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1AM – I knock on the guest house door – Georgio opens it immediately, and gives me what I take to be a sly, conspiratorial grin. I am also very amused by his cartoonish flexing of the pectorals, not unlike the body-builder in ‘Monsieur Hulot’s Holiday’. Georgio’s pick-up truck is waiting in the driveway – we’ll push it down the hill until out of earshot before starting her up, then drive to the ocean and dump the shrine- thing in the deep channel where the storm drain run-off meets the sea. We are both wearing black, in sixties TV thriller style, and make our way silently through the camellias. As we round the corner, and come into the ‘oriental’ clearing, however, we are met with an inexplicable sight; four figures, human for sure, are gathered around what I thought of as our garden ornament, and seem to be performing some kind of ritual...as the gibbous moon emerges from behind a thin cloud, I can make out the features and demeanour of Hashimoto, our fastidious but dedicated gardener, and two of his underlings, plus an older female, perhaps Mrs. Hashimoto, variously kneeling, bowing, and placing things in or around the little concrete house on a pedestal. For all of a minute, I am rooted to the spot, unable to move. I then give Georgio a tug, and we retreat back to the guest house, to lick our wounds and consider our predicament. Georgio starts in about trespass and rights and stupidity and how dare they (as a soon-to-be-evicted guest, a trifle too territorial), but I am crippled by my British sense of fair play, and I have to give this some thought....For tonight though, we are confounded.

Took Mr. Alphonso down to Will Rogers State Park to watch the Polo match – it was a delight to see the dear old fellow back in his element, surrounded by the thunder of hooves, the flying of the turf, and the companionship of the world of horseflesh. He even met a couple of cronies from the old studio days, can't be too many of his contemporaries left. I doubt there are even two polo games a year, so these are precious times for Mr. A to joy in his world of expertise and knowledge. Personally, I know little and care less for horses, but I always try to look as awake as possible when Mr. A goes off on one of his equestrian monologues, which can last hours, of course. On the other hand, I quite enjoy Polo, and have seen H.R.H the Prince of Wales on several occasions playing at Ansty in Wiltshire. Mr. A, needless to say, is a big Charles fan, loves Camilla as being a proper woman, (horsey, that is), and thinks Diana was too busy shopping to appreciate the athleticism of her regal hubby. “ Camilla has a real rump!” Said Mr. A, slapping the side of his wheelchair in lieu of an available posterior. “And such beauty – some nights I have dreams about her in all her magnificence!” Mr. A has obviously joined the very short list of male admirers of Mrs. Parker-Bowles (including Mr. Parker-Bowles, a list of three?) – and whatever elusive charm she has, it must be something to do with her firm riding seat. Suffice to say, we had a glorious afternoon, the weather perfect, and several times I looked over to see tears in the eyes of my esteemed friend.

Helped Mavis move some of the animal cages to our temporary space next door, and found myself reflecting on her fatal attractiveness to the locals lads; she's no real beauty – complexion rather acned and red, and her figure shapely but a bit heavy. Her best feature is her thick straight hair, of unknown true colour – it's always dyed a kind of loud auburn – and she always dresses in that 90s style of tattered red and black, supposed to look Eastern Bloc – a very British take on fashion, that's far too genuinely scruffy and disdainful to make it in uncynical, sunny climes. I conclude that she wins hearts with sheer personality and humour, and I resolve to inspire her to new heights by playing her some of my Gracie Fields records, her being a fellow Lancastrian and all...

I arrange with Georgio to do the big heist later tomorrow night. He grunts out a strange and twisted aphorism, and goes back to changing the pool filter. While he has been staying in the back, our pool has been Evian-clear, receiving seemingly hours of maintenance a day. I am beginning to suspect that Georgio's agricultural expressions are losing something in the translation from Slovakian. Here's a recent baffling selection:

When the sun goes down, it's still shining on the other side of the world.

It's a bad farmer who urinates on his own leeks

Better a wife than a door-stop

Lard won't make you fat if you don't look at it

Stand on one leg when you shake hands with a Russian

When I tried to get my own back by saying that the Czechs had been bounced out of the Olympic Ice Hockey, all I got was a cold hard stare...speaking of Hockey, I think I've found our area of communication – I mentioned that I was a fan of Ziggy Palffy, the L.A. Kings' wondrous Slovakian winger, and suddenly Georgio lit up like a scoreboard, and said that he had helped 'Zigo' with his physical conditioning when he first came to California; and he had been a great pal of Joseph Stumpel before he got traded to Boston. At last I have a weapon to keep despondency at bay...I took a chance and asked how things were going with Martina – the news not good – she refuses to answer the phone – still, I need Mr. Muscle around a little longer ...