

# 4

By the time the royal party had completed the tour of St Michael's Cave and had returned to the upper cable car station, Roy had finally arrived at the bottom end of the cable. Finding the building empty, Roy headed towards the waiting cable car and eagerly searched for the start button. In line with his usual level of intelligence Roy had mistakenly thought the controls to the cable car were in each individual car. Not even being able to drive (a bonus to the rest of society) Roy's knowledge of mechanical apparatus was less than zero. He'd spent at least five minutes searching underneath the seats for a hidden lever to pull, without any obvious success, when suddenly the car started to move up the rock.

It wasn't a consequence of Roy's actions that the cable car suddenly started moving. At the top of the rock the royal party had just finished their tour of the upper level and were on their way back down again to rejoin the royal yacht. As the Queen's car gradually descended the rock, Roy's car travelled in the opposite direction. It was at the halfway point when Roy realised that he'd missed the royal visit and climbed onto the seats to get a better look at the Queen as she descended the rock again. Unfortunately for Roy his abilities to even stand were suspect and he slipped off the edge of the cable car seat, cracking his head on the window frame as he fell. There may not have been much inside Roy's empty head but it still followed basic medical principals out of pure routine. One of these principals concluded that if you hit your head hard enough, your brain goes to sleep. It was in this state of concussion that Roy ended up on the floor of the cable car, as it parked itself neatly into the upper cable car station.

With the royal visit over, the town council escorted Queen Eleanor back to HMS Rooke and onto Britannia for a royal banquet. Unwilling to accept enforced frugality, she still entertained her guests to the highest quality food she could justify. Caviar and salmon were abundant and while the visit had been proceeding, the ship's catering staff slipped ashore to raid the few shops, which were still open.

A notable exception to the guest list was the chief of police, although he'd been invited, he'd excused himself at the cable car station, on the pretence of an important police matter to deal with. Leaving the party to stuff themselves silly, he wanted to know why all the apes appeared to be stuffed also. As the police chief went up, Roy's cable car came back down and slipped neatly into the station at the bottom of the rock.

"Do you want me to wait for you?" the cable car operator asked.

"You can go home," the police chief answered. "I'll get a lift back down with the ape warden."

With the cable car system now completely shut down, Roy lay undisturbed in the lower cable car station, unconscious but still breathing. Music could be heard echoing across the harbour as the town council continued to party long after Britannia had sailed out of the port. The Black Watch had joined in the festivities in their own way

and most of the dockside pub windows had long since disappeared. Recently the regiment had acquired a band of groupies who followed them around the world. These experienced glaziers and carpenters tailed the Scotsmen on assignments, making a lucrative living rebuilding the towns that they were stationed in.

Out of the Straits of Gibraltar and into the Atlantic Ocean, the new style royal yacht sped through the darkness and along the African coast towards their next scheduled royal visit.

"How much did we spend on food and drink during the luncheon last night?" Queen Eleanor asked while pondering over the royal account books.

A recent government election promise to rationalize royal spending had been carried out. Not only had the civil list been cut to nearly zero, the royal family's personal fortune had been frozen pending a treasury investigation into the source of their wealth. Until it could be established that the royals had worked for their savings the whole royal issue would be treated like a business and every penny accounted for.

"We spent way too much," the Queen's financial advisor replied. "We're well over budget for this financial quarter your majesty. We need to concentrate more on reducing the cost of these social functions. That way we'd end up in profit after royal visits."

"What do you expect, we've never needed to justify our expenses before. In the old days we just spent all the money we wanted to, then sent the bill to the government. The system always worked exceptionally well in those days."

"It may have worked well for you your majesty but unfortunately the public got fed up with footing the bill all the time."

The newly formed 'Senior Nobility Overseer of Bills' had appointed the royal accountant, financial consultants for the royal budget and a sub-department of the Treasury. Since the disastrous referendum where the royal family had been required to become financially viable, balancing the books had become the biggest nightmare of a monarchy used to unlimited financing.

"Can't we just sell a few more 'By Royal Appointment' logos to get some extra cash?" Queen Eleanor suggested. She was more enthusiastic for extra resources, as opposed to a cut in her living standards.

"We have a slight problem with that area of business at the moment. The public looks upon these logos as indicating that you actually use the products that are being sponsored. The companies are now starting to demand proof of this, for their advertising campaigns you understand."

"Well, what's the problem with that?"

"There's a few people in the country who refuse to believe that you ride an easy-rider motorcycle while smoking Cuban cigars."

"We'll just have to convince them otherwise then won't we. Don't we have the samples they gave us down below?"

"Yes, your majesty, they're in the hold, along with the royal toilet paper and the regal condoms."

"Did I really sponsor condoms?"

"Yes your majesty. There's a royal appointment logo on everyone of them," the S.N.O.B. representative replied. "How about increasing the charge for a royal visit?" he returned the conversation to the subject of money.

"We can't do that. I'm only just undercutting the Pope as it is. He only gets rebooked in safe venues now, except that is for his Saudi Arabian tour planned for a couple of weeks time. Can't figure out why they want him over there when there's no Catholics to visit."

"Well, if we can't raise the charge for royal visits, how about leasing some of your property?"

"There's nothing left to lease really. Balmoral's already a five star hotel. Windsor Castle restaurant and catering services are doing fine but at maximum capacity and Buckingham Palace bed & breakfast is full all year round. We've got to come up with something different."

"How good are you at drawing cartoon helicopters? We could put some very simple stories with them and so long as your name is written..."

"It's been done already."

"Trains then?"

"No, I think that avenue's been well and truly milked by the Welsh."

"What about a hit record. Could be good for a couple of million."

"No chance. 'God Save the Queen' wouldn't even sell one copy, let alone a million. We need something new, something modern, the kind of something that would take the country by storm."

"Well I'm all out of ideas, your majesty."

"I know, I've got it. I could have an agony column in 'The Times'. After all the agony I've had with those sons of mine, I should be an expert by now."

"Great idea, your majesty. I'll start the enquiries after we've taken these photographs. Could you just hold still for a few seconds."

The Queen was on the aft deck of Britannia, sitting on a Hell's Angle motorcycle while smoking a Cuban cigar. The financial advisor had made him-self busy working the video camera.

"That should keep the sponsors happy for a while. Let's hope that the condom suppliers don't demand any proof of usage," the accountant commented.

"If the condom suppliers demand proof they can forget it. I'm not subjecting Dick to that kind of indecency."

King Richard IV had taken the public's decision to rationalize his spending a lot harder than Queen Eleanor. Whereas she seemed content to roll over accept working for a living, he on the other hand advocated a return to monarchy rule. He even refused to accept the term 'Duke of Edinburgh'. In his mind he was a king. He was born to rule this country and its pathetic citizens. He was of royal blood. The only fly in his ointment was Queen Eleanor herself and her willingness to work as an ambassador for Britain.

"I wouldn't worry too much about the condom makers," the accountant added. "They're not likely to ask for photographs. They'll probably just want a royal quote about what flavour you preferred."

"Flavour! I thought we were talking about condoms here?"

"We are your majesty. It's a modern thing the youngsters seem to enjoy. If you ask your sons, I'm sure they'll be able to tell you all about it."

"With the oldest one being a raving lunatic botanical linguist and the youngest a thespian, I'm not so sure about that. I suppose the middle one should have a good idea. He was married to a perverted nymphomaniac for a while."

Queen Eleanor returned to counting the takings from the Gibraltar royal visit while Britannia skimmed at 40 knots across a calm Atlantic Ocean. "Where are we going now?" she asked.

"The next visit is to The Gambia, then four other African countries before we head across the South Atlantic towards Brazil. From there we have a few countries to visit in South America and eventually around Cape Horn into the Pacific Ocean."

"Well get on the phone to London and organise a column in 'The Times for me'. We need the extra income as soon as possible and tell them I want money up front."