



His Double Double Life

A clunk of keys and a clash of metal signals the arrival of a man. The man shuts and locks the gate behind him and saunters towards a small shed on the sunny side of the field of allotments. A pair of ears has been alerted to the presence of the man, and very soon a pair of eyes is focusing on the shed. Some minutes later, the man reappears from the shed, holding a garden fork, and, between his lips, a cigarette. He looks around, smiles to himself, lights up, draws a puff and saunters off out of sight, humming to himself.

Monsieur Marc Simian is the onlooking owner of the pair of ears, the pair of eyes, and a bad tobacco habit. He faces a dilemma: he craves a cigarette, but he is wary of people. And the means by which he might get hold of a cigarette could make or break his relationship with people.

Marc cannot see what is inside the man's shed, but wonders if it might contain cigarettes. The man did not lock the door after him. Perhaps he could just sneak in and help himself to a cigarette?

To take a cigarette, Marc knows, would be considered theft. He has already eaten several fruits and vegetables

from the allotments, but somehow that did not feel like thieving. Those fruits and vegetables are nature's produce - and eating is an animal necessity. However, a cigarette is a human product, and a cigarette that has been deliberately bought and stored in a shed definitely has a sense of human ownership. So to take one would feel like theft - a theft all the naughtier since smoking could be seen as a luxurious indulgence, not an animal necessity.

Marc does not want to steal. More particularly, he does not want to get caught stealing - he has had enough trouble with the law already. However, he can't just buy a cigarette - at least, not for now. This is because he has no money. Alternatively, he might try to 'beg' a cigarette from someone else. Perhaps he could just go up and ask that man for one. However, this is not so easy for someone in Marc's position.

International exposure

Marc's problem with people is not because he is himself a monkey. More, it is because he is a shipwrecked immigrant, who has recently escaped being hanged as a French spy. He escaped execution because he managed to convince his accusers that he was English, and not French. His accusers accepted him for being English because his name, although French, sounds English in English. In fact, he could have defended himself at greater length, had he needed to, because he speaks good English.

He speaks good English precisely because he is, in fact, a French spy

being able to speak good English is just part of the job. Now as a monkey - that is, as an animal - he could risk stealing fruit and vegetables. But, as an Englishman, he cannot afford to get caught stealing cigarettes.

The problem with asking the man for a cigarette is that this would commit himself, now, to behaving as a citizen. From now on, he would have to play the role of the Englishman with the allotment, rather than the role of undercover agent, the unseen animal quietly exploiting the allotment's security and food supply.

Although M. Simian is not accustomed to living in a rough hut, he has been prepared, as a spy, that he will have to live roughly some of the time. As versatile agent, he could either live the life of a monkey, and observe England from the undergrowth; or he could live the life of an Englishman. To live as an Englishman needs resources, and he lost all his cash reserves in the shipwreck. But he really needs that cigarette. So dealing with people becomes a necessity.

A rapprochement

„Sure, go ahead“ the man smiles, holding out the tobacco roll-up to the newcomer. The crucial exchange is often easy enough, as Marc knows, but the danger lurks in the small talk. „So, you're new around here?“ says the man, between puffs, „Live near here?“

Marc knows that this is the Englishman's way of asking „Who are you?“ and „Where do you live?“ - questions which, to someone in Marc's position,

amount to tricky interrogations. If the man had asked more obviously sensitive questions (say, on politics, religion or sex) Marc could have answered almost any way, and the response would be accepted as fair. „Must the King marry a virgin?“ or „Are you circumcised?“ could be answered - or not answered - politely. But to fail to say who you are or where you live is an unacceptable response, however sweetly delivered. Simian cannot, of course, admit who he is, or that he lives here, on the allotment. It would be bad enough for an Englishman to be found squatting in someone's allotment, never mind a French spy...

„Eh, yes, just moved here, just round the corner“ Marc hears himself say, in his best, most casual English voice, as - in a flash of lateral thinking - he answers the questions the man actually asked. Fresh from this success, he considers asking the man if he thinks the King should be circumcised...

„Nice day for it?“ he continues, instead; glancing down at his roll-up. „Oh yes, yes... Nice day for it“, the man replies, glancing down at his fork, „See you, then“ and he walks off, humming.

Marc is pleased to have survived the test of contact with the locals. For now, he has somewhere to live, access to fresh food, and the basis of a relationship with his neighbours. But how long will this be sustainable? Between man and monkey, English settler and French spy, he will sooner or later have to sort out the priorities in his double double life.

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