

# 1

"Good morning Roy, did you have a nice holiday?" Sadie asked, being decidedly pleasant for a Monday morning.

This had taken Roy completely by surprise. He wasn't used to the more pleasant side of his older sister's personality. Throughout their childhood she'd always been mean to him. Maybe this was why in adult life she felt the need to protect him to a certain degree. She'd made sure he had a good job and the newspaper even supplied a central London flat for him, that is if you could call a converted store-room attached to the print-room a flat.

"What holiday?" Roy replied. "I haven't been on holiday."

"That's what you probably need then. How would you like an expenses paid cruise of the Caribbean? On a first class cruise liner."

"You mean the Q.E.III is touring the Caribbean at the moment. What's the catch?" Despite his simplicity Roy was starting to get a subconscious signal about Sadie's hidden meanings.

"It's not the Q.E.III I'm afraid, but it is a first class cruise line. Only the top people sail on it and you have to be either famous, rich or titled to buy a ticket."

"I think I know why you want me to go on this cruise. It was the cat in the print rollers wasn't it?" Roy was referring to the previous night's delayed printing of the early edition.

"No we're used to that. Your feud with Fleabag is well known now and the print-room mascot still has seven lives left, if we don't include this near miss."

"Then why do you want me to go on a snobby cruise then?" Roy's brain had reached capacity level and was close to overload at this point.

"Well, to be honest with you there is a little job I'd like you to do for me at the same time. In return for an expenses paid holiday, all you have to do is interview the ex-princess who's supposed to be onboard the American registered ship."

"Are we talking about Fungy, the daughter-in-law that Ellie, sorry Queen Eleanor, seethes about all the time? I'm not sure I'm going to be popular in Buckingham Palace if I do this job. Why can't you send somebody else instead?" Roy felt torn between his loyalties to his older sister on the one hand and his 'close' companion Queen Eleanor III on the other.

"Nobody else on the staff could get a ticket. As I said before, you've got to have a title, and we've already booked you onto the next sailing from Miami, Sir Roy," Sadie teased.

"I wish I didn't have that stupid title sometime but I couldn't really refuse could I?"

Queen Eleanor III had in fact knighted Roy on his return from Antarctica, purportedly for services rendered in her rescue. Only Roy and Ellie knew what those services actually were. One month in a cave on the frozen wastes of Antarctica and Roy had been of considerable service to the crown.

"I suppose there isn't much to keep me here in London, is there?" he said.

Queen Ellie now had King Richard (Dick) back and Karma was too busy at the university to see much of him. Maybe a Caribbean cruise was what he needed to revive his sex drive. He'd had nobody to practice with, his previous consorts were otherwise engaged and nobody else was desperate enough to consider him.

"OK I'll do it. Where do I catch the boat from?"

"You're booked on the early morning flight out of Gatwick Airport to Miami. You need to catch the Gatwick Express from Victoria railway station. I'll have the company driver drop you off there in plenty of time," Sadie rubbed her hands at another successful idea to keep Roy out of the way.

"Why Gatwick? I usually fly out of Heathrow. It's easier. The tube goes there," Roy protested.

"The problem is that you're banned from Heathrow Airport. They even have posters in the underground staff office with your picture on it. For now we'll have to make do with Gatwick, until they forbid you to cross their doorstep as well. How about trying not to upset anyone this time."

It wasn't long before The Daily Global driver pulled up outside Victoria station in the company Mercedes and Roy climbed down from the cab.

"How about taking a bundle of papers in with ya mate?" the van driver requested. "Just drop them at the paper shop between the concourses. They'll know what to do with them."

Roy staggered through the archway leading into the station; two bundles of newspapers loaded onto his outstretched arms and a suitcase on wheels following behind like a faithful dog.

Unfortunately for Roy the inevitable happened and his heavy suitcase was trailing behind him, lying on its side, the wheels totally ineffective. Loaded down with newspapers that towered above his head, he crabbed sideways towards the paper shop in the centre of Victoria station. Eventually after reaching the shop, he deposited his load onto the checkout desk and puffed to catch his breath before asking where to take them.

"That'll be £62.40p," the checkout assistant informed him. She'd counted the number of papers in the stack and multiplied the individual cost.

"No, I'm delivering, not buying," Roy explained, still half out of breath.

"You're trying to tell me that dressed like that and carrying a suitcase, you're a newspaper delivery driver. SECURITY!!!"

Within seconds two burly private security guards had positioned themselves either side of Roy and the store manager was approaching fast.

"What's going on here?" the manager asked as she arrived.

"He dumps two bundles of newspapers on my counter and now that I've totalled it up on the till, he refuses to pay. Says he's delivering them to us. Doesn't look like a delivery driver to me, suitcase and all," the sales assistant quickly explained before Roy could answer.

"What have you got to say for yourself? Is this some kind of stupid prank or something?" The manager's voice had ice in it.

"I work for The Daily Global..." Roy started to explain.

"Can't you think of a better excuse than that?" the manager cut Roy short. "I think this is a matter for the transport police," she decided.

"But I was only trying to help..." Roy tried to say, but he'd been hoisted by his armpits and was being carried towards the police building opposite.

"ello, 'ello. What have we here?" the desk sergeant asked. Roy instantly started laughing. "This is no laughing matter, m'lad," the sergeant continued.

"Do they teach you those line at police training college?" Roy asked. "'ello, 'ello Mr police-y-man. What's the time Mr police-y-man?"

The sergeant's sense of humour was obviously on the lost property list, still sitting at Charing Cross station awaiting collection because Roy was soon hauled laughing down to the cells.

"I don't think he'll be able to answer any questions until whatever he's on has worn off," the desk sergeant commented.

"Evenin' all. Nick, nick. Nick, nick." THUD, "Owww..." Roy's voice echoed up the stairway.

Two hours in the cells had done wonders for Roy's inappropriate sense of humour and it had also done wonders for his alibi. Searching his belongings had resulted in the discovery of his Daily Global identity pass and a phone call to Sadie had confirmed that he'd been dropped off at Victoria station by the company's delivery van. Even the limited intellect of the transport police couldn't miss the obvious. Roy had therefore been released immediately and all his property returned to him.

"I hope we can put this little misunderstanding behind us, Sir Roy," the sergeant commented.

"You mean the arrest in the paper shop or the bouncing off the walls on the way to the cells?" Roy asked.

"A little accident when you missed your footing on the steps, sir."

"Five times?"

"You were laughing so much, it was difficult for you to walk straight."

"I may decide to do an in-depth study of the police, when I get back from my Caribbean cruise. Don't forget to buy The Daily Global for the details," Roy commented as he collected his belongings and walked off towards the Gatwick Express platforms, his suitcase trailing behind him on its side.

After stopping to pick up the suitcase four more times he finally reached the entrance to platforms 13 and 14, the dedicated platforms for the Gatwick express service.

"Platform fourteen for the Gatwick express service, direct to Gatwick airport, calling at Gatwick airport," the tannoy announced.

This notification in triplicate was obviously designed so that the terminally brain dead couldn't get on the wrong train. Roy being a member of the aforementioned category continued onto the platform, stooping to pick up his suitcase once again. The lead had got caught around the wheels and he'd decided to dispense with the pathetic contraption and carry it instead.

Thirty minutes on the train and an unsuspecting airport was about to be inflicted with Roy. Being in competition with each other Heathrow had conveniently forgotten to inform their rival of what was in store for them.

"Am I too late for my flight?" Roy asked, putting his ticket and passport on the check-in counter in a pre-emptive move. "I got kind of delayed at Victoria station."

"No problem at all Sir Roy, do come this way. May I take your suitcase for you?" the ground stewardess asked.

This helpful manner was a shock to Roy's system after his previous experience with airline staff.

"Why are you being so nice today?" Roy asked rather bluntly.

"You have a first class ticket sir," she replied. "Now sir, I just have to check your luggage in and you can relax in the executive lounge until the departure time."

Roy's powers of comprehension were working overtime. His usually tight fisted sister had not only sent him on a Caribbean cruise, but she'd flown him out to Miami first

class. There was something he was missing, he didn't know what it was but it was subtle and would probably boomerang back on him before the end of this assignment.

"You mean I didn't have to check-in at least two hour before the flight this time?"

"No sir, that's just for the economy passengers. I take it you've never flown first class before?"

"I didn't even know I was on a first class flight," Roy explained. "What other surprises do you have for me?"

The ground stewardess gave a friendly little laugh before answering. "Well, there's the freshly cooked food..."

"Not the usual plastic box of reheated indigestible matter of indeterminate origin, with the little plastic knives that break as you attempt to cut through the protective shell of whatever it's supposed to be?"

"No sir, our in-flight cook prepares each meal individually from the select menu. Today the speciality is chicken in red wine sauce and..." Instinctively the stewardess produced a paper bag from behind the counter. "Most people wait until they're on the plane before they get airsick."

"It's not airsickness, it just that there are two food items which trigger a violent sickness in me. You could say it was something I'd eaten."

"If you tell me what they are sir, I'll instruct the chef to avoid serving them."

"One is the dark coloured alcoholic drink you just mentioned."

"You mean the type of sauce?"

"Correct, and the second is the Chinese equivalent of a potato."

"I'm not quite sure I understand that one," the stewardess replied. "It can't be the sweet potato because it sounds the same. Can you give me another clue?"

"Main diet of the Chinese. Makes a lovely pudding with swirls of jam."

"Oh you mean rice. Nothing like a potato."

Roy hadn't heard the last part of her reply as his head was back over the paper bag and had reappeared tinged with a green colour.

"Please don't mention that word again. Now where's this executive lounge you told me about?"

"Follow me sir. I'll take your bag if you like."

They walked out of the check-in hall and on towards the executive lounge. The ground stewardess pleased that this first class passenger wasn't the usual arrogant little snob, who thought money bought servitude from the staff. Roy completely unfamiliar with the snob set was therefore completely out of his depth in the executive lounge. He was sure he recognised a couple of the faces, probably pop stars or TV presenters.

"Excuse me," Roy picked a likely candidate for a conversation.

The recipient of Roy's attention turned towards him with a poker face, looked him up and down, mainly down, before giving just a "Hmmmfff," lifting his nose in the air and turning his head the other way.

Not only did arrogance prevail but ignorance featured high in the snob personality as well. Roy found himself an empty armchair in the corner of the room and sat down. He missed the hustle and bustle of the departure hall and the interactive manner of economy passengers. The first class executive lounge was more like a mausoleum. The businessmen were too busy making money on their lap top computers, the aristocrats were vying for social status and unwilling to associate themselves with the lower classes and the celebrities thought they were better than everybody else because they had a job performing on TV

Another thing Roy noticed was missing was the constant droning of the overhead tanooy. The insulated walls of the executive lounge prevented even the slightest evidence of life creeping into the room and the arrogant lifestyles of the occupants, prevented even the slightest glimpse of life existing on the inside. The TV idols may have been the life and soul of the party on screen, but off screen they were the worst mix of hatred, impatience, arrogance, ignorance and bigotry ever devised by man. America had found the perfect answer to communism. They'd inflicted materialism and idol worship onto them and it had broken the system.

"Sir Roy? Your flight is ready." The ground stewardess was gently shaking Roy's shoulder as all the other heads turned at the mention of his title.

"Oh, sorry, I must have dozed off. Did I miss the plane?"

"No Sir Roy, we have plenty of time. They won't leave without you."

Leaving the occupants of the executive lounge to ponder over the who's who of who Sir Roy was, still half asleep, Roy followed the stewardess to his waiting plane. Handing him over to the air stewardess he was directed towards his seat. Not only were the seats in first class considerably larger, they were also full recliners and came complete with a built in bar. Luxury was something that hadn't been inflicted on Roy before. Maybe this flight was Sadie's idea to soften him up for the opulence of a snobby cruise of the Caribbean. He was out of his depth and sinking fast and he hadn't even left England yet.

"Would you like to select your meal from the menu sir?" the stewardess asked.

"Why is this one covered by a sticky label?"

"The ground crew informed us of your culinary preferences and the consequences of certain dishes. As a precaution we've ensured that you can't even see the dishes in print."

"And you're not going to mention them either? Just for the fun of it."

"No sir. This is the first class cabin. We don't have fun here."

'What a miserable life', thought Roy. 'Definitely economy class on the way back'.