



His Lordship Goes To Town

The low golden sun warms the last of the harvest crops as Autumn falls on an allotment on the edge of an old English town. Apart from the occasional breeze gently rustling the leaves, there is almost no sound, like the still of a summer day. But a thoughtful onlooker is well aware that the warmth will soon fade, and the easy pickings of late season fruit and vegetables will soon diminish to nothing.

The onlooker, a Monsieur Simian, considers himself the paramount inhabitant of the allotment. The allotment is of course home to many creatures; but to Monsieur Simian - a well-educated monkey - the other animals don't really count. Of all the creatures that reside there, after all, he alone knows that this territory is an allotment in the first place; he alone is aware of the concept of residence, and the particular rules of stewardship of the land that apply here.

Besides, he is the strongest and smartest creature around, most able to exert his will on his surroundings. He is aware of his power and providence as he surveys his lands. The allotment, its fruits and vegetables, and all the pollinating insects, burrowing worms and waste-digesting bacteria that help support its ecosystem, could

have been put there just for him, for his own benefit, as the head of the food chain. But it is a food chain that is in danger of withering away, come winter.

Simian knows that he cannot survive the winter if he stays here. Sooner or later he will need to go out from the allotment, venture into town, and make his living in the human world. But to do that he will need money. So he has had to think about ways of raising finance. As he looks around, he realises that most of the fruits and vegetables have already been harvested, and there is not much he could sell. All there is, really, is the land itself. So he comes up with a very promising plan: he sets himself up as landlord of the allotment.

The new regime

The nominal owner of the land is the town council, but the council seems to have become an absentee landlord. At least, no one from there has been around since Simian arrived on the scene. So Simian steps in to take charge of the place himself. In one move, he transforms himself from desperate outlaw to overlord, simply by claiming possession of the territory.

He decides to extract a rent from all the allotment holders - or at least, as many as he can get away with, for now. So graciously but persuasively, each time he meets a new person, he asks them for money.

Now, an outside observer who did not know what was going on might think they saw just a hairy little man begging for cash. With or without

a latent threat of violence, money changes hands, and the recipient leaves the donor alone. The recipient earns an easy income, doing no more work than the effort of collecting the rent.

From the point of view of Simian, however, it confirms his sense of lordship of the allotment. The allotment renters work the land, paying him for the privilege, while keeping most of the produce for themselves. He is still head of all the creatures on the allotment. Those humans - who neither own nor live on the allotment - simply slot into the hierarchy between him and the other creatures. Under this new regime, for several days, Simian enjoys a rich harvest of cash from the allotment-tending proletariat of Hartlepool.

He accepts rent not only in cash, but extracts whatever else he can from the locals. He graciously accepts some nice tomatoes and peppers from the man whose greenhouse he couldn't break into. These will do for immediate consumption. He borrows a couple of handy looking metal tools and a leather pouch from a man who has insufficient cash on him. And he gently extorts cigarettes from the man whose wife doesn't know he goes down the allotment to smoke. Once having forsaken the role of the humble, amoral, animal forager - for the role of human wheeler-dealer - he may as well play the game to his full advantage.

Simian senses that he can only do this extraction exercise once - at least, once for this year. So after he reckons he has got 'rent' from most of the plots, it must be time to put his money to use. With the silver jangling in his

leather pouch, his lordship heads into town.

Man about town

The first thing he does is to buy a nice coat. Expensive, but worth it: this should confirm his presence in town as a gentleman, and not just a primate. He also gets himself a decent haircut, which makes him feel much better - Monsieur Simian is, after all, ever so slightly vain, even for a monkey. Looking the part, he then heads to the town hall to do his main business, to buy himself the right to one of the allotment plots. This ensures his presence on the allotment is legitimate according to human laws - not strictly necessary for Simian, but a kind of insurance that may serve him later on. Besides, it will stop him having to climb over the gate all the time: the Lord of the Allotment is now in possession of a key to his own fiefdom.

His main business done, Monsieur Simian checks in to a nice inn, where he will stay for the night to celebrate his newly elevated position in life. He dines well, on seared fish, roasted vegetables and fine port, and finishes with a cigar in front of a crackling fire. As he enjoys the luxuries of his new-found wealth, he wonders briefly if he may have unfairly exploited his fellow creatures to get here. But he swiftly concludes that he is just acting within the system - what is a human-made system, after all - and is simply making the system work in his favour. Changing the system would be another matter, for another day.

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