roof you could have seen jumbo jets lined up from one end of the airport taxiway to the other, that is if you were allowed on the roof. This area had also been temporarily closed to the public.

In the forecourt of the terminal building passengers were streaming out of the doors and police shepherded them towards a car park situated a safe distance away. Sirens could be heard from the direction of the local town and a white panel van suddenly appeared around the corner, blue lights flashing and brakes screeching on the tarmac. On the sides on the van were painted the words 'Police' and 'Bomb Squad'.

At this precise moment in time Roy was in the air over Europe. He'd woken from a little nap and reached towards his bag to get a comic.

"Drat, I must have left my bag in the airport when I had to run for the plane. So much for buying those comics," Roy commented and turned back towards the window to watch the clouds drift by, before dropping off to sleep again.

The bomb squad at Heathrow weren't as unconcerned about the whole affair as Roy was. They'd just packed sandbags around a bag lying unattended in the departure lounge and shot at it with a rifle mounted on a robot camera. When the bag hadn't

exploded they picked it up and carefully opened it, only to discover that all it contained was an assortment of sweets and simple comics.

Roy's name soon became known throughout the facility as the bomb squad officers sifted through the contents of his bag. He was safe at the moment, but when he finally returned to England the authorities would want a few words with him.