In Search of Bare Monkey Man

In Memoriam Marjorie Sykes MA

Needless to say the porters all chucked down their baggage and fled, the moment the escarpment came into view, just like they do in the films. Or rather, *our* baggage. And they were topless as well. But never mind, there'll be plenty of that later. We thought hiring all female porters it might be different, women being so much more sensible, but they soon started mumbling about jewjew and bare monkey man, exactly like the men, and shrieked and ran at the first view of the cliff, exactly like the men. Weird how all Africans are scared of escarpments. Except Umnaara, the shop stewardess, who's still lurking around somewhere – but don't get your hopes up, she's not one of the amazons. She wears a rumble-in-the-jungle teeshirt that comes to her knees and the main reason she does – here I speculate, admittedly – is because she's so short and ugly and bow-legged and hairy I'm sure she'd be mistaken for a gorilla if she didn't; alternative theory – she *is* a gorilla, since obviously if a gorilla learned a bit of Swahili and wore a rumble-in-the-jungle teeshirt you'd take it forgranted it was an ugly little woman who just looked and smelled like a gorilla. She doesn't carry things either. Like I said, she's the gangmaster and shop steward, or was – encouraged them (or discouraged them) by hitting them with twigs, and complained on a loop about their wages and working conditions and food rations and loincloths and nursery provision and smoking breaks and various health-and-safety regulations, and the supposed impartiality of the arbitration procedure. Amid mumbling about how nothing's the same since independence, or it could have been nothing's changed since independence – I couldn't really tell what she was mumbling about most of the time.

But, if you're disappointed at arriving just too late to see our sixteen six-foot loincloth'd zuluish porters – not one of them less than five foot seven and three-quarters and D cup with legs that went all the way down, I can assure you, I was in charge of measuring and idle chatter at the recruitment tent – you can take consolation in being just in time for the memsaabs' bathtime. That's when we all – all the whities – throw all our togs off and run down to the river and splash about and laugh a lot and pretend to be having a good wash. The native women wouldn't go near the river, except to quickly fill a bucket and dash back – they kept clean by rubbing dust on their bodies (an acquired taste I suspect) or rolling in parched mud wallows, or rolling in moist mud wallows then sprawling in the sun while it baked on them. Yes, I can see how you might warm to it come to think of it. Not Lakari though – sorry, we made her a honorary honkette before we set out (she was sore for days), you'll simply have to get used to it I'm afraid, everything that applies to us applies to her, she has full citizenship of the pale planet, so to speak – you can't whip her and she won't do your

laundry. But at least you'll be able to watch her throw her togs off and run down to the river and splash. Oh look, there she goes! ... Me too. Back in a bit.

ꕥ

The other reason we tried women porters this time was that we were sick of the men raping us. OK you get used to it in some degree, and to be honest one of the worst things was having to keep remembering to make your moans and sighs and squeaks and shrieks and yelps – well some of us do, I don't exactly shriek, as you know, but some of us do – reminding yourself to make them sound indignant instead of ecstatic, protest not gratitude. No the worst thing was being taken forgranted – I know, typical female point of view. The worst thing was them assuming, after the first few, that they could just help themselves and fuck us when they felt like it. It was partly our fault for not punishing them – but what can you do, someone's got to carry the bags – as well as for trying to negotiate ourselves a decent night's kip by arranging an afternoon sex break for them in lieu. Recreational rape. Not that we compromised on working hours – the men had a shop steward too, I need hardly say, though he wasn't like a gorilla, well actually in some respects he was – they had an agreed siesta cum smoke already, so we fitted the shagging into that, or tried to. Siesta cum smoke cum screw. What? Siesta cum smoke cum come, yes, thanks for that, I'll do the jokes from now on. When they asked for an extra twenty minutes we had to argue – pointing out in passing that twenty minutes was enough for three goes – we argued that sex was a perk not work (they seemed to understand things better if they rhymed, like politicians). But this put us in the position of having negotiated it away so to speak, or seeming to have: we'd given it to them as a break-time right, like an extra ration of gin, well rum then, when all we wanted really was a good night's sleep ... Or should it be pork? An extra ration of pork.

I'm not saying the women porters weren't equally inclined to wander after lights-out. Cheeko left her zipper open, took in five or six a night, they called her Cuddly White Elephant Woman Likes Doing It A Lot and considered her one of their tribal totems become flesh – great heaps of flesh. I told her it proved what a fat cow she is, the fat cow – well you saw her didn't you, bouncing down to the river like a collection of huge half-inflated balloons in a bag. I had to report to Daphne for a good spanking for saying it. There's a tip for you – insulting someone's a brilliant way of getting spanked by Daphne. Hits the spot every time, a good spanking from Daff, well for me it does, she's one of these firm rhythmic spankers. Only a few things she uses corporal punishment for, and the easiest's insulting someone – someone white anyway. Or Lakari. Weeing near the tents is another, though that's usually at night so you don't get caught unless it's very splashy – if you own up to it in the morning she doesn't spank you, she assumes you're lying in order to get spanked and makes you wash up,

which is the punishment for lying. Last time, I said I quite like washing up actually Daff, so she made me wash up next time too – for lying.

No, we don't bother dressing again after the splashing, we just put our knickers back on, on account of this irrational conviction we have – since the male doctor in Cambridge who inoculated us told us absolutely categorically it wasn't true – that there's some sort of nasty jungle grub that'll wriggle into our cunts if we don't. Then we always sit around like this, eating chocolates, preening and looking at each others' bellies, until time for bed. No tall negresses to feast your eye on I'm afraid, just plenty pale pimply and the lovely Lakari, Lakari the saari we used to call her (no, you're right, no saaris on safari). Though I see you've spotted Geraldine – nothing pimply about shiny old Gerrybuilder, the thinking girl's Arnold Swarthynigger, god's gift to leotards, you should have guessed it from her square chin and knee bandages. You'd have thought blokes would find square chins, square tits, square buttocks and tree-trunk thighs, never mind a near-perfect impersonation of Paul Robeson singing Swing Low Sweet Chariot, never mind the fact that she can carry a log on each shoulder while towing a landrover, uphill, backwards, a bit off-putting; but speaking of logs I see she's made an impression on you. Yes, you. She does these exercises every night after polishing herself all over with something that smells suspiciously like brasso. In fact the upside-down press-ups are only the prelude, the best's still to come – you'll like how she's adapted the chest-expander to work with her knees, keep some for then. Just look at that sunset! Well anyway ...

ꕥ

I thought you could have carried more than that, funny why white men always have bad backs. Without porters, of either persuasion, all we can lug up the escarpment is what we can lug up the escarpment – *not enough*: not enough food, not enough pop, not enough chocolate, not enough rope, not enough calor gas, not enough water, not enough soap, not enough shampoo, not enough deoderant or sunblock or mosquito repellant, or lipsalve or nail varnish, or oil of ulay. Definitely not enough perfumed ultra-soft quilt-effect three-ply toilet tissue – well it's useful for all sorts of things, from eye-shadow removal to squashing flies, and weighs *nothing*, I don't see why we couldn't bring at least a few rolls (and nor did I see why you'd side with Daphne against me, I mean really!). Anyway, you know what it all means: it means we shall all have to go topless and improvise, wash in our own wee, rub sticks together and forage, and squabble over how to divide three berries, a suspicious-looking mushroom and a big grub between ten of us, OK eleven, and get seriously sweaty and grubby and itchy, and emaciated and dehydrated and covered in sores and boils and insect bites, and not return alive. If there are really man-eating bats we'll probably get eaten by man-eating bats – you will anyway; if there really is a bare monkey man we'll probably be too blotchy and smelly and flaky to attract him;

if there's really jewjew we'll probably all fall off the cliff before we even *get* to the never-never land.

You'll fall off the cliff for sure, with your bad back, and since we're roped together I'll come too and you'll have to listen to me chattering all the way down. Yes I know I insisted on being roped to you, in spite of Pompom winning the raffle, I just didn't want you spending the day with that arse in your face. OK I was wrong, I should have let her have you, let *her* jump off a cliff with you. I'm convinced we're going to fall off. But it won't happen yet – it'll wait till we've wasted all day and all the effort, only to plunge back down to where we left our bras and lipsticks (I can't believe bras weigh enough to make a difference, empty anyway, I think Daff was conflating voluptuousness and baggage, like willowy girls do); it'll happen when we're so far up we're too exhausted to scream – six-hundred feet of quality freefall, contemplating the sky, before a tree impales us. Yes, ouch! Unless we land on the toilet paper. That or Pompom and Gerry will tumble backwards into us and since Gerry's built like one of these blokes who pulls lorries with his teeth – more like one of the lorries is right, thanks for that, I *would* have thought of it – and obviously she's carrying the heaviest load, so they'll crush me to mush and you'll jump off the cliff to escape being steam-rollered; or Cheeko the Elephant Woman (and Beth, poor plain puny little Beth) will bounce backwards over Pompom and Gerry and then us, suffocating everything in her path, the fat cow, if she doesn't burst first and drown us in offal.

That or the entire zulu nation in anger will be lined up along the top of the escarpment when we finally finally – christ knows how long it'll take, we thought we could do it in a day but look where the sun is and look where we are – *finally* crawl exhausted and aching with torn clothes and dishevelled hair and chapped lips and smelly armpits and abysmal overall skin hygiene up over the last rise, clinging with our chipped unpainted fingernails to the final crumbly rocks of the top, defenceless but too dusty and sweaty and peeling to be worth raping or eating or mud wrestling, or selling into slavery, and carrying nothing of value in the way of plunder – do zulus use roll-on deoderant? So they'll stamp on our fingers and we'll each in turn fall backwards off the scarp with a tuneful series of receding screams. Don't you think, probably? Still, look on the bright side, they might be a lost tribe of warrior women, so either you die happy looking up their little leafy skirts or they recognise you as The One Whose Coming Was Foretold, tie you to a special tree reserved for their phallic god-totem-fetish incarnate, shake their nipples and necklaces at you to the frenzied beating of bongos, and kneel each morning to worship the old stiffy and milk you for breakfast. Beats queueing at the pump! ... I know, sounds good! But are you man enough?



I'm feeling a lot better now. I thought I was a gonner, I really did, it was so nice of you to ... no I don't mean pulling me up, of course you'd pull me up, it was either that or jump over and join me for the flight; but I mean how you held on to me after and stopped Tansy from kicking me, the bitch. Well you tried, and I think it was nice of you. Then offering to clean my scratches with your own spit ... Daff says only three of us died in the pile-up, or down rather. Funny that, the three, since we were roped in pairs – d'you think the rope broke or was it cut? That option didn't occur to you ...? Daff wouldn't say who the odd one out was. I notice you kept hold of your camera, I'm sorry about the rest of it. Even more foraging and rubbing sticks together and eating grubs for us now then. Never mind. Before you get started with the germolene I want you to take a picture of me all scratched and bruised and dirty and lying limp in the gravel – no I mean better than the ones you did take, I don't think I quite got the pose plus we need to tear what's left of my clothes a bit more sexily and scoop some more dust on me; this time I'll get the legs right, and the hair out of my face. There's a good gravelly spot over there look, lots of spiky stones, come on, while my scratches are still fresh. What was that about hair over the face looked fine?

I don't know if Daff's going ahead with the offering. I suppose nothing's changed in that respect, if we've gone to the trouble of inching up the cliff with whatever we haven't dropped, I suppose the expedition's still on: there's no point in us being here, scratched or unscratched, if we don't go ahead with the offering, the sacrifice. It's up to Daphne of course, it's down to her. You've probably gathered what kind of a character she is – there's no one like Daff, she's stainless steel, she's platinum, she's moses's favourite niece: leads us to the promised land, seas part for her etcetera. No one else could have got us to follow them this far. No they couldn't. Who but Daff could have got us to do that calendar? Ah well you see there *were* twelve of us counting Marjorie and Una – and definitely no one but Daff could have got Una out of her frumpy jumper and knickers, that's for definite; nor Beth (poor plain puny little Beth). Actually she looked great, Beth, somehow, somehow the camera managed to adjust her to normal size so you couldn't tell she was pint-size puny personified, and plain's irrelevant when you've got tits like that. Who'd have thought it? poor plain puny little peachy puffy pinky and perky ... No the thing I didn't like about the calendar was getting November, I mean do you look at me and think Miss November? and don't you dare answer. I didn't mind getting muddy, I liked that part, mud glorious mud. But really, who looks at a calendar in November at all except to regret the gorgeous willowy leafyness of Dee's October or pine for the gorgeous fur-trimmed ampleness of Pompom's burst-open Santa outfit? I mean really. I want May next time.

Pity the porters deserted, every one of em with a pair so perfect they should be reported to the monopolies commission never mind the arbitration service, and two legs too – your film-bag'd be bulging,

calendars enough for years. What? No, not a chance, she'll never pose for you, not Lakari, no way, out-of-bounds and no-trespassing, don't even start fingering your knob (or however you focus) ... But like I was saying, no one else could have got us here, no one, no one but Daphne. She's aluminium. No one but Daff could have got us on that bloody plane, for a start – the only thing more miraculous than getting us to get *on* it was us getting off it alive. No one could have got us to throw so much away: from careers to complexions, from virginity to the last scrap of dignity, from stella artois to ever being taken seriously at the hairdresser's again. No one else could have talked us into leaving our bras behind; no one else could have persuaded us that we could ever actually make it here – even if we're not so ready to believe we'll make it back. No one but no one but Daphne could have convinced us that life without shopping or ice cream or cosmo or vibrators (yes OK I don't need one now you're here, you think that if you want!) would be anything but a living hell ... And guess what? It is.

ꕥ

Now we've tied Daphne between the two trees all we can do is wait, watch her bum and wait. I suppose he'll come at night, we'll light the fires at sundown. I'd never really noticed what a nice bum she's got – I suppose the eyes have to rest on something, since all we can do is sit and watch, I suppose you have to focus on something. Yes, your camera too. I'm not all that surprised she decided to choose *herself*, in spite of the shocked gasp from the others. Oh no, the plan was to draw straws. But, we'd all agreed Daphne could choose someone when the time came if she judged that circumstances required it. I half suspect when she made us agree to that, before we set out, it's what she had in mind, herself I mean, she had in mind. I doubt if she had any intention of circumstances not requiring it, nor of choosing anyone else. Even though Tansy's the most beautiful, the bitch, yes OK after Lakari, and Cheeko's the most ample (or was, the fat cow), and Beth (poor plain puny little Beth), well she doesn't count any more either, if she ever did, and Gerry's the most muscular and Dee's the most choirboyish and Pompom has curves like the skyline of Istanbul can only dream of, and Steffi, Steffi's got that sweet young innocent look and speaking entirely objectively the most perfect curvy tight-little wiggly backside you've ever seen and if I see you pat it again you won't believe where I'm going to shove that fucking tripod; and yes, I was coming to it, I'm the most talkative – well apart from naked white and screaming we don't know what his tastes are do we, he might like a good chinwag – but I think Daff had *herself* in mind from the outset. *She* was the one with the Marjorie fixation, all along, so I think she naturally saw herself in the role. Naked white and Marjorie.

You might think it's a bad strategy, sacrificing our leader – at least when she's such a brilliant one. No I mean it, I know I don't agree about the bras but it's a very small thing – hers was anyway – it doesn't dent my confidence in her as expedition leader. No one else

could have got us here – no one else could have got us past Croydon. Look we've been over all that. OK I disagree with her now and then – though she was definitely wrong about the toilet rolls – it doesn't mean fluff, it does em good to be disagreed with. But I'm not surprised she's chosen herself, and I'm not surprised she chose Delia to succeed her. You'll think Dee's mousy, not leadership material – she wears granny-glasses and socks back in Cambridge you know – but she can rally when the need arises, or anything else, she's cool under pressure and she knows everything Daff knows. I know she didn't want it, but also she was a bit upset about Daff offering herself. Just between you and me she volunteered to take her place, she did her best to persuade Daff to use *her* as the offering, but of course that's completely ridiculous, we certainly have to assume bare monkey man likes at least a hint of titty on his totty. Where will he have formed a taste for choirboys? No, I wouldn't have thought he went to Eton. Anyway, you saw how efficiently she organised tying Daff to the trees, and how she smacked that bitch Tansy. She'll be a good leader.

The camera's fine there. Doesn't she look good from the back? You'll get some lovely pictures with your telephoto, plus a sore eye. No it's all right, you carry on twiddling your knob and zooming in and out, keep yourself focused on her bum and I'll take first stint on the lilo. I hope he comes tonight or we're going to have to start a shift system. And it won't be all that comfortable for Daphne if she has to stay tied between the trees in that X position all day tomorrow – her arms are probably aching already, well obviously they are, they must be. While twelve hours all-round all-over sunbathing is more than she's used to – d'you suppose tarz minds sunblock? It's either that or bright red and peeling, a pale English rose like Daff. She said we weren't to waste it on her, the tube-and-a-half of lotion we didn't drop on the way up, nor feed her nor risk scaring him off by hovering round her, but I know Delia's taking her something to drink when we go to light the fires – now she's leader she doesn't have to do what Daff says I suppose. But if we scare him off by being too conspicuous that'll only prolong her agony out there. And if we give her too much to drink she'll wee herself. Aha! Now there's a thought ...

ꕥ

I know I'm in a minority but I agree with Dee's decision – leave her be and stay off. Daphne knew she was letting herself in for something unpleasant – damn it, she was sacrificing herself and she knew it. There's no plan to get her back when he comes and takes her, and we've no idea what he does with his naked white offerings. OK, you're right, correction: we don't *know* what he does with his naked white offerings but we do have an idea or two. In any event, the trophy's for keeps: she buys us a ticket to the lost fountain, but for her it's one-way, monkey bloke gets to keep his living doll and do whatever it is he likes doing. We assume he shags her senseless (you live in hope – but then I married you didn't I), but no one has ever come back to tell; he might

insert the nozzle and fill her up without her hardly noticing while she's watching David Attenborough, and then lie comatose till the football comes on (well don't take it personal – I said watching Attaboy, I didn't say during the adverts!). But he might drag her arse behind the nearest good bush and beat her to pulp, he might tear her open and taste her titbits and stick a finger or two up at us behind our backs, he might bore her to death with talk of who said what at the office (but then I married you didn't I) followed by who said what in the betting shop (ditto) followed by who said what in the pub (oh shut up!); he might juice her, or make marmalade, or peel her skin off for his new range of hats and handbags, or stake her to the ground and daub her with a particularly revolting brand of stagnant green slime for the sheer sensual-stroke-aesthetic delight of it, a sort of jungle Andy Warhol. And film the dingoes licking it off her. Or, he might keep her to hoover his lair and do his laundry, and answer the phone when he's watching an important match – wolves versus rhinoceroses.

We've tended to assume they get shagged senseless and that's it, less happily-ever-after than all-the-rest's-a-blur: shagged senseless then shagged senseless, or shagged senseless then hung up as a trophy, or shagged senseless then snatched by a crocodile while lying limp and tingly on the riverbank after, or shagged senseless then die of some unspeakably disgusting jungle infection, or shagged senseless then cast aside to starve if not mercifully eaten by a lion or a leopard or a lot of ants (not admittedly the most merciful) first. We've made the bizarre assumption he's monogamous (and yes, I married you didn't I) yet he might indeed be a collector, like the legend says, a hoarder – we were so keen to distance ourselves from Alma Tadema we barely considered it, the legendary jungle hareem. But he might, he might *have* one, as in the picture, straight out of Alma's wet dream, a lair full, an arse-and-tit gallery of dozy pre-raphaelite nudes, a perfect Victorian soap advert, a carbolic pulchritude of scrubbed-clean pale freckled janes, effortlessly doing lairwork and bringing up little bare monkey men and waiting for their next go with tarzan the rape man, liking it so much not one of em's ever wanted to escape to tell the world or the *News of the World*; or alternatively, chained to the sink covered in bruises. Naked white and black-and-blue. Either way she doesn't come back, we knew that. But we didn't think about the insects. I don't know if Daff did, apart from Dee and Tansy (the bitch) she's far and away the cleverest of us. When you think about it someone who knows as much about the jungle as Daff does *must* have, she has to have anticipated it. Yet it never got mentioned. How once night fell and we'd lit the fires the whole area around the two trees would fill with insects.

Oh it's awful ... You can hardly tell from here, her back's fairly clear, but her whole front's covered with em. Flying insects and crawling insects, fluttering insects and creeping insects, burrowing insects and building insects, biting insects and stinging insects; moths mostly, huge fluttering moths and middle-size fluttering moths and tiny fluttering moths; ants, big ants with wings and little ants crawling up

her legs, thousands of em; beetles disappearing into her orifices, beetles emerging from her orifices, big ones like cockroaches, little ones like ladybirds; locusts, flies, mosquitoes, goodness knows. We should have brought an entomologist, there are probably undiscovered species on her. And in her. I don't know what they're doing to her, but even if they aren't doing much except tickling it has to be the most revoltingly horrible experience imaginable, tied there X-wise, immobilised, naked, and covered with em like that. But Dee's right. In spite of what I say I have to support her – and I was right wasn't I, when firm leadership was needed she was *it*. No seriously. Deciding to leave her be, to let the insects have their way with her, not to waft them off – it's a terrible decision but you couldn't do it, wafting them off her, they'd just come straight back or others would come, two of us would have to stand by her all night, wafting, which would be pointless, we might as well fetch her in. The only alternative is to do that, to abort and take her down. But Daff wouldn't want that: Delia says so far as she could make out when she went back after we noticed the insects swarming to the firelight Daff wanted to be left. Though if bare monkey man comes now I don't know what he'll think of his naked white offering. Perhaps he'll pick the insects off her and have a feast ... Yes, perhaps he will – perhaps he'll fuck off home.

ꕥ

Three nights – poor old Daphne – two days and three nights. But the nights – I'm glad I didn't get the night-shift. You wouldn't know from here, her bum looks as cute as ever, but her front's terrible. All manner of peculiar marks and bites and swellings, holes where things have burrowed in, or out, eggs laid on her, and in her, wriggling grubs, bits of dead insect – I suppose some of them eat each other, or lay eggs and die, or hatch and eat their mother. Last night a bunch of little monkeys came and had lunch off her, Steffi says. Oh it's ... it's just horrible. I prised her mouth open to put the water in, I half expected it to be full of insects, like her cunt. Her eyes didn't open, but she swallowed it down, the water. I kissed her on my fingers and cried. In a way it's ridiculous leaving her there, we should take her down and care for her. What use is she in such a state? even to bare monkey man – he'd have to be desperate as Denis Thatcher. But Dee's right, she probably wouldn't want us to. It's what we're here for after all. But we none of us imagined it would mean her suffering like this. Even Daff herself, wise as she was, she can't have anticipated it. It's a form of torture. But Dee's probably right, I suppose. To abort having gone this far, having put Daff through so much, would make it all for nothing. The only way of justifying the horror of it, the torment, is to see it through.

Then again we don't know that bare monkey man hasn't already been, peeped through the trees at the swollen oozing half-dead pock-marked red-and-blue bag of bones we're offering him and sloped off in disgust to write a letter to the *Telegraph*, or the jungle telegraph. Or, if he came after dark and saw her totally covered in em and didn't fancy it

one bit – and who wouldn't. Or if he's not coming at all – perhaps he's busy in a far distant part of his roam-zone and hasn't the faintest idea we're even here; perhaps he's filled his lair full – dead or alive – and had to put his hareem-building on hold till he finds a bigger pad; perhaps he's at a convention of bare monkey men, no wives sweethearts or sacrificial offerings, a jungle gaudy, a forest fraternity; perhaps he's met a nice gorilla girl – where's Umnaara by the way, did she fall off the cliff? – perhaps he's hung up his club and settled down to a life of slippers and bananas and a hairy hump up the back-way every friday. How would we know? It's just part of the superstition, part of the legend, that he always comes, that he always knows, that he always takes what's offered so long as it's pale and female, and starkers. It can't actually be true, come to think of it, he can't always fancy it – OK he can, he's a bloke – but he can't always know there's one there. No matter if he's immortal or not. *Or* talks to the trees.

No, we weren't gullible, I don't think we were, I don't think we took the legends to be entirely or literally true. Well obviously we didn't. But we know he exists, even though the photos are blurry, we know he used to accept the offerings of the Mabonies (defrocked missionaries, tenderised and sunbaked); we know he took Marjorie when the infamous expedition of 47 tested the theory, there's even shaky film footage of it. But there's a lot we don't know too. We don't know, in spite of what the natives say, that he really takes anything offered so long as it's naked white and female – he might be choosy, well he *might*! We don't know that he takes anything any time – he might only take it when he needs one, he might still be happily married to the last, if not to Umnaara, he might only take em when they're in season (in any of various senses), he might only bother when he can be bothered, if the wind's in the right direction or there's a P in the month. If he's fussy enough to demand white skin he might be choosy about hair colour, or eyes, or breasts, not colour (well, possibly) but cup-size, or which direction they point, or legs, he might be a leg man – or nice bum, yes, you're right, perhaps we should turn her round. And we don't know how far he ranges, how often he comes this way, how he knows when there's one tied between the two trees waiting for him. The natives say he just knows, the jungle tells him, he listens to the trees – but of course *we* know that's nonsense. We've hoped he'd see our fires, the Mabonies always made fires. But if there's something he's following on the sports channel, or he's got a prior engagement in some swamp thirty miles off, wrestling a crocodile or buggering a blue-arsed baboon, he couldn't possibly have the faintest idea we were here, whatever the natives say. Could he. Well ... could he?

ꕥ

Delia has to decide. That's my opinion. She's our leader, she has to decide. OK we're all in it together, what we all say and think matters, but it's not meant to be a democracy. We chose a clear way of doing things before we set out, and we chose a leader. We've a new leader

now, but I don't think that's the issue, I think if we hadn't chosen Daphne we'd have chosen Delia – no really, I certainly would have anyway. I would! It's brains not breasts that count. But that's not the issue. Dee's our leader – in a way she's got more not less credibility because Daff appointed her, it makes her Daff's representative, it means she speaks for Daff. So Delia has to decide. We do what Dee says. There's no point leaving Daff there now she's dead – and there's no point apportioning blame or deciding what we should or shouldn't have done, what if this and what if that. She's dead. Maybe she's starved to death because we didn't feed her, six days and nights is a long time; maybe she's died of sunstroke, or from her skin peeling off like that; maybe some insect's poisoned her or burrowed into her brain, or her heart; like as not her heart or brain's *full* of insects. We just don't know – OK lungs, yes all right, you're probably right, asphixiated is a fair bet, if her nose and mouth are ... Pompom says they're stuffed solid. OK, that's it then, fine, I'm wrong, we *do* know.

But the immediate issue is, when we take her down do we replace her or do we slope off home abandoning everything we came for – everything Daphne herself planned and dreamed and persuaded us to go along with? Go home with nothing, not only not Daff but no Cheeko (the fat cow) or Beth (poor plain puny little Beth), no bottled immortality or evidence of the lost fountain, no trace of self-esteem, no best-seller with film-rights (Oliver Reed my arse!), no telephoto photos of fuzzy bare monkey men. Hundreds of Daff's backside, perfectly focused. Several of me scratched and gritty after being dragged back up fifty feet of crumbling scarp. And these of ... not Lakari, surely? when did you get these? No, let me look, they're good. It's amazing you managed to catch her off-guard like that, she's usually ... She's posing for you. You jammy ... you sod she's posing for you. Where was I when ...? Did you shag her? she's all submissive and ... Cry stall-mighty! you bastard, you fucked her, you fucked her didn't you? Didn't you? You did you fucked her! I know a tossbag who's just been fucked when I see a photo of one, for fuck's sake! *and* the next – if that's not a just-fucked look ... Christ in anger a cunt! a cunt close-up! the cunt's fucking cunt. Pink and sparkly and ... You son-of-a ... You fu ... God it's gorgeous! talk about a man-eating flower – isn't it the most pink and fascinating thing you ever ... No you needn't disagree, I mean it, it's the most ... it's the best photo you've ever taken. *And* it's in focus. The cunt's cunt! I just can't believe she spread her legs and let you, not Lakari. You jammy bastard! An open-for-business muff shot and you shagged it in the bargain. Yes you did! I don't know why you deny it, she's all moist and post-whatsit ... Lakari though – the fucking cunt! – I'm gobsmacked.

Come on then. Enough photos. The options are to keep Daff's dream alive and carry on, make her suffering, her sacrifice worthwhile – which means one of us replacing her, tied between the trees; or to abandon it all, admit defeat, make the whole expedition and all we've gone through and Daff's sacrifice and that effing calendar, the lot of it,

a complete waste of time, a farce, a ... Take her down, bury her and go home; or take her down, eat her and go home – OK, too many live grubs and dead moths. Take her down and burn her and go home – big bonfire might bring monkey bloke. I just can't believe she let you fuck and photograph her, not Lakari ... fixated on blackies as you are, yes you, well brownies then that's not what I mean, I mean Lakari's ... everyone knows she's impregnable, impenetrable, the cunt, she's the poised and picky one, the most impossible to get into. No no, more than Dee, it's different with – you mean you tried Dee? You bast ... Yes, sorry everyone, Daphne's the order of business. Sorry. I'm for replacing her, for carrying on, for trying again with another offering. But Delia has to decide. *And* she has to choose which, I mean who – I'll go along with Dee, whatever she says. You fucking bastard ... trying it with Dee! I mean really. How desperate were you?

ꕥ

At least there's a nice view across the jungle from here, all across the jungle till it becomes mist – or is it spray from the lost fountain? And *you'll* have a nice view of my backside from our tent – don't you dare take any fewer shots of it than we did of Daff's. I'm sorry it's not so cute. No it's not. Let's hope little tarz has heard the message of the trees by now, finished wrestling his croc or come back from his convention, or whatever's been keeping him. One theory is that it might be an acute sense of smell, in which case I'm sure I stand a better chance than poor old Daff, she always smelled like a bunch of flowers, I never knew anyone who smelled so nice, even on safari. Such a shame, that rancid stench when we took her down, and how clear her ribs stood out, even in so short a time, and all those thousands and thousands of dead moths and dead beetles inside her, and all those wriggling grubs ... Or perhaps he'll have seen the bigger bonfire we had last night when we burned her. She flared up didn't she, being so dry and full of moths I suppose, on her mound of crackly brushwood. Ages since I danced naked round a bonfire. All it needed was fireworks and a crate of cinzano.

That's OK, don't linger. Now I'm tied nice and tight the best place for you is back there, focusing on my assets. You noticed I struggled a bit, in memory of Marjorie, I thought it was the least I could do. Helped get the lashings tighter – did you see how half-hearted Gerry's knots were till I started resisting? Nice and rigid now, I can relax and *hang* on em, let my belly etcetera sag, nothing beats being tied up by Geraldine but she needs encouragement, a bit of a wrestle. We did wrestle once, I never told you. Friendly of course, I'd be dogmeat if it hadn't have been, but oh it was ... it's the nearest I ever came to going lesbian, which is why I never told you. Me and Pompom versus the dump truck. After we let her beat us she let us beat *her* – all over with a plastic toy cricket bat. Part of her toning up – beat with bat and massage with meths – she wasn't as solid then, but she was getting there. I thought of you while I was doing it – whacking her with the bat

I mean – no I did, it's one reason I've been so nice to you since, used up a lifetime's aggression in one session with Gerry. Yes, OK, we did, after, we did do the other – rubbing with benefits. So now you know. That's why I'm telling you I suppose, if I'm going to die ... no come on it's all right, if I'm going to pose for monkey fella till half the insects in Africa come and live in me I want a clear conscience. It's the only time, for me. Pompom went back for more, still does. But it's the only time I was ever unfaithful to you with someone who looks like Arnold Swarthynigger with a cunt. It was nice but it meant nothing. I thought of you while I was doing it – so now you know. You go now. You know me, the longer you let me talk the longer I'll talk. Go and focus that camera of yours, see if you can make my arse look half-decent.

Oh and when you come back at lighting-up time bring me some drinking water as well, as well as the stuff Pompom's making up, the ointment, for the face and fanny as agreed. It was sickening how many things had worked their way up into Daff through her cunt. I could hardly bear to watch as we ripped her open, but I suppose it was right, doing a sort of autopsy, even if we didn't have the tools, I suppose it was the scientific thing to do, rip her open and take photos. You were right to suggest it. Anyway, plenty ointment up the pleasure pit, OK? A last little visit to the old slot, just fingers mind, then you can forget *mine* and concentrate on hers, the photogenic one. Oh for christ's sake stop blubbing and saying you're saari! ... I'm sorry too. I'm sorry I'm pale and talkative and have a big arse and never forgave you for that time with them schoolgirls. I can see it now, after coming on the expedition, I see how it puts you in these positions, like a whole different set of rules kicks in when you're away from civilisation with the under-sixteens netball team and two-thirds of em are your favourite colour. No, broken-down on the moors near Sheffield counts as away from civilisation in my book. And you've got to do something to pass the time. As for the cunt of cunts, to be frank I'm a bit proud of you – that you penetrated her defences never mind her other thing (well OK, if you say you didn't ...). To say nothing of managing five of em in such a short time, on the moors I mean. All right four and a half, if you hadn't have been interrupted by the tow-truck.

But look, Delia was right, I don't want you sulking at her, or saying anything that undermines her authority. She was right to carry on, that's what I thought we should do and she made the right decision. She was right to choose me – or whoever she might have chosen – it was her job to choose so she was within her rights. I was a bit surprised. I'm not entirely sure why me, I'm not actually sure if it's a compliment or an insult, all that stuff about droopy tits and wide hips, I suppose it makes sense, and obviously Lakari doesn't count, cunt or no cunt, the cunt, we knew all along she wasn't an option, so I suppose you could be right, she *was* probably flattering me by saying I was the best bet – Dee does have this swotty matter-of-fact way of phrasing things, like a deadpan comedian, as if you're meant to wonder if she means it. But no you're right, Dee's straight down the rail I know that,

I'm absolutely with her – she's the boss. Raising how she'd offered herself instead of Daff wasn't fair, as if to imply *she* should go next; now she's our leader she has to make decisions as our leader, I'm not complaining. And she was right not to compromise on the birthday suit. Obviously it would have been nice from the insect's eye view if not the camera's to keep my knickers on – and definitely to have a bag over my head at night (if I live to tell the tale you'll never hear the last of how you suggested I should have a bag over my head at night) – but Dee was right not to compromise. Stark Marjorie naked, nothing less. Now don't linger and don't whimper, I'm fine. I'll see you at sundown.

And sweetheart – the cunt with the cunt, you know, the one you didn't fuck, she's fine for photography and pencil sharpening but you're not in her league, believe me, I'm past teasing now. Even if you performed the little miracle of parting her petals once, out here, on an expedition, the only plonker for miles, like being broken-down on the moors, she's not going to see it as life-changing, not Lakari. Gerry neither I'm afraid, anyway she'd do your back in first round. Dee neither, if you were serious, she's too intellectual for you and far too flat-chested; anyway she's a lesbian. Now Steffi ... no seriously, I mean it, Steffi's nice, I know you've noticed, the bum at least, but don't let it distract you from her other bits, which are also nice. She's young, she's eco-friendly, and she's kind to animals. Misses her mutt something rotten and likes being licked. I'm sorry what I said about you and her, that time. I think she's up for it. Leastways she'll make do, out here, far from the nearest shaggy dog. Go on, I don't mind, in fact I want you to – she's the one I'd choose for you, she's the one I'd prefer you to shack up with, and shag. Sweet face, cute arse, neat slit, barely used – so your hockey-team experience might come in – and she's not even finished her doctorate. OK netball, whatever. When you're fed up taking photos of mine (and don't forget your promise) take some of hers and work your way round. Go on now, I'll see you later with the ointment. Oh and, while I think of it ...

ꕥ

Ah. I thought you were ... never mind. I must have dozed off while they were covering me, Tansy and ... A bit relaxing it was, the final massage, his last chance to impress me bless him – and I dozed off! Tansy's beautiful and brilliant, I hate her, the bitch, I was mortified to see him dab some of my ointment on her nipple like that. I mean really! I wanted him to take up with Steffi who's just a twit with a twat and a peachy bum. They were meant to be doing the face and flaps but they did me all over, the ointment I mean, the insect repellant, Pompom and Gerry must have worked overtime and made a bucketful. Nice of em. Though knowing Tansy it crossed my mind she was coating me with honey as a treat for the insects, the fucking bitch. Anyway, that's why I'm all slimy and sexy, naked white and slippery, the stuff they put on me; rosy smell too, I didn't notice before – maybe it *is* honey. I don't know what it does to insects but it's driving you

crazy little tarz-fella, my you can go at it, I suppose you've always had to supply your own lubricant before. Steady on there you'll do your back in, if I know menfolk ... Not all that bare are you? Feels quite downy, sprawled over my back and bum as I crouch. I suppose no one's come close enough to notice – except your victims, your offerings. Oops, that was a cute little snort, are you done then loverboy? Let me roll over and cuddle you while you have a snooze ... Yes, quite downy. Muscular too, stumpy thighs and a tight hairy bum. Bare monkey man indeed – what do they know? Come to mama, yes, put your sleepy head there, that's a perfect pillow for a hairy little chappie who's done his day's work of bagging dragging and shagging.

Looking round while you snooze – there there, snore on, or was it a fart? – I assume we're at interim camp, not the famous lair. We can't have come far, even if I was out of it when you fetched me. I've got a bit of grazing on my leg, to add to the scratches from when I fell off the cliff (I'll tell you about that another day – you'll have to learn to listen, by the way, whether or not you're a candidate for answering back), I suppose it's from dragging – you're a strong little fellow but you're hardly tall enough to carry me without bits of me dragging on the ground. You'll have to be more careful with me in future or I'll go septic on you. Yes, you ... Whether they'll follow the original plan I don't know, it was discussed but no concensus had been reached – or Delia hadn't decided: about the lost fountain I mean, the quest for immortality. Obviously with the loss of supplies, both from the porters scarpering at the sight of the scarp and then from everything we dropped on the way up – including the Elephant Woman (our heaviest piece of baggage, the fat cow) and Beth (poor plain puny little) and Umnaara, apparently (either fell off or ran off) – obviously the rest of the expedition was under a bit of a question mark, even apart from everyone being fed up and smelly and desperate for a relaxed soapy bath and a good long dyno-rodding (no it's all right jungle boy, I had something considerably longer in mind, in both senses) while scoffing a big box of truffles and catching up on East Enders.

Though actually, normal logic goes funny at this point. Because since there aren't remotely enough supplies to get everyone back, we knew from half-way up the cliff it was turning into a one-way ticket. So why should they stay on top of the escarpment, get sunburnt dehydrated and covered with insects, and starve and die, when they can come into the shelter of the jungle, get rheumatism foot-rot and covered with insects, and either die or, if we lead them to the lost fountain and it really does give you immortality, then there's at least a chance they won't. Die, that is. The lost fountain will heal their wounds and restore their complexions and keep them young and beautiful with lovely bums forever. My ex included, if Steffi protects him like she promised, though she's no match for Tansy. If he's taken up with that bitch I don't know what state he'll be in, he might have a nice time at night but she'll beat and bitch him senseless in between. Or perhaps the lost fountain doesn't do that – you always assume the elixir of immortality

cures and heals you, but all it says on the bottle is immortality – it might simply keep you alive, for ever and ever and ever, no matter what kind of wretched state you're in, untouched by makeup for centuries and wracked with continuous unbearable pain, except you're immortal so you *have* to bear it, you stagger on through living death for millions and billions of years, a disgusting walking – no crawling – a revolting crawling corpse, riddled with diseases, nibbled by rats, leaking various colourful fluids ... Which reminds me, when you wake up little tarz, I'll have to do a big yellow wee before we set off again. There, now won't that be nice? A treat for the nostrils.

ꕥ

Bare monkey man's lair (as they call it) is a spacious cavern behind the lost fountain, which gushes upwards like a geyser, a real true fountain, to the height of the tallest trees – the Mabonies say you can see it, if you're black, they point to it but white men see only the distant mist, and white women see mist as well. Bare monkey man guards it for the Long Phallic Snake God, god of immortality and sexual ecstasy, coiled in the hollow earth, and brings bare-naked white women to bathe in the fountain and become immortal, young and tingling and frisky forever, ready to keep the god company in the long night of eternity after the world will end. The long night of eternity is expected to be very long, so the snake god will need as many nude nubile pale pinkies as bare monkey man can bring him. They spend their time, in between bathing and sleeping and bathing, *lolling* – lolling under the fine spray, moist and (err) moist, flaunting and caressing themselves and each other, tickling each other lightly with whispy grass or wiping each other firmly with the fur of lion cubs, to maintain the tingle of their pure immortal flesh, which the natives believe is the most tender, sensitive, pleasurable, erotic, arousing, orgasmic thing in creation – white female flesh that is. Well they're right about one thing, anyway.

That's the nice version of the legend, the version the Mabonies and Victorian clergymen, painters and soap manufacturers liked to believe, the version immortalised by Conan Doyle, or was it Rider Haggard – one of those hairy chaps with indecisive parents. But we're scholars and women of the world (well I am), we scoff at such twaddle. Bulwer Lytton, Heron Allen, Rice Burroughs – now *there's* one with plenty to answer for. On the basis of the incident in 47, when an expedition tested the natives' claims by offering their only non-male member, we accept the existence of bare monkey man and his peccadillo for naked white and female, preferably in the shape of short-sighted Cambridge graduates. We think they were unduly criticised when they came back without her, and shouldn't have been rusticated. Far from anti-feminist as everyone called us at first, when we formed the Club and mooted the expedition and posed full-frontal for the fund-raising calendar (including Una and Beth, poor plain puny little Beth), we think it's an even more radical-feminist position to insist that Marjorie was no victim but the vanguard of a new emancipation – liberated enough and

independent enough and daring enough to have sacrificed herself. The struggling as they stripped her and tied her between the trees was for the benefit of the camera; the tall thin bloke snatching her glasses off and scrunching them up in front of her face was demonstrating her total naked vulnerability, as well as the absolute finality of her act of sacrifice. We believe *she* was behind it, she choreographed the whole thing, she persuaded the men to do it. Beats foreplay any day – sorry tarz, you don't know what that is do you. Stick around, I've got some lessons lined up for when we get there.

So anyway we formed the Marjorie Sykes Club and each one of us (including Una – which is why, when she chickened out and we stuck feathers on her door, she hung herself) we each of us vowed to be as willing as Marjorie to give herself to bare monkey man for the sake of anthropological research, existential gratification and women's rights. Oh and the quest for immortality, nearly forgot it! And a bit of rough. All this in spite of not one of us (except Una) believing in anything remotely like the fairy-tale version. We know we won't come back, if we're chosen, and what we expect to see if we reach the lair is more in the nature of a woman-eating gorilla's abattoir than the snake god's temple-hareem of white immortal pulchritude, immaculately posed and perpetually preening, that our stiff male ancestors preferred to picture. Alma Tadema – there's another – did the famous painting of em. I doubt if he'd have bothered if they'd been covered in scratches and sores and sweat and dirt and ants like me. He dragged me a long way today, to another interim fuck-station – monkey chap I mean, not Alma. My leg's torn to shreds, I'll have to see if I can't convince him I don't need dragging, that I'll limp after him willingly. Truth is he's not all that communicative, doesn't even grunt, never mind say ungawa or discuss whether dragging still has a place in modern marriage. He just does a snort when he's ready and another when he's done. Then I roll over and cuddle you don't I, little ape fella. He sucked my tit just now. And picked a few ants off me, and ate them. Then he sleeps like a baby, and farts. He killed a little monkey earlier, didn't give me any but didn't object when I helped myself to a bit. It was disgusting, and tough as an old rug, but it was protein. What I didn't spew up was protein anyway. Perhaps I should try the ants ...

ꕥ

More likely bare monkey man's lair will be a damp cave or crevice, a narrow rock fissure, carpeted with thousands of tiny rat bones or whatever it is he eats. Now and then a larger long bone or a broken skull – naked white woman, I presume. Not immortal. I think he probably *does* treat em (us) as his mates, so-called, while we last, judging by his routine with me – drag shag snore – not incompatible with domestic bliss in English suburbia: bonks us then buggers off to the office (or vice versa), discarding us among his leftovers, the bones and the betting slips; comes home, gives us another squirt, then snores and farts all night. I don't imagine we get much housework done, what

with all the lolling, lolling about dying of boredom and malnutrition – not so much starvation as inadequately varied diet, women being omnivores (yes, another wasted feed-line!) – compounded by sheer inadvertant neglect – like the way he injures my leg by dragging me, but doesn't mean to. Then there'll be the festering damp – especially if we can't find anything to wear, or install central heating – even *before* postulating itchy jungle diseases, fungal infections, insect and snake bites, infestations of lice or fleas, or ants, and the occasional visit to the crevice of a hungry lioness. It all helps. Plus of course the memsaabs' favourite – nasty things that crawl up into you through your fuck-hole. (No, not you.) So when one day he comes home and finds his shagbag plumb out of squeak, or reduced by some cat to a mess of innerds and a ribcage, he drowns his sorrows in time-honoured masculine fashion, throws up, wanks over what's left of her, then heads back to the escarpment where he got her (stroke-pub stroke-library stroke-supermarket) and waits for another. Am I right loverboy?

Whether I can survive better I doubt. I've an edge, a certain mental preparedness from having come into it deliberately, studied the problem, taken a survival course, got the required jabs, read or seen *Castaway*, twice, left in-the-event-of letters, and ruthlessly weaned myself off mint-choc-chip and soaps (never mind soap!); but I don't think any of that'll compensate for the dietary deficiencies, damp quarters, runny sores, cunt-grubs, and visiting predators with fangs. We didn't compromise – Daphne decided, then Delia, but we all agreed – no compromise on the nakedness. Mentally equipped but without equipment. Early on we'd discussed a survival backpack, strapped to our shoulders, everything we might need: chocolate, flares, lipstick, nail file, spermicide spray, flower-arranging manual, Jilly Cooper omnibus; or even a few small essentials in a secret place about our persons. But no, we decided to stick with Marjorie, scrunch up the glasses and go into it – send whoever was chosen into it – utterly and completely starkers: completely bare, completely nude, completely naked, completely exposed, completely vulnerable, completely helpless, completely without means or hope of survival. Basically, completely fucked! So ... here we are, at yet another leafy motel with en-suite pissing area and pick-your-own ants, nursing the ugly little randy little ape man and resting the bad leg. All shagged out are we? I think I'm talking to myself, silly cunt ... No change there then.

ꕥ

© Tony Simcock 2010 onwards 2010/5