**BARCELONA FROM THE TOP**

We could see it from the Ramblas by the edge of the water. A tall tower, halfway across the harbour. Eerie, dominant, an elegant civic gesture, set up, perhaps for the world fair, we had no details. As we approached, the structure appeared to be not unattended, but not cared for. The tower supported a suspended cable to the hills south of the city. There was another tower on the middle docks and then the cable went to the station at the top of the hill.

Now quite near we looked back to the city. The view from the car would be impressive, the arc of the harbour. The hills behind and maybe a view of the cathedral. We approached the tower. I had photographed industrial structures before, and I became nervous as we approached the door to the ticket booth. As an observer rather than an engineer, I scoured the rusty bolts and corroded paint. I looked up to the car then across the hills. Longer than I thought.

We went up the elevator passing more rust, a latticework of bolts and plates. The windows were dirty and the brown smell composed of dust, oil and faded insulation from the electrics. At the top there was a platform next to the winding gear, and a good breeze that was refreshing, but it gave me some ideas. The car was filling up, there was only standing room; no glossy buckets to be strapped in. The windows were plastic, the grab rail a dull patinated brass, greasy with use. There was a slight movement as the breeze picked up.

I stood there looking at the hills. The cable looped up to the central tower, ascended to the drive wheel of then ascended to the station, Misty and a long way off.

At this point, clamped in the tower ready to go, I felt fear. It started with the height. I'm not good with height. There was a whining clank then the cable began to move. The car slid out of the cage, the wind caught and the car gently oscillated in the breeze.

At sea there is a movement, the corkscrew, where the craft will rise with the wave, come down on the peak, but at the same time twist to the side. This I was used to; even enjoyed, but up here was not the place. As the car approached the central tower the fear increased. The nearer we got, the relative position of the car to the cage on the tower veered rapidly left of centre then to the right. I clung to the rail averting my eyes seaward. But I could not avoid watching the central tower. A jar, a clump, a cage wobbling on a stick. There was a clank as the brake was applied and then the cage was within the cage.

I shrank 2 inches; my hands were white and clamped to the brass rail, my tubes in the lower bowel constricted and I got the altitude pain. This was a distinct reaction to fear.

Before I could rearrange my stance, the cage erupted in slow motion towards the hill. The corkscrew returned, now enlightened by the vertical rise. The car accelerated. Now possible death was not at sea but an orange cargo container at the foot of the hill.

I was told later that my face went from white to grey then, near the hill, green. The final ascent in front of the chalk hills, rushing up. We will collide. A final lurch, a back swing, a clunk of brakes and we shuddered to a halt. I shivered; my hands were welded to the brass. In a strange moonwalk I left the station. Ahead was a bar, some steps above with two metal tubes as rails. I could just make it, left hand, clamp, lift, right, lift, clamp.

I have never needed to lift a brandy glass with two hands before. I looked back to the loop of cable. From land, and I repeat, land, it had a strange beauty.