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In the town of Gibraltar the population were preparing for their forthcoming independence celebrations, as well as Queen Eleanor III's final visit to the colony. As the royal yacht Britannia sailed down the Atlantic ocean from Southampton, with the intention of making a two hour visit to the colony on its way towards Africa and the South Atlantic, the town was being subjected to a facelift. Bunting was being draped between the lampposts of the main street and the Union Jack flew alongside the Gibraltar flag. Street parties along with beach parties were being prepared and the docks were receiving a paint job ready for the arrival of the Queen.

HMS Rooke, the Royal Navy's shore base on this tiny peninsular of land which jutted out into the Mediterranean, had seen many sights in her time but this was promising by far to be the most spectacular of them all. Commanding a strategic position where the Mediterranean met the Atlantic Ocean, Gibraltar had always been a military outpost and most of her three hundred-year history as a British colony had related to military matters. HMS Rooke had been the centre of many naval victories and countless famous ships were repaired there over the years. To this day NATO still used the facilities for re-supply and refitting ships of many different nationalities.

The current military complement in a time of relative peace though totalled a company of the Black Watch in transit to desert training in the Sahara and one American destroyer on a re-supply stop, which was just leaving after hearing about the approaching Spanish fleet.

The USS Maverick cast off her dock tether and pulled away from the dockside of HMS Rooke. The Americans had made their usual noisy exit from the harbour area, with sirens whooping and foghorns blaring. The official reason given for this was that it signalled goodbye to the port being exited. In reality the US Navy had learnt from experience that the only way of not hitting anything capable of propelling itself out of their way, was to make as much noise as possible as an advanced warning to them. All the local shipping were well aware of the significance of the noise and many small craft scurried out of the American ship's way as it left port. The only exception to this rule being a large yellow marker buoy with a flashing light on the top which was anchored out in the channel. Unfortunately it didn't have an engine and therefore had to suffer the damage inflicted on it. Already well dented from previous encounters with the US Navy the local authorities had long since given up trying to repair it. The American ship itself had suffered no damage whatsoever in this encounter, as all US warships were fitted with reinforced hulls. Purportedly this was for defence against torpedoes in wartime but in reality they were for defence against anything else which happened to be in the sea at the same time as they were.

"Where to Captain?" the American first officer asked.

"I think we'll head for Ascension Island Number One. Set a course will you."

"The opposite direction from the approaching Spanish forces and lots of cheap beer. A great choice I feel."

They'd steamed at full speed through the Straits of Gibraltar, between Spain and Morocco and successfully managed to avoid hitting both of them completely. Then they were finally into the Atlantic Ocean and bound for Ascension Island.

While the Americans did what they usually did in any situation that could result in them having to fight any real action (run) the preparations for Queen Eleanor's visit had almost been completed. Even the Barbary apes on the rock itself had been given a spruce up. Under the direction of the park manager each of them had been captured and subjected to a hygienic bath, just in case they should approach the Queen on her visit to the sanctuary. Being jumped on by a European ape with a shitty bum wasn't considered the correct way to treat the Queen of England, which leads us to ask the question of how she ever conceived the Prince of Wales and his other siblings.

Reports had started to filter down to the colony of the approach of the Spanish navy from Barcelona but this hadn't surprised many citizens. It was expected that the Spanish government would make a few waves and a fleet playing with itself in the Mediterranean was the least they'd anticipated from their lifelong enemy.

Roy's plane by this time had been diverted to Algiers, after fog temporarily closed the airport in Gibraltar and he was sitting in the Algiers transit lounge, awaiting a change in the weather. With the airport at Gibraltar protruding half out into the sea, it was subject to coastal weather conditions and fog was one of those problems. It usually didn't last for long and by mid afternoon even the most persistent fog had usually lifted but until then the passengers of British International Airways, flight 473 were stuck in North African.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, British International Airways regret to announce that flight 473 to Gibraltar will be slightly delayed. Please listen out for any further announcements. Thank You," the overhead tannoy informed them.

Short, sweet and very uninformative, exactly what you'd have expected from an airline public relation department. It had been eight hours since they'd arrive in Algiers and the atmosphere in the cramped transit lounge was becoming rather fetid.

"I spy, with my little eye ... let me think ... something beginning with the letter 'P'. What is it?" Roy was having an intellectually challenging conversation with a six-year-old boy.

As he said the letter 'P' a very scruffy looking Jack Russell terrier disappeared into the crowd returning in less than a minute with an empty coffee cup from the next table. In the absence of any other entertainment their game had become a major spectator sport and nearly everybody watched, totally enthralled by the action. Years of watching soap operas had already honed most of their higher thought processes away and 'I-Spy' was akin to 'Mastermind' in this arena.

"Plastic cup," the boy replied without a second thought.

"Who am I playing against, you or that dog?" Roy demanded.

"If you take them independently or even jointly, you come off short on the intelligence front," came a comment from the audience who'd gathered around them.

"Who asked for your opinion anyway?" Roy retaliated. "You're distracting my concentration levels."

"It can't take that much to concentrate the brainpower of a peanut," the heckler continued.

"Who do you think you're talking to? Do you know who I am?" Roy challenged.

"I don't really care who you think you are mate. I know what you're not and remotely intelligent is surely one of them," the heckler responded.

The rest of the passengers instinctively formed a circle around them and increased its circumference by some subconscious signal, which must have originated in the schoolyard, until the area inside the circle, by some remarkable coincidence, was exactly the same size as a boxing ring. After eight hours in the transit lounge life was obviously becoming very tense and a teeny bit of hostility appeared to be creeping in. There were only a limited number of things to 'I-Spy' in the sterile environment of airport accommodation and you could probably count them all on one hand.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, your attention please, British International Airways would like to announce that flight 473 to Gibraltar is ready for boarding. Would all passengers please make their way to gate 14 and have your transit cards ready. British International Airways wishes to apologise for any inconvenience this delay may have caused," the metallic insincerity of the apology noticeable to all apart from the clinically brain dead.

"At last, we're on the move again. It's nice of them to apologise, isn't it?" Roy commented.

Nobody thought it appropriate to reply to his last remark, taking into consideration the closeness to violence on the last occasion. Like well-broken horse they all shuffled towards the departure gate, where they saw their first live airline representative for eight hours. It's amazing how they became and extinct species when there was a likelihood of complaints. (It must be a natural occurring self-preservation instinct).

"Transit cards please. Welcome back onboard," the insincere smile was back again.

It had only taken a short while to load the plane and again they were hurtling down the runway into the air and on their way towards Gibraltar. Just as Roy was about to drop off to sleep though, the kid in the seat behind him started absentmindedly swinging his legs. Tap, tap, tap, tap. Roy tried to ignore the irritating vibrations, which were starting to get to him. The episode in the Algiers transit lounge had upset him more than even he knew.

The baggage reclaim at Gibraltar Airport hadn't done anything to alleviate Roy's tension either, considering his checked baggage was inadvertently been unloaded in Algiers and consequently hadn't arrived in Gibraltar with him. What's more he still

had the queues of Immigration and Passport control to contend with. Nobody was in a good mood and it was surprising nothing more than the occasional heated argument hadn't occurred so far.

"Reason for visit and length of stay in Gibraltar?" an immigration robot asked.

"I'm a reporter with The Weekly Global, here to cover the Royal visit," Roy replied.

"Length of stay?"

"I already told you, I'm here for the royal visit."

"Just answer the question and don't get mouthy! How long do you intend to stay in Gibraltar?"

"OK, OK, keep your shirt on. It'll be about four or five days at the most."

"Is this visit for business or pleasure?"

"If you call chasing the Queen around the world pleasure, then I'm a monkey's uncle."

"I've already warned you once about your flippancy attitude. If you want to enter Gibraltar, just answer the questions."

"OK then, business."

"Right, you can enter. Have a nice stay in Gibraltar."

"Why all the fuss about how long I was going to stay if you knew I was going to be admitted anyway?"

"Just move along. Next!" The immigration officer was getting just a tad annoyed at Roy's continuous arguments. It was fortunate at this point that he'd decided to give up and just walked on towards the custom hall.

"Anything to declare?" the customs officer challenged.

"YES! Two kilos of heroin, three hand grenades and an Uzi," Roy replied.

Getting annoyed at the bureaucracy was one thing but trying to joke with a customs official was a fatal mistake, as Roy was about to find out. Before he could say 'only joking', he was laying face down on the floor with his wrists handcuffed behind his back. More customs officials were arriving by the second as alarms sounded throughout the terminal building creating a cacophony of sound. Up to his neck in it and sinking fast was a very apt turn of phrase to Roy's current predicament.

"Where's your sense of humour? It was only a joke. Don't you think your over-reacting just a teeny little bit here? What do you think your doing now? Leave my trousers alone. Why are you pulling my trousers off? I don't think taking my trousers off is going to solve anything."

"It's going to solve the question of where you've hidden two kilos of heroin and all the other stuff."

"I told you before, I was only joking. Why don't you believe me?"

"Well, we've got to make sure haven't we."

"What makes you think there's enough room up my arse to fit all that stuff anyway? Of course I was only joking. It's obvious, isn't it?"

"Just making sure."

"ARGHH, OUGH, YOWEEEEEEEE!!!!!"

"Nothing here," the customs officer reported. "Maybe we ought to think about surgery to see if it's in his stomach?"

"WHAT!!!" came the high pitched squeal from the examination couch.

"Only joking. You're free to go now."

A very dejected and bow legged Roy staggered quietly out of the airport with a resolution, never to joke with customs officials ever again. At the rank outside the airport, a pack of cab drivers curiously watched Roy slowly make his way across the airport forecourt. Looking rather dejected and dishevelled, he gradually made his way in their general direction.

"I see you've met our customs officers. Very thorough aren't they?" the first taxi driver commented. "Where do you want to go to?"

"I want to go to where the royal visit is taking place," Roy instructed the cab driver with the intention of getting this assignment over with as soon as possible. For some reason he'd developed a disliking of foreign assignments and wished he was back in the print-room at The Weekly Global offices in Fleet St. On the other side of the coin, Ed was more than content to have Roy out from under his feet for a short while and was busy making a list of possible assignments for him in the future.

"Where's your luggage?" the taxi driver asked.

"Ask British International Airways," Roy replied. "It's probably in Timbuktu by now, if it's not still in Algiers."

"You left your luggage in Algiers. Are you brain damaged?"

"No, I'm just fed up with foreign countries, now let's find the royal visit."

Leaving the terminal building taxi rank the cab drove down the road parallel to the runway and close to the gates into Spain. Gates that were now once again tightly sealed. The steady stream of cars which usually flowed from the Spanish side of the border were now non-existent. Stopping at the runway crossing gates while the

stoplights flashed red, another jet aircraft approached to land at the colony's only airport.

"What are we waiting here for?" Roy asked.

"We have to wait until the planes have landed. They have the right of way at the moment."

"You mean we have to drive across the runway to get to the town?"

"That's right. We have to wait until there's a break in the aircraft traffic before we can go anywhere except Spain and with the fog only just lifting it might be a while before we're allowed to cross," the taxi driver explained.

Gibraltar Airport was strange in comparison to other airports, not only did the runway protrude half out into the sea but if you were travelling from either Spain or the airport terminal, you had to cross the runway to get to the town of Gibraltar itself. For Roy this meant sitting in the back seat of a taxi for nearly an hour as the backlog of flights delayed by the fog were given priority to land. Needless to say the taxi driver left the meter running during this time, easily recognising a newcomer to the colony. It was obviously a subconscious signal that taxi drivers worldwide pick up on. The 'this one's good for a few bucks' signal.

While Roy was sitting watching the planes land, the royal yacht Britannia had just entered the harbour entrance and was approaching the moorings at HMS Rooke. The massed bands of the local defence force were playing 'God save the Queen' while the soldiers of the Black Watch stood smartly to attention on the dockside.

The old cruise liner style Britannia had reluctantly been replaced as a parting token when the Queen's finances were rationalised. The new Britannia was in fact an old high speed cross channel ferry, considered surplus to requirements after the construction of the channel tunnel. After being moored in a backwater harbour for five years, the treasury finally purchased the rusted heap for next to nothing. Looking like a floating shoebox on the outside, the high-speed catamaran was furnished to the standard of a five star hotel inside. Capable of over forty knots in a calm sea it was a major asset to the Queen for moving quickly between her busy schedules of royal visits.

She may have been built like a box, without the usual elegant lines of other ships but HMY Britannia still looked resplendent, decked out in her royal pennants. It was only going to be a quick visit to the departing colony. She still had seven countries in Africa and five in South America to visit before sailing around Cape Horn into the Pacific Ocean. A short visit of only a few hours it might have been but the population of Gibraltar certainly knew how to throw a party. Long after the Queen left it would still be going on and it looked like the whole town had turned out at the dockside to welcome the royal yacht.

At the level crossing controlling the traffic heading for town, Roy was still sitting in the back of the taxi, oblivious to the fact that the Queen had already arrived. It had

only been thirty minutes since they'd arrived at the crossing and true to Roy's luck the visit was preceding without him.

"Aren't you going to the celebrations yourself?" Roy asked the taxi driver in way of conversation.

"Can't say I'm really interested in royal visits," the taxi driver replied. "Standing on the dockside waving a plastic flag won't put bread on my table. Sitting here with the meter running will though."

"You mean I'm expected to pay for sitting here when we could have been there by now? I can see the town from here, it's only five minutes walk."

"If you want to walk, be my guest," the driver replied and with that Roy paid the accumulated charge and proceeded to walk towards the distant buildings.

He'd only covered about fifty feet when he heard a loud roaring noise in his ears, closely followed by a very strong wind. Blown onto his backside, he glanced up as the sun disappeared behind a giant jet aircraft, less than five feet above his head. Roy had learnt the hard way that trying to cross a runway against the lights was worse than doing the same at a level crossing. Where he'd looked from side to side, his limited intelligence had neglected to prompt him to check upwards and the approaching jet aircraft had consequently been out of his line of sight.

"Changed your mind have you?" the taxi driver asked as Roy crawled back across the runway to the waiting cab. "Shall I start the meter running again?"

"Start whatever you like. I just want to get this job over with and get the hell out of here. I hate Gibraltar." Roy climbed back into the taxi and collapsed on the seat.

It was to be another thirty minutes before the lights changed to green and the taxi finally moved forward towards the town. Roy didn't notice, he had his eyes tightly closed all the way across the runway. Needless to say the royal visit was well underway by the time Roy even entered the town and was well clear of the naval base when the taxi dropped him off.

"I'm a reporter with The Weekly Global newspaper," Roy informed the guard at the gates to HMS Rooke. "Where can I find the Queen?"

"They should be nearing their visit to the rock by now," the guard calculated. "Take the cable car to the top of the rock and it's well signposted from there"

At the Ape's Den on top of the rock of Gibraltar, the staff charged with ensuring the apes have a long a healthy life were in a state of near panic.

"What do you mean they're all dead?" the chief warden shrieked.

"I mean they're lying across the rock, on their backs, with their feet in the air," his assistant reported.

"Maybe they're just sleeping," the chief warden said hopefully.

"Do apes stop breathing when they're sleeping?" the assistant asked. "There's no way out of it, they're all dead, D E A D dead. What are we going to do when the Queen asks us how they are?"

"We could tell her they've gone on a holiday to Morocco," he suggested, "Doesn't sound convincing does it?" he asked, knowing the answer already.

"Not in the slightest. Anyway, you'd better think of something quickly, the cable car's on its way up here now."

"What about if we just sit them upright in various poses and pretend they're docile?"

"It might just work," the assistant agreed. "We'd better get moving if we're going to get them all positioned in time."

The next five minutes were filled with frantic darting backwards and forwards between different parts of the rock, sitting up and rearranging all the dead apes before the Queen's cable car arrived at the top. Unbeknown to the warden, the apes had all been allergic to the detergent in the cleaning solutions, and consequently died of anaphylactic shock as a result. Indirectly, trying to impress the Queen had caused the extinction of the only free roaming apes on the European continent.

"I must say that I'm impressed with the tidiness of your Ape Den, warden," Queen Eleanor commented. "Are the apes always this inactive?"

"Very docile creatures are the Barbary apes, your majesty. They can sit for hours, apparently not moving a muscle. Comes from a hunting instinct, when they have to silently sit waiting for their prey."

"I thought you said they were vegetarians?"

"Only in the dietary sense. Err... In a mating sense they're extremely predatory animals. They'll sit for hour in the dark waiting to pounce on an unsuspecting female."

"You make them sound like rapists. If that's the case why are they inactive during the daytime?" The Queen was starting to corner the ad-libbing chief warden.

"They wore themselves out last night. It's the height of the mating season at the moment, your majesty. We can't keep them apart."

"You make them sound like a red headed ex-princess I know."

"The Barbary ape is a very friendly creature. If it wasn't the mating season you wouldn't be able to keep them away from the tourists."

"Can't keep them awake more like. They must have taken lessons from the Duke of Edinburgh. Oh, by the way, the third one from the back just fell over. Maybe you ought to pick him up again before he looks like he's dead." And with that parting

comment the royal party proceeded on towards St Michael's Cave before returning to the cable car again.