

ROBBERY AT THE COUNTRY CLUB

'Gonzalez!'

'Gonzalez, get yourself in here!'

This was no more than a normal greeting from Captain Alonzo. Slightly worse, for it was Monday morning and no one liked Mondays, particularly Captain Alonzo. The usual robberies, drug arrests and vandalism had taken place at the weekend. The cells were full with the disorderly, the drug addicts and the drunks still fighting from Saturday night. The Mayor had been on the telephone with complaints about this and that. Some officers had been seconded to help the National Police apprehend some illegal immigrants who had come ashore near Torrevieja. And now, to top it all, a report of robberies at the Senat de Naranja Country Club: a club with a difference. How could anyone be involved in a robbery was beyond belief, for the club was a home to naturalists. 'Where do they hide the stolen jewellery?' Alonzo thought.

Captain Alonzo moved his cigar from one side of his mouth to the other, complete with loud sucking noises. If they allowed him to leave his desk that he would show them, he thought. It doesn't need someone mulling over the problems, sorting out the options, going round the houses. What was required was somebody to get up there, sort it out fast, no if and buts. Someone like him, direct and positive, shoot from the hip, somebody with intelligence...

'Gonzalez, where the hell you are? Gonzalez!'

'Captain, I am here.' Gonzalez hurried into the office cleaning dirt off his hands onto an even dirtier cloth.

'What are you doing?'

'Checking my motor cycle.'

'We have the mechanics for that.'

'The mechanics don't go at 180 kilometres per hour on the *autovía*. I check it for my own safety.'

'You won't need that motor cycle where you are going. I have some confidential work for you. You are in Crime, NOW. Not next month, but NOW, immediately.' Alonzo smiled, or was it a grimace? The Captain was not one to crack jokes. 'You will like it.

You will definitely like it. There have been robberies at the nudist club in Senat de Naranja, in the Orba Valley. I want you to take charge of the investigation.'

'*Cómo no?* Captain,' said Gonzalez, eager to escape. He could see that Alonzo was in a bad mood. So bad, he could even shoot the prisoners today, he thought. Clear out; keep the bad tempered old bugger happy. Yet Gonzalez liked the Captain, respected how he took everything seriously and personally. He admired how the Captain defended them all publicly and then ripped them apart privately if they did something wrong. And...while he had been sitting on the fence up to now, he was beginning to fancy Alonzo's job in a year's time.

'I'll be up there in about an hour,' stated Gonzalez.

'Hold on! Hold on, Gonzalez! This is undercover work. I will get you a female assistant from the Benidorm Beach Patrol. They are accustomed to nudism, that sort of thing is going on in Benidorm all the time. The two of you book in at the club for a week. I don't want cheap gags and smutty innuendos from you, please. Hmm, nudism...it's a sticky subject, Gonzalez. There could be important people who are members of the club and do not wish to be identified. It's going to need careful handling!'

'Wait a minute, wait a minute and wait a minute, Captain. You are not suggesting I and that female from the Benidorm Beach Patrol book into that club, take our clothes off and try to find the robbers? You must be joking, Captain. She is one of my old girl friends, a brunette who lives in Pedreguer. In her job all she wears is a blue hat and matching cuffs. I can't do that. What would María think? What would her mother think? What would...?'

'...Okay then, take María, or if she's busy, take her mother instead.'

'Ha, ha, Captain! Very funny! I'll talk to María tonight. She will need a little persuading.'

'Of course, Gonzalez. And be quick. Remember, undercover - no gun, no truncheon, no radio.'

'I'll take a truncheon. I may need it.'

'You have nowhere to put it.'

It was only a few days later that Gonzalez and María - at the wheel of her shiny new red Volkswagen Golf - found themselves at the entrance to the discreetly titled and very discreetly located Senat de Naranja Country Club. María had required some persuasion to go, but when she realised that Gonzalez could be chaperoned by his old girl friend from the Benidorm Beach Patrol she quickly agreed. Look on the bright side, she thought. See it as a holiday with a difference, to have fun, to advance the Spanish cause of living for today, tomorrow and every day. No clothes are required...just wear a smile and some perfume, she thought. Various other thoughts occurred: 'Do I need new shoes?... What do you wear in the evenings?... Eating soup could be dangerous...'

Senat de Naranja itself was a fairly run down old Spanish village. It would win the prize for the narrowest streets in Spain, so narrow in fact, that stopping a micro car to unload the weekly shopping from Intermarché immediately resulted in grid lock. The Mayor had attempted to solve this problem with traffic lights, which were often mistaken for Christmas decorations or at fiesta time, or a new type of lighting.

Rapid development was inevitably taking place. White villas and a green golf course were replacing orange and lemon groves, with the mayor, architects, developers and financiers all smelling euros. A German and an English urbanization covered the nearby hillside. A common bond existed... THE CLUB. It was inconspicuous, situated at the end of another posh urbanization of white villas owned by rich Swiss, off a minor road, tucked up a tiny lane, on top of a mountain. Although discreet, the small brass sign set above a two metre hedge looked to be exactly what it was: a nudist camp, a proper, traditional nudist camp, of the sort they had in Carry On films. Would Barbara Windsor be giggling inside as she bounced across the volleyball court?

But María and Gonzalez had both decided to give it a try. What could be better, when the rest of the Guardia Civil were dressed in tight fitting uniforms and *abogados* sweated in offices, than to cast aside the trappings of law and order and run free, through the Orba Valley countryside, the wind ruffling their hair, all of their hair? While Spain struggled to survive in the broiling heat and stores emptied of fans and air conditioners bought by sweaty hordes of desperate shoppers, nobody but nobody seemed to mention the obvious solution: off with your clothes.

It was late when they arrived. They picked up a key from a short skirted, fully clothed, plumpish, surly receptionist, who had her face glued to a computer screen playing a DVD. They made their way to a log cabin without encountering a single naked person. It was a little disappointing, but after a good supper they turned the duvet down and fell asleep. Tomorrow was another day.

They awoke late next morning. Gonzalez made coffee. María produced breakfast. Then Gonzalez made more coffee while María did her nails. María tidied up, although with hardly any clothes, there was no mess. Then Gonzalez made even more coffee and sat down to read a magazine about the latest Nike sports goods. María studied her face in the mirror, looking for wrinkles. Gonzalez reached for another magazine.

‘Something bothering you, Gonzalez?’ asked María.

‘No, no.’ He hadn’t considered it before, but going naked in front of a large number of strangers was challenging for both sexes. He had psyched himself up and reckoned he could handle the situation, but it had just occurred to him that nudism presented a special problem for men. ‘What if there’s someone really attractive out there?’ he whimpered. What am I supposed to do?’

‘Did you pack your truncheon?’

‘Ha! Ha! I think I’ll just have a bit more coffee.’

María could take the prevaricating no longer. ‘Right then, get your kit off, we’re going out,’ she said. ‘Let’s show the Senat de Naranja Country Club what we’ve got.’

A nippy breeze blew around their lower regions as they emerged with some trepidation into bright sunlight. White albino skin around their middle bits contrasted with other brown areas which had regularly seen the light of day for a number of years. Nobody seemed to be about. Sticking close to a hedge they tiptoed across a brown patch of earth outside their cabin towards the main path, observing in the distance a fully clothed gardener trimming hibiscus bushes. A Moroccan maid fully clothed in white was pushing her cleaning trolley towards some cabins. But round a corner, there they were! Naked bodies - dozens of them. They stopped dead in their tracks, and stared. Well, it was fascinating. They were bombarded with images of nakedness, but nothing they had seen or felt could have prepared them for the sheer variety of human bodies right in front of them; both simultaneously very, very ordinary and very, very strange.

There was a man in his mid-sixties, his small breasts trembling under his white chest hair. He had a pot belly, thin legs and knock knees but in spite of this, he had a big smile on his face. They could see why, for in one department at least, he was exceptionally well built. By the pool, a couple in their forties lounged on chairs, both deep in holiday paperbacks. He had black hair creeping across most of his body, while she had luxuriant, long blonde hair on her head and none anywhere else. And there was a tanned, muscular man striding purposefully to the bar. He looked the very image of the macho male, were it not for one little thing between his legs, which was bouncing up and down like an excited caterpillar.

Everywhere they looked there was something fascinating and wobbling. All around, body parts that normally hid from the light of day were jiggling, bouncing and lolling in what looked like a desperate bid for attention. The scene was not arousing...but it was compulsive viewing.

‘The problem is, you are not supposed to look,’ said María

‘It’s impossible not to,’ replied Gonzalez.

‘Good manners are not to look. Gawping is rude,’ said María.

‘It’s a denial of basic curiosity not to look,’ replied Gonzalez. ‘When clothes come off, it’s impossible not to be interested in what they’ve been hiding.’

‘The solution to this problem is easy. Everyone here seems to have entered into a strange, surreal conspiracy. They are all naked, but are all busily pretending not to have noticed. They maintain eye to eye contact only. We have to do the same.’

‘Let’s go for a drink,’ said Gonzalez.

‘Coffee?’

‘A proper drink,’ said Gonzalez.

They wandered away from the pool into the clubhouse, to lean tightly pressed against the bar. It had draught beer from Yorkshire, Germany and Spain, Guinness from Ireland and lots of different types of Scotch. The bar stools and chairs were plastic (of the sticky variety) and the tables were emblazoned with the insignia Coke (the drinking variety). Taking command of the situation, Gonzalez said to the fully clothed bargirl dressed in blue jeans and white Tee shirt advertising the Club across her ample chest, ‘A gin and tonic for the lady and a Scotch for me. Make it a large one.’

'You wish,' said María.

They settled in over the next few hours. In fact they found the Club to be a thoroughly civilised and respectable place. The clientèle were a mix of older couples, including quite a few senior citizens of all nationalities. A friendly bunch; full of smiles, 'HOLA's, 'MORGEN's, 'HI's and 'GOOD MORNING's. The conversation flowed. Gonzalez did however find it was a bit disconcerting to discuss the merits of the new Ebro water project with a dark-haired *señorita* when her jauntily angled nipples were pointing straight at his white teeth. María had a similar problem when discussing the planting of a vegetable garden with a hairy Spaniard.

As they retired to their log cabin - for no Spaniard misses a *siesta* - the situation was still perplexing. If you removed the naked people, what you had was a nicely located holiday facility with pleasingly landscaped grounds, log cabins of various levels of luxury and excellent facilities for swimming, tennis, *boules*, and so on. But add the people...

'I still want to look at the bodies,' said Gonzalez.

'Curb the urge to gawp, steal occasional glances instead,' said María.

'Okay, so we were getting used to being naked - now what?' asked Gonzalez.

'The nudist lifestyle embraces health and fresh air, as much as it rejects clothes,' lectured María. 'Tomorrow we have to get out there and get sporty. And remember, Gonzalez, you are here to solve some robberies, not to get an all over suntan.'

'You are right! Tonight we will dress for dinner. Guests are requested to wear clothes in the bar after 7.30 p.m., as blue cellulite appears after that time. We will look for suspicious characters wearing lots of jewellery. Tomorrow we play games.'

The next day at 10.45 a.m. (early for Spanish people), they prepared for the day ahead. They wore nothing other than anti-perspirant, shades and trainers, which made them both feel totally foolish. First they went for *boules*.

'Don't swing it too hard,' Gonzalez cautioned her. 'Just flip it up gently and let it fall. That gets the best results.'

'Don't worry, I know how to handle one of these,' she replied. 'Now you just take one of those smaller balls and throw it. Be sure not to let it go over the boundary, though - it's against the rules.'

'Oh... You've lost the ball, María.'

'Plenty more!'

Next up - tennis!

'Love all!' María called.

'Not just now!' Gonzalez yelled, thinking that she was enjoying herself greatly with multiple innuendos and smutty jokes. The game itself was good for playing starkers. The dangling and wobbly bits did bounce up and down a lot and there was plenty of undignified bending over, but with no shirts and shorts in the way there was no sweat, no stickiness, and a cooling breeze throughout.

After that, it was time for the Jacuzzi. María was shifting around to find a position where she would be pounded by the fiercest jets of bubbles, to feel what she was missing. Suddenly she had her head back and her eyes closed. What's going on here! I don't believe this! Enough, thought Gonzalez... To the bar... again.

Darts was on offer, but that seemed to be asking for trouble. The pool table was unoccupied and it quickly became apparent why. The table was about hip height. You had to lean over it. For some shots you had to lean over it a very long way. This all took place in a bar, under the gaze of assembled old ladies nursing sherry and teenage girls sipping Coke. It's, well, it's a bit awkward. 'Aim for the pink spot,' said an old geezer at the bar. Yes, pool was a great source for innuendos, puns and saucy remarks.

They retired to the cabin - *siesta* time again. 'I feel better today,' said Gonzalez. 'Yes, I am not so self conscious any more. I still find bodies interesting, but I've stopped gawping like an idiot every time I see a new one. I've become mesmerised by the sheer physical sensation, a sense of feeling totally unencumbered.'

'Strip away clothes and you strip away a small but important layer of your personality,' replied a philosophical María. 'By the way, have you seen my watch?' she added.

'No! It will be in your case.'

'It's not! I've checked.'

'My watch is missing too,' said Gonzalez, calmly looking around.

‘We’ve been robbed... I’ll report it to the Guardia,’ said María, panicking.

‘I am the Guardia. There is no need to report this, María. I marked all our valuables with a special powder. Whoever took the watches will have blue dye on their hands. It does not wash off for three days.’

María was stunned. ‘You clever thing... you... my clever Sergeant Gonzalez.’ She was impressed with Gonzalez, oozing massive eye contact and gazing in admiration at her man. ‘All we have to do is to examine people’s hands for blue dye. Who do you think did it then, Gonzalez?’

He was on a roll. ‘It’s an inside job.’ He spoke with the authority of a hard man of the Guardia Civil on his first crime investigation. María looked on with respect. ‘People with no clothes can’t hide watches or go around dripping with jewellery. The guilty person wears clothes. It’s the gardener, the maid, the bargirl or the receptionist. Definitely!’

‘Wow! Have you been reading Agatha Christie again?’ she asked. ‘Who exactly do you think did it, Gonzalez? Tell me!’

‘It cannot be the gardener - he has no access to the cabins. The barmaid was working when our watches went missing. It’s the Moroccan maid or the plump, surly receptionist,’ said Gonzalez. ‘What do you think?’

‘Probably the maid; the watches will be in a Marrakech souk by now.’

With that, there was a hurried knock on the door. It was the Club manager dressed in a pinstriped lightweight grey suit (somewhere to keep his pen and mobile phone, no doubt). He looked shifty, but maintaining strict eye to eye contact he said, ‘Excuse me, Sir, but I know who you are. It was I who reported these thefts to your Captain Alonzo. He is a hard man. When I telephoned him today to ascertain progress he told me he had two undercover operatives in place and to leave him alone as he had other problems. My daughter - the receptionist - and I did not take long to work out who you were. We think it is the Moroccan maid who is guilty.’

‘Why do you come to that conclusion?’ said Gonzalez calmly.

‘Because she has access to all the cabins,’ replied the manager.

‘Possibly,’ said Gonzalez, distancing himself from the Club manager and becoming extremely miffed that everyone was coming to the same conclusion as he was.

The manager rubbed his hands anxiously. 'Can I ask you to handle the situation most discreetly? We have a number of important people here. I do not wish them to think they are holidaying with crooks and robbers. Let me tell you...' At this point the manager lowered his voice and moved closer. 'Let me tell you... the man with black hair creeping across most of his body and the lady with long blonde hair on her head and none anywhere else is the Mayor of Senat de Naranja and his German mistress. The well endowed man in his mid sixties, with small breasts, pot belly, thin legs and knock knees is the district architect. The tanned, muscular, macho male may have nothing to offer physically, but he is a big building contractor. We all know these things happen in Spain... collusion... but if they knew there was a tough member of the Guardia Civil on the site... goodness knows what would happen.... I could be closed down.'

'So, what do you want me to do?' asked Gonzalez.

'If you arrest the maid... discreetly please ...perhaps I can offer you my office?'

'Thank you. If that has to be done...yes, that's a good idea,' said Gonzalez.

With that, the manager left.

Gonzalez and María, still in shades and trainers, their smiles replaced with a frown, and all thoughts of a *siesta* dispelled, went for a walk in the grounds. Nothing much had changed since this morning. The gardener was still snipping away at the hibiscus. Bodies were slightly redder and still wobbling. The pool table was still empty. The barmaid was still serving drinks. The housemaid had finished for the day and was pushing her cleaning trolley into a large outdoor cupboard. Life in the sun was slow and easy. Important people were doing the things important people do by looking unimportant with no clothes on.

'It's relaxing, this nudism,' said María. 'We are now accustomed to being naked. All this health and fresh air! It's good for us. Let's sit down for a while, Gonzalez. Relax. Sit closer. Take it easy for a bit.' María was feeling romantic. Her man was in charge and she was enthusiastically by his side. After a few days, wearing no clothes in private surroundings was now as normal as walking around Intermarché fully clothed. A lack of clothes did not bestow a sexy feeling. In fact, wearing revealing clothes was sexier. She could see Gonzalez was deep in thought. Give him time, all will be revealed. And it was...

'It's too obvious,' he said. 'You think it's the maid because she is Moroccan and has the opportunity. If she is so clearly a thief, then something would have happened before now. The receptionist and the manager think it is the maid but have done nothing about it. All they had to do was sack her. I don't understand this. Let's go looking for blue hands.' As they bounced past reception in their trainers, shades now surplus in the fading sunlight, they saw it. Their search had ended. The receptionist had blue fingers. 'Can I ask you to step into the Manager's office?' said Gonzalez. He drew himself to his full height. Although naked, he felt he had to exert his presence in this situation. The office was crowded with two naked bodies and two fully clothed bodies jostling for position with a desk, a chair, a filing cabinet and a cactus plant.

'I would like to identify myself. I am Sergeant Gonzalez of the Guardia Civil and,' pointing to María, 'this is my assistant. Can I ask for your identification, please? Both of you!'

The manager and receptionist both produced their identity cards.

Jose Ballesteros and Immaculada Ballesteros Martinez,' said Gonzalez, repeating the information on the identity cards. 'Tell me, Immaculada, why are your hands covered in blue dye?'

'Ink.'

'I don't believe you. Has your printer broken down?'

'No!'

'Has your pen broken?'

'No!'

'Have you anything to say?'

'No!'

'I am charging you with the theft of two watches. I will ask you again. Have you anything to say?'

With that the receptionist started crying. 'Okay, I'll admit it. But it's his fault,' she said, pointing to her father. 'He never pays me. I have no new clothes. I am stuck here all the time, chained to a computer. I have no friends. What a life! I had to get money from somewhere. I have asked him for a few euros on many an occasion. But he's a miserable old...'

'Well,...' said Gonzalez.

'...But I do have one question.' Although sobbing, Immaculada had recovered some of her composure. She broke the strict eye contact rule and looked down. 'Is that your truncheon?'

Gonzalez looked pleased.

María smiled.

The manager stared.

Immaculada started sobbing again.