

the
SECRET HISTORY
of
Mrs. Mystery



THE SECRET HISTORY OF MRS MYSTERY

The Woman Next-Door

At first I heard the rattle of the little engine. That was before I saw her and it emerging from the cloud of thick blue smoke which filled her garage. I had to tell my wife.

“Jane, I see she’s got rid of that old motorbike and side-car at last.”

“It’s about time, I always thought it was dangerous to have a wooden kitchen chair lashed to the sidecar frame.”

“Yes well let’s be fair she did have what looked like a big paving slab to weigh the wheel down.”

“I shall be glad to see the back of it. What has she got now?”

“I think it’s called a tuk-tuk.”

“Oh right, they are quite popular in the Third World.”

“Really, well that’s the first one I have seen in this street.”

“What colour is it?”

“Sickly pink.”

“Yes very stylish.”

“Same shade as her hair?”

It’s quite unusual to be living next-door to someone who worships Donald Duck down at the local pond and has a rare collection of greetings cards, which comprises of a card for every known Saint’s day, including a *Happy Saint Agapit’s Day*. Mind you this is only hear-say, we have never been past her heavily bolted front door, so we haven’t seen them.

But we do have to admit that she is an unusual woman, how many of your neighbours prance around the garden with no clothes on? And how many of them have a tattoo of the Pope on both cheeks of their bums? And she is a big woman and not a pretty sight, even for an old man to look at. From a distance she could easily be mistaken for a Neanderthal throw-back, and if you were unfortunate enough to get closer there would be no mistake. Her husband had left her several years ago, some said he had gone to live with the Inuits in Northern Canada. I can’t say I blame him, she is a scary specimen of a woman. She is seldom seen in public during daylight

hours and never without her heavy dark glasses and booming headphones. For some reason she is never outside if there is a full moon and as far as I know she has never spoken to any of the neighbours. We call her Mrs. Mystery and for a good reason.

Let me tell you something else. She never disturbs her curtains until well after mid-day, sometimes it's almost evening when she shows herself outside the house. Her front door doesn't have a letter-box or even a door-bell so nobody can attract her attention during daylight hours. The Postman thinks she is in contention for a *no-bell* prize.

I said to my wife Jane; "I think she should be classified as *superstrange!*"

"Why do you think that John?"

"Well there were rumours about her being whispered in the back room of the *Dog and Pickle* last week."

"What were they saying?"

"Well Jane apparently nobody has any idea who her parents were."

"Really..?"

"Yes somebody thought she could have been the result of a failed experiment."

"Experiment..?"

"Yes it's believed that in the 60's the Russians were trying to create the perfect woman."

"Perfect woman...? Well they obviously failed."

"And that's not all, Cranky Jimmy thinks she may be a rejected alien from outer space."

"Cranky Jimmy you say..?"

"Yes, mind you it was just before closing time and he was well oiled by then."

"Look John you are confusing me."

"Why?"

"Well they were talking about her down at the Mothers Union and Granny Treacle said that Mystery's mother had invented Tipp-Ex correcting fluid when she was trying to make porridge."

"Granny Treacle..?"

"Oh you know the old lady who doesn't move very quickly."

"Correcting fluid you say? How does Granny Treacle know about this?"

"Well John I have told you before, many years ago they both lived in Dulally Alley."

"Dulally Alley...? Now I am confused."

One afternoon I peeped out of our bedroom window at her world and I witnessed an awful sight, it was so frightening I had to call my wife:

"Jane you will never guess what she is up to now!"

"Is she naked again?"

"Well not completely, she is just topless."

Mrs. Mystery was in her back garden trying to chop down a big tree with a little hand axe. From the back she looked like a gorilla trying to juggle two melons. Jane looked at the spectacle.

"I expect she is on a mission."

“What to chop enough fire-wood for the winter?”

“No silly, to put little boys off women for life!”

It was about a week later, I opened our curtains on a bright summer's morning and got the shock of my life, there was an awful racket coming from her garden. I couldn't believe my eyes, I had to call my wife again.

“Jane you are not going to believe this, come and have a look.”

“Do I have to?”

“Well yes, and you won't believe it either.”

“She can't be naked again, not at this time of the morning.”

“No dear, she has got an animal tied up on a chain in her back garden.”

“What sort of animal is it?”

“Well it's quite big and hairy, it's got a long tail and a very long nose.”

“How many legs has it got?”

“I can count four, one at each corner.”

Jane reluctantly levered herself from the comfort of the duvet and peered around our bedroom curtains out into Mrs. Mystery's garden.

“Right Jane you studied zoology at Uni, what is it?”

“Err, it looks like some sort of anteater to me. Possibly an ...Aardvark? Hang on I shall have to look it up.”

“An aardvark, what the hell is she doing with an aardvark in her garden?”

“Oh I expect it's just to confuse the neighbours.”

“Well it's certainly worked.”

Jane thumbed through several of her dusty old books and finally went onto Google. She was engrossed in her computer screen as a long head appeared from behind Mrs. Mystery's house.

“Jane what on earth...?”

“Hang on darling don't confuse me I haven't fully identified the anteater yet.”

“Well don't be too long, it's about to burrow under our fence!”

The head behind her house limped onto what she had laughingly thought of as a lawn. Time and neglect had now turned it into an unruly patch of brambles and weeds, which the animal began to chew.

“My God Jane, you will never believe what else she has got.”

Jane left her computer and joined me at the bedroom window.

“It looks like some sort of Donkey but it's quite hairy, it could be a Poitou, that's an unusual breed.”

“Yes whatever you say Jane, but have you counted its legs?”

She stood waiting for the mucky joke.

“Please don't tell me it's got five.”

“No dear you have overestimated by two. It's only got three legs.”

“Right John, so Mrs. Mystery has got a three legged Donkey and an anteater in her back garden.”

“No sorry dear, you are wrong, the anteater has just burrowed under the fence, now its nose is in our garden.”

That’s when the chain tightened and it retreated back down its new burrow.

If it happened to be a sunny afternoon, Mrs. Mystery had a habit of taking all of her clothes off and exposing her mounds of flesh by laying in the same spot on her so-called lawn. This was the only area which she attempted to keep trimmed, yes you guessed it, with a pair of scissors. And that’s the place where her sun bed had a permanent home. As I watched the new menagerie going about its daily business there was a movement in the grass, a sort of writhing, wriggling movement. I grabbed my binoculars for a closer look. That’s when I saw its long body heading for the sunbed.

“Jane you are not going to believe this!”

“What is it now?”

“For God’s sake, she’s got a snake, a bloody great big thing and its wriggling through the undergrowth in her garden.”

With that it settled on the sunbed and took advantage of the warming rays of the morning sun.

“Oh my god it’s a type of constrictor and it’s huge.”

The three legged donkey was seen limping at pace for a gap in the fence, it pushed right through, then heading for an escape into suburbia. After a couple of weeks I missed seeing Archie’s head (well what else could I call an aardvark?) peering into our garden from under the fence. I quite liked him, he had cleared out all of the ants but now he was nowhere to be seen!

It must have been about a month later, there was an autumn chill in the air and all was quiet in our neighbour’s garden. I was dozing away when I was disturbed by a *ding-dong* on our front doorbell. I slipped on my dressing gown and answered the door to a young man in a deep blue uniform. My first thought was; he is probably lost and trying to find his way home from a fancy dress party. He offered me some identification. I didn’t have my reading glasses on so it may just as well have been a bag of sweets.

“Good morning sir, I am Police Constable Chesney. I would like to ask you if you have seen your neighbour at number 13 recently.”

“No sorry Constable she tends to keep herself to herself, I haven’t seen any sign of her for several weeks.”

He handed me a contact card.

“Well sir if you do see her would you please let us know.”

“What’s the problem Constable?”

My attempt at being nosy was met with a curt:

“Sorry sir, I can’t say, but we would like to talk to her. Have you noticed that she has been acting strangely since her uncle died?”

“Her Uncle?”

“Yes, you know the one who owned the Zoo?”

“The Zoo..?”

“Yes he left her some of the residents in his will.”

“Well I can’t say that I noticed her acting any more strangely than usual.”

By Christmas Mrs. Mystery had still not been seen, and her curtains hadn’t been disturbed for weeks. After Christmas had been and gone, the shops were stocked with Easter eggs and chocolate bunnies wrapped in silver paper. The nights were getting lighter and the sun made an occasional appearance over the roof tops. Jane was thinking about the coming summer and endless barbeques in the garden.

“John you will never guess what I saw last night.”

“Surprise me.”

“Well I was just looking out of the window, as you do and I thought I saw a cloud of blue smoke going into next-door’s garage.”

“Really, what was making the smoke?”

“I can’t be sure, I couldn’t see much of the thing, but I think it was streaked with pink.”

“Not shocking pink?”

“More a sort of mucky pink and do you know I thought there was a long tube sticking out of the back of it.”

“Was the tube belching blue smoke?”

“Strangely not but it was painted in bright colours and when I got up in the middle of the night the bedroom light was on next door.”

“Really, do you think there were burglars?”

“No John don’t be silly, they wouldn’t dare to pinch anything from her. No I think she may be back.”

“Right, where do you think she has been?”

“Oh probably to some Greeting Card Fair somewhere, I heard there was one in Beijing.”

“Well it took her a long while to get back.”

“Yes those Tuk-Tuk’s are quite slow and I have a suspicion that she may have taken a wrong turning and got lost.”

“Got lost, why do you say that?”

“Well you must remember me telling you that when I was surfing the internet, I came across that site featuring a dancing competition in Walmart.”

“Walmart..?”

“Yes you know the big one in Las Vegas.”

“Las Vegas...?”

“Anyway John I am sure I told you. There was someone there who looked a lot like her and she was taking part in a; *dancing in the frozen meat aisle competition*. She was doing the *funky chicken* in a Donald Duck suit.”

“Donald Duck suit...? Jane are you sure it was her?”

“Oh yes there is no mistaking a body like hers.”

“And you think that now she is back and living next door to us again?”

“Yes I am sure. Mrs. Number 12 said that when she was in the tobacconists, just before they closed, and who do you think was in there? It was someone who looked exactly like Mrs. Mystery.”

“What was she doing in the tobacconists?”

“She was buying some pipe-cleaners.”

“Pipe cleaners, but she doesn’t smoke a pipe... does she?”

“Oh I don’t know, maybe she wanted to use them for worming the cat.”

“Ah!”

Over the next few days Jane kept a closer watch on Mrs. Mystery’s house. She wasn’t being nosy. She was just taking an active part in a combined Neighbourhood Watch and R.S.P.B exercise to log strange looking old birds. I was curious as well and although I didn’t catch even a glimpse of her I heard a constant booming noise, it went on all through the night but stopped at breakfast time. And even stranger, it was coming from her bedroom, I had to tell Jane.

“Jane have you heard those strange noises coming from the house next door?”

“Yes John I have, you don’t think she has inherited a Bittern do you?”

“No we are too far from the Marshes, it sounds more like a Digeridoo to me.”

“A Digeri what?”

“Do.”

“No don’t.”

“Maybe she didn’t go to a greetings Card Fair in Beijing after all. Maybe she went to a Music Festival.”

“What in Australia?”

“There’s no telling with her.”

For the next few nights the booming noises continued to come from the direction of her house. We wondered if she was having lessons so we looked in our local Yellow Pages but we couldn’t find anyone in our area who offered Digeridoo for beginners. Jane even drew a blank when she looked online but she did discover one unusual fact. In the outback of Australia certain Aboriginal tribes can attract very large snakes by imitating their feeding calls on a digeridoo. Jane was still curious about Mrs. Mystery.

“Well if you ask me I think she’s looking for another man.”

“God help him.”

“From what I’ve heard she’s been out on the pull.”

“Why do you say that Jane?”

“That woman from the Old People’s Home says that she saw her in the local burger-bar.”

“Old people’s home...?”

“Oh you know John, her with the ginger tom.”

“Ginger Tom...?”

“Anyway she saw her in the burger-bar dressed to the nines, full length fur coat, stiletto heels, Gucci handbag, the lot.”

“What was she doing in there?”

“She was chomping her way through a half-pounder and trying to impress.”

“Impress who?”

“Well apparently the deputy manager of the sausage factory was also in there.”

“Sausage Factory...?”

“She kept looking at him.”

“Were they sitting together?”

“No of course not, that would have been far too obvious.”

“Someone should warn him.”

“John Smith don’t you dare.”

“Maybe she just went in there because she was hungry.”

“No John, no way, she was carrying a neatly folded copy of; *Doggin Weekly*, that’s a dead giveaway.”

“Dog what...?”

Meanwhile I heard an unusual report from a friend who had been to a posh new nightclub in the town. He said there was a woman in there who fitted her description perfectly and she was taking bets that after twelve pints of real ale and a jar of pickled eggs she could fart the tune of *God Save the Queen*, before she passed out. I was told that by the time she had downed the twelve pints of real ale and eaten a large jar of pickled eggs they had a tape-recorder ready to record the attempt, and a local record producer was standing by to make a fortune from selling copies. I had to tell Jane.

“John that sounds disgusting, so are you telling me that she has a body trumpet and a Digeridoo in her arsenal?”

“Her arsenal..? Err well yes, you could put it like that, anyway that’s what I was told by Frank the Plank.”

“Frank the Plank? Isn’t he a bit thick? Anyway so what did he say happened next?”

“Well I was told that she got as far as; *Send her Victorious*, then stopped. I am not sure if she passed out or just ran out of gas.”

So to get back to the story. After a couple of weeks the caterwauling stopped and we didn’t see any further signs of Mrs. Mystery, however we did catch glimpses of a very large, well-fed snake relaxing on her sunbed.