

Mervyn Jones

Five Days by Moonlight

Monday

REACHING THE ENTRANCE to the Zoo at ten minutes past nine, he saw her car—a small Renault—already parked. It was usual for her to arrive first. His conception of courtesy ordained that a man should wait for a lady, not she for him; but he had to drive in from Barnet, and to leave home at an absurdly early time would have involved him in difficult explanations to his wife.

He parked his Jaguar and entered the Zoo, using the Society membership card which he had acquired when committed to this affair. The gatekeeper, who had come to know him well, would have been surprised to learn that his interest in animals was minimal. It was she who had, with what he considered to be a feminine admixture of timidity and guile, and also making a choice of a scene pleasant to her through familiarity, proposed that they should meet here. He walked briskly to the Charles Clore Pavilion for Mammals and descended the steps leading to the Moonlight World. She had explained to him that this subterranean arcade was devoted to nocturnal animals, and that the near-darkness was intended to deceive them into the belief that night, which they favoured for such activities as were available to them, began at the hour when the Zoo opened. A sign adjured him: "Go slowly to adjust your eyes to the dim light." But this precept he never obeyed. She was here, guarded for him by a secrecy which the promises of love turned into knowledge, just as the cleverly modulated light transformed day into night; she was waiting.

He found her near the cage of the short-headed flying phalanger. Its head was indeed rather squat, but she had remarked that she found the designation "short-headed" un-

necessary to the point of being pejorative, for it did not appear that there was such a creature as a long-headed phalanger. It did on occasion fly, so far as the confines of its cage permitted, although whether this flight was more than a particularly agile leap neither he nor she had been able to decide. At present, it was apparently dormant. The day, or in phalangerial perception the night—at all events, the period of wakefulness—had begun only a quarter of an hour ago, and in the absence of any imperative responsibilities it was surely reasonable for a phalanger to prolong its rest. She had wondered, moreover, whether a phalanger—or for that matter a jird, a hutia or a casiragua—might not find something suspicious in an environment that varied with no lunar cycles and in which totally dark nights never occurred. To advance this problem invited conjecture concerning the intelligence, or at least the capacity for memory, of nocturnal animals.

Lovers, however, could only rejoice that it was always moonlight here; and it was hard to believe that, when the Zoo was closed to the public, the arcade was brilliantly illuminated. Yet such was the reality, and it had suggested to her one of those speculations that arose from time to time in her imaginative mind. She would like to know, she said, whether some ambitious keeper made use of its seclusion to study for an Open University degree, or conceivably to write a novel, undisturbed even by noises from the sleeping animals and benefiting from free electricity.

But he was averse to such discussions, in view of the desperately limited time that they could spend together. He admired the ingenuity with which she had devised so safe a meeting-place; and he was gratefully aware that no other man was able to caress the

woman he loved on the way to his office, thus storing a pleasure that lingered through even the most demanding or frustrating day. Still, he grudged any attention diverted to the creatures which merely provided the locale and the background, so he at once embraced and kissed her.

She responded to the kiss, then withdrew her lips and rested her cheek against his. He had reflected on occasion, as one of the curious effects of this style of meeting, that he was able to offer her a freshly shaven cheek instead of the stubble with which other mistresses, not to speak of his wife, had been obliged to content themselves.

"How was your weekend?" she asked.

"All right", he said. "We went to the cottage."

Her hand, rustling his hair, halted momentarily before resuming its movement and he regretted the little word "we"—the reminder of another allegiance. They both had marriages so deeply rooted in habit, which time had soldered into loyalty, that a break was virtually impossible. Stated and accepted early in their love affair, this fact was nevertheless a constraint which they did not like to recall when they were together.

"I painted nearly all the time", she said. "It keeps me from thinking."

He wondered whether she meant that it kept her from thinking of the deception imposed on her husband, or that it kept her from vainly thinking of him. As though to resolve this doubt, she added: "I missed you all the time, though."

"I never stop missing you, darling", he said.

Tuesday

HOLDING HER IN HIS ARMS, and aware in his peripheral vision of the meticulously regulated movements of the slow loris, he toyed with the notion that through the accumulation of these meetings they had, in a sense, become nocturnal animals. They resembled these creatures, in the first place, in the prudent shyness with which they evaded notice even in the dim light which afforded welcome protection. They kept their voices at a pitch below the norm of the daytime world, for their murmurs could not be drowned by the noises of traffic and of aircraft which are the urban equivalent of the lion's roar or the

elephant's trumpeting; indeed, they were more often than not silent, communicating their sentiments through the intuitions of contiguity. And of all the senses, sight was the least necessary to them. He savoured her attractions by means of hearing (sometimes words, but more intimately and delightfully the accelerated rhythm of her breathing and the throaty sound with which she expressed particular pleasure), by means of taste (a mingling of marmalade and coffee which he had learned to recognise on her lips), by means of smell (partly natural, partly the scent, delicate rather than pungent, which she considered suitable for this hour), and above all by means of touch (the fine strands of her hair, the cool smoothness of her skin, the fabric of dresses now familiar to his fingers rather than to his eyes). So great, by this time, was his reliance on the tactile that he had begun to forget such visual details as the precise colour of her eyes and the tint of her complexion. Much time had passed since he had last seen her exposed either to daylight or to electric light at the power lavished on an ordinary room, and in this time his love had only deepened.

At a certain point, these assignations had touched a chord of memory; and after some searching he had recalled other assignations belonging to a period which, despite its remoteness and its insignificance in the perspective of his life, retained a certain charm because it was the first time when he believed himself to be in love. He was then in the Lower Sixth of his public school and the girl was one of the domestic staff. They had met secretly, for she was afraid of dismissal and he of some possibly serious punishment. It was always dark, therefore; and sometimes they were fortunate enough to enjoy the romantic light of an early-rising moon. They had restrained themselves from the full satisfaction of desire, she from prudence or perhaps inherited moral inhibition, he from the lack of confidence caused by total inexperience. There was in any case the threat of interruption and discovery, as there was now in the Moonlight World; and he was thus repeating, so many years later, an exchange of affection no less real because it extended more to the emotional than to the physical sphere.

Moreover, as his trysting-time with the girl

had been nine o'clock, so the hour for these rejuvenating encounters was also nine, or as soon after nine as circumstances allowed. Forgetting that to the outer world the hour was ante meridiem, they joined in that sweet fusion of ardour and contentment which for lovers is the reward of evening. When they parted, of course, the cherished illusion had to be discarded. But even then he rejoiced in his rare advantage of including two evenings within each span of twenty-four hours: one given in the customary manner to a dinner-party, the theatre or the television, and the other to an amatory interlude for which it was unnecessary to invent an alibi.

Making a pause in their absorption in each other, they stood hand in hand contemplating the slow loris. This animal was aptly named; it crept along the logs that furnished its cage at a pace which appeared to have been artificially reduced, like a television replay of an incident in a Test match. When lifting food to its mouth, it showed a similar lack of haste or eagerness. From time to time the loris and its mate—if that was their relationship—met, regarded each other pensively, and passed in the manner of neighbours whose paths cross in the course of shopping. She was hoping, she had said, to observe the slow loris in the act of love and to discover whether it was roused by desire from its habitual placidity. He had dissuaded her, however, from such an intrusion; if the loris made love slowly, he felt, that was its own concern rather than a subject for public curiosity, and it might well derive more enjoyment than, for example, the urgently impelled dog. Whether the character of the slow loris was shaped by a tentative and cautious outlook on life, or by a reflective and abstracted cast of mind, or by simple languor, was open to doubt. These pacific animals, in any case, supplied an appropriate background to a meeting such as theirs, in which a surrender to passionate excitement could scarcely (in the absence of even a bench) be rewarding, and might in the event of their being disturbed lead to grave embarrassment.

Wednesday

HE HAD BEEN WORRIED, at the time of his arrival, by not seeing the Renault. He had been lucky with the traffic lights,

however, and it was only four minutes past nine; that he should reach the Moonlight World before her was not unprecedented, and he told himself that it made a pleasant change. But after descending the steps, he was quickly overcome by a feeling of desolation at being alone in a place so distinctively consecrated to her presence. He did not propose to miss a moment of her company by awaiting her, as she awaited him, in the farther recesses, and so he stationed himself close to the door. There, he glumly watched the hasty perambulations—whose restlessness mimicked his own mood—of the small-toothed palm civet, an animal which he was unable to regard with any degree of favour.

When he had flicked the illuminated panel of his digital watch on and off for the third time, and read the discouraging figure of 9.15, he began anxiously devising reasons for her lateness. She might have been detained by some domestic emergency, or by an inopportune telephone call; or trouble with the car (she praised its reliability, but he had no faith in cheap cars) might have exposed her to the delays of public transport. The pacing of the civet grated increasingly on his nerves, and it occurred to him that anyone coming through the door might suspect that he was keeping a rendezvous. He moved along the corridor until he reached the abode of an animal which, in moderation at least, he liked. With its appealing, somewhat puppy-like features, the kinkajou was at least amusing and could be called attractive. The cage, however, was almost filled by a dense network of the branches and twigs of trees, arranged—with a care and artistry which one could not fail to admire—to resemble the forests of South America wherein the kinkajou was at home. Patience and keen attention, therefore, were required if one wished to catch a glimpse of the animal when it did not choose to exhibit itself close to the glass. Twice he thought that he discerned its face amid the vegetation, but he could not be sure; and he waited for it to emerge with a concentration that, to some extent, diverted him from the infinitely more significant task of waiting for a unique and adorable human being.

The kinkajou did not reveal itself, and this bad omen—together with the passage of time, for it was now half past nine—forced him to the painful realisation that she too was

unlikely to appear. She had never been so late before, nor had she ever failed to keep the assignation; he began to fear that her husband had by some means become cognisant of the affair. Another horrifying possibility was that she had been injured in an accident. He trembled at the thought, and struggled to persuade himself that, since her home was in Kentish Town, there was little risk of a serious accident in the short distance. But a bumping accident with its attendant tedious formalities, perhaps the intervention of the police; a mechanical mishap such as the blockage of the Renault's petrol feed-pipe, with which a woman of purely artistic and literary interests was ill-equipped to deal; for that matter, a puncture—any of these was only too easily imagined. He realised miserably that he would not know until tomorrow, and regretted that he had cautioned her not to telephone him at his office. She herself worked in a bookshop, but he had not troubled to learn its name.

He searched the other corridors in the faint hope that she had arrived while he was intent on the kinkajou, but it was no surprise to find himself still alone. Lighting a cigarette—an indulgence which in his agitated state he could not resist, although smoking was forbidden in the Moonlight World—he was startled by a sharp outburst of high-pitched chattering and looked up to confront a douloucouri. The name, which might have graced a family of Greek aristocrats, was inappropriate; the douloucouri was a monkey, in no way superior in dignity to the species which traditionally accompanied organ-grinders in their mendicance. Why it should be nocturnal, since simians were by nature inquisitive rather than retiring, it was not easy to imagine. It was staring at him in the shameless manner for which children in respectable families are rebuked. It had bulging eyes, whose dilation appeared to be as irresistibly provoked by curiosity as is that of the male sexual organ by concupiscence. In their regard there was also a malevolent or more exactly a derisive quality; and it seemed to him that, having on other occasions seen him happy in the possession of his beloved, the douloucouri was now enjoying the discomfiture caused by his enforced solitude. So potent and so disturbing was this impression that he moved hastily away and turned his attention to the inoffen-

sive, if uninteresting, Brazilian tree porcupine. It was irrational, now that hope was virtually extinct, to linger here at all; yet he felt it to be a point of honour to remain until the time when he normally said his farewell to her.

It was ten o'clock, therefore, when he sadly ascended the steps. As he started up the Jaguar, he concentrated his mind staunchly on reviewing the appointments that lay ahead of him. They were, since he was keenly involved in his work, by no means without interest; yet nothing could compensate him for the melancholy experience of having, against all expectation, begun the day with a wasted evening.

Thursday

WHEN HE SAW HER—indeed, as soon as he saw the Renault—he was so relieved and delighted that he resolved not even to seek an explanation for his disappointment of the day before, much less to reproach her. She, however, took the first opportunity when her lips were free to say: "I'm dreadfully sorry about yesterday, darling. I had to keep Alexander home from school—he's got chickenpox."

He frowned, a reaction fortunately invisible in the Moonlight World. An allusion to one of her children was necessarily an allusion to her marriage, and hence to the established domain in which she spent most of her time and which he could never enter. He liked to think of her, so far as he could, as trammelled by no existence outside the retreat where, at the beginning and the end of this precious hour, he found her and left her.

"I'm glad you were able to come today", he said.

"I've left him with my mother. I phoned her right away, but she couldn't get over till the afternoon."

Sadly, they both knew that the lost meeting had made a rupture in their accustomed harmony. Although on the plane of logic he fully accepted the validity of her explanation, it was inherent in the lover's irrepressible demand for the loved one that she could not be quite forgiven. They did not speak again until, yielding to her wish, he had accompanied her to the cage of the fennec fox. This was her favourite among the nocturnal animals, and in her estimation the most

intelligent; he had sometimes arrived to find her crouched before its cage at fox-eye level, for she believed that it recognised her and, in its silent fashion, greeted her. He dismissed this claim as an illusion created by its alert expression, but she argued that a dog was able to recognise regular visitors and there was no reason to suppose the talents of a fennec fox to be inferior. In his view, it was more probable that the fennec fox regarded all humans as an intriguing novelty. Not only was it nocturnal, but its home was the Arabian desert; and the annual total of people walking about the desert at night must surely be derisory.

However, a visit to the fennec fox prompted a train of thought with which he liked to dally. Its cage was large, and the décor of sand and stones was presumably an accurate replica of the desert. Thus, unlike the cages of forest animals which were (to his taste, if not to that of the animals concerned) displeasingly congested, it evoked visions of boundless space. For him, it engendered a mood in which he could imagine himself remote from his habitual surroundings—accompanied, needless to say, by the woman he loved.

He was led again to think of a scheme, which he had several times urged on her, whereby through an unbroken sequence of days and nights they could be together without any danger of being thwarted by mischance or by competing obligations. His idea was that they should go away together—or rather, since recognition at London Airport was too great a risk to run, that they should meet in some distant and unfrequented place. Given the right choice of destination, the project seemed to him feasible, and indeed it had more than one successful precedent. He made a couple of business trips every year, and in the past he had contrived without detection to be reunited in a discreet hotel with his mistress of the relevant period.

Now, he once more pressed her to consent to this enterprise. But she returned, with a gentle sigh just audible above the squeaks of the nearby Chinese hamster, the same answer as on previous occasions. Nothing would rejoice her more than to accede to his entreaties; but she had never, since her marriage, travelled without her husband and she could imagine no plausible excuse for

doing so. Indeed, it was her husband's regular habits and taste for domestic routine that accounted for the brevity and the timing of their illicit encounters. As before, he could not rebut these inexorable arguments; and he knew that, although she would not say so in any wounding manner, she viewed his proposal as a fantasy reflecting more credit on the intensity of his love than on his sense of reality.

He dropped the subject, therefore, and they turned from verbal exchange to the simpler language of tactile pleasure. Kisses, the mutual relish of flesh and hair, and the ardent pressure of their vertical but nevertheless fondly intertwined bodies: these assurances of devotion were immune from disagreement or reservation.

Friday

ALWAYS, A SPECIAL poignancy attached itself to those meetings which must be followed by the separation of the weekend. It was precisely on Friday, however, that the precious time was likely to be reduced at the outset by a density of traffic caused by a heightened rhythm of commercial activity. So it proved today; he was delayed at every possible point of congestion and, when at last he hastened from the gate to the rendezvous, his watch showed 9.18.

She greeted him with more than her usual eagerness, evoked both by the chastening thought of the approaching separation and by the impatience which had mounted within her while she awaited him. Then she confided in him that life at present was not without its difficulties for her. The child, though of course his illness was minor, was bored and fretful. Her husband was in the sullen mood invariably induced by a visit from her mother. And her mother, who disliked getting up early, had commented critically on her insistence on leaving the house before nine when she was not due at the bookshop until ten; her explanation that she preferred to shop before the crowds had been met by the rejoinder that a need to shop every day indicated poor domestic management. This incident, which she found merely annoying, struck him as potentially menacing, for he had considerable respect for the perceptiveness of elderly women. One of his mistresses

had remarked that she was more vigilantly observed, and therefore her infidelity was more likely to be detected, by her mother than by her husband.

On her, however, the effect of these irritations was to sharpen the joy afforded by her lover's consoling embrace and to generate an exceptional ardour. She began, indeed, to invite him to forms of physical intimacy which, though falling short of the luxuriences of the bedroom, recalled those on which he had ventured in his youth under the similarly reduced illumination of the back row of the cinema.

Reluctant to seem an unwilling partner, and tempted by her candid encouragement to a ready arousal, he was yet unable to dismiss the fear of interruption. His forebodings were justified; for, just as he was on the point of deciding that speed might compensate for recklessness, they were made abruptly aware that they were threatened by an observation by no means so impassive as that of the angwatibo or the long-nosed potoro.

Experience had taught him that, while the Zoo was little frequented before ten o'clock by the tardy English citizenry, tourists hailing from more energetic nations were inclined to make full use of time. The arcade now echoed to voices whose appreciation of the Moonlight World was expressed in the German language. He disengaged himself from her in sudden alarm. Although he disapproved of xenophobic prejudice, the unexpected sound of that harsh and commanding tongue revived memories of a childhood dominated by warnings of invasion and conquest. They fled, in automatic compliance with a procedure worked out at the initiation of these meetings, to the vicinity of a door labelled "Emergency Exit." They had, between them, a wide range of friends, including some without regular employment, and the possibility that one of these people might decide

on an early visit to the Zoo, though slight, was not entirely to be discounted. They had not, however, been driven to making use of this means of escape; nor did they do so now, for the Germans were after all strangers. True, the mood of passion had been irretrievably dispelled, and any attempt at renewal—with the Germans evidently intent on a methodical tour of the arcade—would have been rash in the extreme; but more temperate kisses, with a watchful eye on the middle distance, were not impossible.

After a time, they were able to move a short distance to a cage which held for them a particular subtle charm. The background was tinted in dark blue, suggesting the night skies of the Mediterranean which have long been regarded as the ideal setting for romantic love. The effect sought by the designer, however, was probably Oriental, for the cage was inhabited by Indian fruit bats. Perfectly motionless—and always motionless, so far as he or she had ever observed—these extraordinary creatures hung from the ceiling, providing an image of unutterable calm and implying the transience of all human sufferings or frustrations.

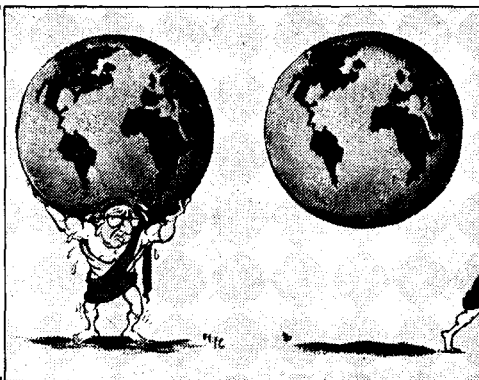
All too soon, a covert but inevitable consultation of his watch told him that it was almost ten o'clock. The Germans had gone, and a blessed silence hallowed their last kisses; but, as on every Friday, the parting was painful. She wished to cling to him until he reached the door, but he was unwilling to say his farewell in the neighbourhood of the restless and distracting civet. In obedience to his plea, therefore, she remained where they had stood while they exchanged fervent assurances of the constancy of their love. So, as he prepared himself to endure the dreary days without her, his memories were of her pale profile framed against a background of dark blue and of the transcendent patience of the Indian fruit bats.

Dr Kissinger

on

World Affairs

An Interview



DR KISSINGER, in the world at large and in the USA itself there is a certain feeling of dissatisfaction with America's leadership. You yourself have now been out of office for 18 months. How does it feel to be a man of whom many people inside and outside America are saying this would never have happened in his time, this would never have happened when Henry Kissinger was in office?

KISSINGER: In fairness one has to say that the new administration was not elected necessarily to carry out the policies that I would have carried out. So I think it is correct to say that certain matters would have been handled differently in terms of style and maybe in terms of substance. But then there was, after all, a change in administration.

—You have always been careful not to criticise the present government, except very discreetly. What would be your recommendations to the Presidency to improve its success at home and abroad?

KISSINGER: First, let me explain the basic position that I have adopted. I had to contribute to the conduct of foreign policy for eight years, under conditions of near civil war. When I now go through the documents for my book, I realise how anaesthetised we were at that time and how we almost took this constant result for granted.

I formed the very strong opinion at that time that what the top leadership of the country needs

THIS is the first publication in English of the long conversation in Washington between Henry Kissinger and a group of "Spiegel" editors, including Rudolf Augstein. Dr Kissinger has kindly gone over the transcript which was originally conducted in several languages.

is an atmosphere in which its motives are not constantly challenged and in which it knows that those who have an influence on public opinion are not just waiting for an excuse to create a "credibility gap."

Therefore, I have been very careful not to make criticisms on essentially tactical issues and to give the administration the sense that, on those items on which I agree, I will even give it public support.

—As you did in the case of the Panama Canal agreement.

KISSINGER: Yes. When I do criticise or when I do state a different opinion, I want it clearly understood by our public that this is not an attempt to regain lost power or to undermine the confidence of the public in our Government, which I really think is one of the biggest problems of our period.

And this I think has to be understood both for this conversation and for my general public attitude.

—Accepting that, what policy changes would you recommend to the Carter government?

KISSINGER: I think what is essential to be done is that there is a clearly articulated concept of American foreign policy which everybody can understand and towards which other nations and our own public can orient themselves.

I think it is not possible to go on indefinitely with these fluctuations which are identified as a contest between this or that personality . . .

—Brzezinski or Young . . .

KISSINGER: . . . within the administration, so that in the period of four weeks you can get very tough talk about the Soviet role in Africa