



In from the Cold

A few years ago, in a rural part of Scotland, there lived a man who spent his life entirely outside society. He lived among the woods and fields, and in winter took refuge in barns and unused buildings. To eat, he killed animals or took food from wherever he could.

This wild man did not consider that he was stealing anything, since he was living outside of society. He was no more 'stealing' the food he found than we would say that foxes 'steal' chickens, or chickens 'steal' grain. This man would consider the taking, killing and eating of a farmyard chicken as fulfilling his needs as an animal to eat: as a deliberate but necessary action, admittedly to the detriment of the life of the chicken, but not as an action committed against humans - the chicken's presumed 'owners'. However, to human society, this was a transgression. The man was hunted down, brought before the courts, and found guilty. But rather than sentencing him to imprisonment, he was instructed to go and live in a house - sentenced to rejoin society!

A Stranger on Main Street

The decision whether to join or rejoin society - or to live as an animal - is not one that people normally have

to make. But this is the very decision being faced by Marc Simian, as he walks down Main Street. M. Simian is a Monkey, who has just survived being shipwrecked, and escaped being executed as a foreign spy. So he feels more acutely than most the typical frisson of exhilaration and latent apprehension that comes with being a lone foreigner in a strange land.

The more he walks, though, the more he gains in confidence. Although he receives the occasional strange look, most of the townspeople seem not to care. Not for the first or last time, he seems to be the individual most aware of his own uniqueness.

He is naturally wary of possible dangers. But, having been publicly acquitted of any crime, and becoming a de facto citizen of the town, he realises that any individuals would be restrained from harming him by invisible bonds of the law, and behind that, the communal contract between each individual and society.

This ingrained tendency means that everyone on Main Street is not consciously sizing up each passer-by, the value of coins in their pockets, or the gold in their teeth, and calculating if it is worth robbing them for personal gain. Even the strongest, meanest looking characters do not carry the menace they would have if they and the rest of the townsfolk were not bound into the same societal game.

So, although he feels like a very unique individual, quite separate from this alien society, he knows that it is through their society that his individual security is guaranteed. If there were no society to recognise his citizenship, he would just be an animal, who

could be hunted down, put down or run out of town.

Choices

Our wandering Simian walks right through the town, comes to the edge of it, and walks back through it again. In revisiting the main street, he feels he is returning somewhere already reassuringly familiar.

Indeed, he can afford now to have a blasé disdain for the street: shops selling useless goods, so-called cafés serving so-called food, offices with nothing but cardboard images of houses in the window. And yet, the almost instinctive tourist's dismissal turns to a concentration of mind, as he realises that his fate now seems to be as a citizen of this town, and he may have to do things the human way.

From a foodstore stacked with exotic fruits, a bunch of bananas is beckoning him. But he knows there is a choice to be made, and a price to be paid for taking the bananas. The price is either to hand over some metal coins, or to risk punishment. He realises that the choice becomes part of a bigger decision: whether to adopt the role of being a good citizen, or to resort to being a scavenging animal.

To choose wilderness over civilisation - to live the life of a fugitive, no better than a chicken-eating fox - may always be an option. But precisely because it will be an option at any time, it is not necessary to make that choice just yet. Once reverting to the animal kingdom, he will have forsaken humanity society for good.

On the other hand, there will never be a better chance than now, to opt in.

While sustenance, security and survival in the short term is always at the front of the mind of a shipwrecked refugee, the possibility of eventually finding a way to return to your homeland - to your own people - will always beckon. And that may require a base in this society, for the time being...

The Monkey walks on, leaving the bananas behind.

Refuge

Eventually, as he walks, the nature of the town changes. Before, there were houses with small gardens attached to them; but now, it seems to be mostly gardens, with little houses in them. It is, in fact, a field of allotments, and the 'houses' are the little huts or sheds.

He darts into the maze of little alleys of hedges and plants, immediately feeling some kind of empathy with the territory. The empathy is not because it's a natural habitat: he is more used to living in the man-made environment of his ship (and he considers himself, anyway, one of the more urbane members of the crew). Perhaps what is welcoming is the blend of natural bounty and human compatibility: each allotment is a sort of primate-scale private refuge, full of fruits and vegetables - and yet with no-one around to claim them. Our hero vaults a hedge, goes up to a little hut, and without much trouble is inside. For now, at least, our brave new citizen has a base.

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