

The strange discovery of the Potato

The time [Duke Peter](#) discovered the potato, now so popular upon our tables, and how he used its little known and hitherto unsuspected properties to cause so much mayhem among the primitive tribesfolk of the American Indies

In which the Duke travels to America

Cocking his head towards the doctor, the Duke raises an eyebrow. "'tis rather serendipitous of you to ask, good sir.", he smiles wryly, " as I was just recalling the facts of my strange adventures concerning the potato". "It was while I was travelling aboard a Danish trading vessel on it's way to India for new spices that we fell afoul of a storm of such proportions that the masts themselves were ripped from their moorings.", the Duke glances around quickly. "Had it not been for my presence of mind and the spare cases of clothing I carried, we would have run amok straight onto the reefs that abounded in that area of the sea".

"Having some of my servants sew up a makeshift sail, we were able to divert our course to the nearest safe lands, which happened to be a large continent which is now known as America."

The [doctor](#) has his mouth full of bread rolls, but says, "Plvv,cnntnue."

[Countess Barbara](#) listens with interest and calls for a glass of wine.

[Lady Alyssa](#) nods, attempting to concentrate on the Duke's tale whilst keeping her eye on the Marquis, ready to move should her dress be in danger from his constantly moving, oversized, alcoholic receptacle.

[Lady Kathryn](#) listens intently, absentmindedly scratching Gerald behind the ear.

The [Marquis de Pommesfrite](#) murmurs to the Lady Alyssa, "A Danish trading vessel? ...mmm... sweeeetttt...", then does his best to look quiet and innocent as the Duke eyes him pointedly.

Duke Peter glances at the Marquis before continuing. "Well, as you know, the western most part of America is full of vast mountain ranges, not unlike the Himalayas of India - hence the name of 'the American Indies'. The first explorers of the continent naming it after something familiar. I saw our fortunate landing as chance to explore these new lands, but the crew did not. The Danish are notoriously fickle and well known to abandon travellers at the first opportunity. No sooner had I set foot on land, than they up- anchored and sailed away. ". The Duke sighs, " I have no doubt they immediately fell afoul of the very same reefs I had guided them through safely."

He pauses briefly to take a swallow the ale that Sally had brought him, to reflect on the ungentlemanly behaviour of some foreigners.

In which the Duke meets some natives

"With much of my clothing now at the bottom of the sea as part of a ship's sail, there was little baggage for my servants to carry, so we proceeded at a fair pace. After several days of exploring we

began to run low on provisions, and I, on clean clothes. Ahead of us I saw what appeared to be several bushes in a group. Actually, as I surveyed the area, they seemed to be all around us.”, he pauses to eye those present with a look of intent. “In fact, it felt as though we were being watched. And the bushes, with their unusually shaped leaves, seemed to be more still and silent than the rest of the foliage in the prevalent winds.”

An interjection by the Doctor

“Sir, I fear that you have most unfairly judged my almost- countrymen. For, while the Danes do indeed have a reputation for abandoning travellers, it is based upon their very little-known custom of putting ashore malcontents and troublesome passengers, which has been most wickedly misrepresented in the past by, for example, Frenchmen (saving your Marquishness' presence, of course.)

“Now, nothing could be further from my mind than the suggestion that your grace is anything but the most polite and accomodating of travellers, and I would be wager my entire academic reputation that your abandonment was an unhappy mischance that caused the sea captain no end of, as the germans say, grief. However, I'll also wager this silver coin that behind those eerily still bushes of which you speak was a rogueish Spaniard, with offers of peace and on his lips, but treachery in his heart.”

“As any man of noble upbringing knows, my good doctor, the Danish practice of abandoning travellers harkens back to the days of the Vikings”, the Duke pauses in his digression to take another swig of his ale. “The barbaric Vikings had a practice known as Hrolvic, where they would abandon babies in the wilderness. If the child survived the night, it was allowed back in the clan. If it makes it back to the village, it becomes a Viking - that is an explorer. If it kills a wolf, he becomes chief, or Thain”. “But I digress”.

A gold coin is wagered

“I'll wager,” said the Spanish Countess, laying down a gold coin while eyeing the doctor with a look of displeasure, “that the bushes were not bushes at all, but a group of green Chup-Chup birds, for some reason far from their native Algeria. I mistook them for plants myself the first time I saw them during their most extraordinary mating rituals.”

Looking briefly at the Countess, the Duke continues: “They were indeed Algerian Chup-Chup birds.”, he carefully retrieves the coin from the table and places it on top of his other coin. “Which, through rather unfortunate circumstances, had been swept by a raging whirlwind whilst in mid flight in their annual migration from Algeria to Spain. As you know, Countess, this happens once a year around the time of frog rains in Algeria. ”.

In which the Doctor apologises, but does not further increase the stakes

After sharing a condescending sniff with his countrywoman over the doctor's slander, the Marquis turns his attention to the Countess of Tango. “Chup-chup birds? I was certain the natives in the Hoggar Mountains were joking with me about those crazy creatures!”

The Doctor pauses, his eyes wide. “I do apologise, your excellency, I did not mean to cause even the

slightest offense. I referred to the Rojishspan Yard, a military training ground in the north of India, which gives its name to a particularly villainous breed of mercenary soldier. These 'Yards', as they are referred to by the British troops, are known for their treachery and their double-dealing, and I would not have been surprised to learn that one had attempted to waylay the Duke. It appears that I was mistaken."

"Indeed you were, sir", indignantly the Duke addresses the Doctor. "And for the moment there - possibly due to the raucous noises from the common room below - I misheard you to say 'Rogueish Spaniard' rather than 'Rojishspan Yard'. As to the true nature of the bushes...". The Duke pauses.

The mention of Chup-Chup birds riveted Lady Kathryn's attention back to the story at hand. She had researched their migratory habits in her seminal volume 'The Breeding of Chup-Chup Birds', but had never heard of a flock reaching America!

Her attention had been momentarily diverted by the rather colourful entrance of [Miss Clare Thimblebelly](#), who was a minor celebrity in Basingstoke Manor household. Her father, Lord Basinstoke, swore by Miss Thimblebelly's 'Preparation Number 3' and had once tried to secure the Hon. Clare for a weekend party. Unfortunately Miss Thimblebelly had been unable to attend. Being somewhat bemused at her father's apparent ardour for the Hon. Clare, Lady Kathryn held great interest in finally meeting her to discuss the famous potion. *She* had never thought the floors of Basinstoke Manor to be *particularly* shiny.

"There now, Gentlemen, it's too early in the evening for such a misunderstanding to cause offence. Now, what of these mysterious bushes?" Lady Alyssa gestured to Sally to refill her glass and settled back, waiting for the story to continue.

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Turning to the Duke, the Marquis exhorts "Please Your Grace, do go on!"

Clare is gazing in the direction of Lady Kathryn's bosom, mumbling "Here, ratty ratty ratty".

Suddenly turning to look at the Duke, she says "Well? Do tell us!"

In which Duke Peter converses with the Chup Chup birds

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time of frog rains in Algeria. ". The Duke addresses the Marquis, "They are indeed wierd birds, as they have their own dialect. It was the men of the Hoggar Mountains that did teach me it, hence I was able to converse with the creatures and learn of their predicament. I suspect, Sir, that the natives were not entirely truthful to you - as they are, indeed, real."

"As I was saying, the birds related to me their current predicament. Not only were they far from home, they were being hunted down to the last by the natives of this land. Some manlike beasts that breathed fire. They possesed hard brown and white scales and threw rocks at the poor Chup Chup birds. I immediately set forth to remedy the situtation. Marching to the nearest native village to give these beasts a stiff talking-to."

The Doctor nods absently.

The Marquis looks thoughtful. Or maybe gassy.

Countess Barbara nods knowledgably as the Duke continues his story.

In Which the Lady Kathryn is Delighted

Lady Kathryn is unable to contain her delight, and Gerald finds himself unceremoniously dumped from her heaving bosom.

"Sir! I myself have some small knowledge of the dialect of the Chup Chup birds", she exclaims. "I am delighted to meet another speaker. 'No rid ri rim no vum. Cheep.'", she adds, looking expectantly at the Duke.

Lady Alyssa brushed an invisible thread off her sleeve. She sniffed disdainfully as a small rodent leapt in her direction. First making sure it did not scurry up her skirts, she nodded at the Duke and wondered what indeed Chup Chup birds had to do with potatoes.

Miss Thimblebelly gathers up the rodent as it scurries past, and looks expectantly at the Duke.

In which the Duke is captured

"Why indeed, yes, good Lady Kathryn! I have not heard the language in some time, so I may be perhaps rustier than I would like, but : Cheep rim ra na no rim rid rip rip ra!", The Duke smiles. "But I digress"

"As I was saying, I set forth with my servants and came upon a village of these natives. I can well see how the Chup Chup's would mistakenly believe they were scaled and breathed fire. They wore a type of armour made out of what appeared to be oval disks of wood. And they appeared to have cigars in their mouths, although they looked rather more round than the normal sort.". The Duke once more drinks from his mug. "Unfortunately for my servants and myself, not only were all the natives armed with clubs tipped with round brown objects, but they were all carnivores, hungry, and outnumbered us ten to one. If I had about me a weapon of some sort, I would naturally have ably defended myself. But alas this was not the case, and we were all captured and locked in one of their huts for the evening meal."

"The huts themselves were curious affairs. The walls made of these same strange round brown objects as were the roofs and apparently, their weapons."

"Alors! What ee-nteresting trade ee-mplicationz zuch versatile petite round brown objectz must 'ave!", the Marquis exclaims in a belatedly acquired bad French accent.

"Good Lord," says the Doctor. "Please, go on."

'Cheep rim ra na indeed!', titters Lady Kathryn, who is momentarily oblivious the Miss Thimblebelly's overtures towards Gerald.

Miss T has noticed the Marquis' English becoming more heavily accented as he has become progressively more inebriated over the minutes. She absently strokes the rat, while waiting eagerly for the continuation of the story.

Lady Alyssa is tempted to ask about the security of such an interesting structure, being made apparently of wooden disks, layered one on top of the other but becomes distracted by the Marquis' sudden heavy accent, reminding her of home and better days.

In which some servants are cooked

Duke Peter of Gloucester pauses to recollect the circumstances that day. "Now, you may think that all these many building materials the natives of the American Indies used were varieties of wood. If so, let me tell you now, it was something far more suprising, the like of which allowed me to escape in the nick of time, before I, myself, was eaten. They were potatoes."

"It appeared as though the native savages used this tree-grown fruit, the potato as a major building material. Sundried and lacquered, it was used as armour. Pickled in vinegar and stacked, as the walls of their huts. Diced with a grid of wire into long thin slivers, then wrapped in potato leaves, it was smoked."

"In my hut with me I had three servants and one of the unfortunate Chup Chup brids. The savages grabbed them all. The bird they minced, turning it into sausages for later cooking, it was my servants they ate that very day. I suppose they kept me for the next days meal. A good thing too, as it allowed my time to plan my escape. I looked upon my servants with horrid fascination as one was shoved into an oven, one placed in a pot as large as a hut full of boiling water, and the third was thrown in boiling oil and fried. A grisly sight and one I do not wish any gentleman or lady to have to see."

In which the doctor makes another, rather more sordid, wager

The doctor again pushes forward a silver coin. "Your tale thus far astounds me. I have no doubt, however, that a man of your own magnificent cunning, daring and wit, would have escaped such a predicament with ease - unless, of course, your escape was complicated by, for example, the attentions of a native lass. I'll wager that this was indeed the case, and you were in fact captivated by an Indian beauty of undeniable charms, who caused your cunning, daring and dare I say witty escape plans no end of frustration.

"Spare us no detail, although bear in mind that there are ladies present."

In which Lady Kathryn snorts

"Ladies present schmadies present!", snorts Lady Kathryn rather vehemently.

"It seems quite obvious to **me** that Duke had been captured by the infamous Bangerznmasch tribe. As everyone knows, this tribe lives in two distinct camps, usually separated by a largish body of water or a smallish mountain range. One camp is populated by the women, whilst the other is populated by the men. It is only on holidays and special occasions that the two camps mix and so it is **quite** unlikely that the Duke would have set eyes on an Indian Beauty of any but the tuber variety!"

"And you sir!," she continues, facing the Duke and pushing forward her own silver coin. "I cannot say what might have happened to your servants, but they were not eaten as you claim. The Bangerznmasch tribe are not cannibals and I wonder whether your servants were not used as an offering to their god instead!"

Somewhat startled by her own outburst, Lady Kathryn leans back in her chair for a moment to catch her breath. "The Chup-chup bird is another matter.", she remarks, almost as an afterthought. "The Bangerznmasch tribe are know for their meat products and a grilled Chup-chup sausage is a very tasty snack - especially with sauerkraut."

In which Lady Alyssa is aghast

Lady Alyssa arches her eyebrows and interjects somewhat disdainfully, "Begging your pardon **Lady** Kathryn, but **I** have no desire to know the details of any debauchery that the Duke may or may not have partaken in during his stay in the American Indies."

In which Lady Barbara digresses

The Lady Barbara pays the Duke a silver coin, saying "That reminds me of my own encounter with the [Bangerznmasch](#) people, although I of course stayed with the women of the tribe".

"Pray, Countess Barbara, how did you find living with them?" asks Lady Kathryn

In which the Doctor supports his wager with some vehemence

"Ahem, yes," says the doctor, looking slightly askance at the Countess. "I have heard it said that when her excellency entertains, the gatherings are amongst the most highly spiced in Christendom, though I imagine few know the full extent of the matter. Nevertheless, I feel it is my solemn duty as an academic to correct a small but not insignificant error of Lady Kathryn's.

"As her ladyship points out, and as the countess has so ably described, the Bangerznmasch tribe do indeed separate the members of the tribe into different genders, are not cannibals, and are in fact most accomplished at needlework. However, if we investigate the matter closely the Duke's tale has the tell-tale signs that indicate that it was not the Bangerznmasch tribe, but the Bubl'nsqvek tribe, a related but altogether different group of people." As the doctor speaks, he takes on the unmistakeable and rather odious tone of a professional educator.

"The Bubl'nsqvek tribe, I was told as I prepared my *own* seminal volume on the anthropology of the new, or, indeed, several new worlds (soon to be published and available at a reasonable price by Messers Dewey and Scroat of London), by the patriarchs of that clan, grew tired of this segregation of the sexes, for reasons upon which I am not entirely clear, but appear to hinge upon a rite involving ritual laughter. Well, giggling. The womenfolk, as I understood the situation," continues the doctor, pulling slightly at his ruff, "for reasons for which I am again not entirely clear, but which still involve rather a large amount of giggling and some gestures and motions that I was, despite my extensive education at an exclusive public school, quite unable to decipher, spent rather less time involved in cookery, architecture and scholarly pursuits, and the men less time with their needlework, and both genders spent rather more time sequestered away, involved in what appeared to be deep philosophical conversations, often lasting well into the night.

"As I said, the Duke's tale tells us all we need to know to distinguish between the peoples. For example, we are told that the Duke was travelling on the coast, whereas the Bangerznmash people prefer to live inland, near lakes and small mountain ranges. For another, we are told that the people are cannibals, and I do believe that the Duke, as a man of the world, can tell when a man wishes to eat him rather than merely involve him politely in a religious ceremony. And finally, we are told that an alluring maiden, no doubt dusky and well endowed with a natural, um, intellect of her own, has complicated the Duke's escape, and this is a tale that I for one would have told. Am I not right, your Marquiship?

"With due consideration to the Lady Alyssa's sensibilities, of course."

The Duke discovers the properties of potatoes and escapes

Duke Peter takes the coin from Doctor von B. and places it next to that of Lady Kathryn's. "I am afraid, dear lady, that in this instance the doctor is entirely correct. The mere fact of the cannibalism enacted upon my servants is a memory I shall never forget and aptly proves that these people (if such savages could be dignified with the epithet) were not of the tribe of Bangerznmash. And as I have had the distinct pleasure of meeting Mr Dewey, the publisher of Von B.'s volume on anthropology (as yet, I will hold my own advice on it being 'seminal') concerning a small wager on his ability to invent a method to categorise books such as to confuse and confound French and German spies... But I digress."

"I had just discovered the edability of the potato in escaping the hut. Being bereft of weapons and tools of any kind, yet again I had to gnaw my way out of confinement. A task I regret every time it becomes necessary. Obviously these savages had never considered the notion, as I quite surprised the young builder on the other side of the wall. I am assuming here, she was a builder, as she was carrying a large tray full of potatoes. This young woman was as strong as she was beautiful, the tray of potatoes being fully as tall as she was and carried in such a way to completely hide her from view, but for her legs. Which was fortunate for my sensibilities as only the warriors of this tribe wore clothing of any sort. The unfortunate act came later, when using her prodigious strength she hurled the entire tray and contents at me. I had the presence of mind to dodge out of the way, but was then so entranced by her beauty I was then immediately recaptured. The savages were annoyed with my antics and the damage I had made to one of their huts and forth with threw me into their pot of boiling water."

The Duke pauses in his tale to order another mug of ale.

"Unknown to anyone at the time, the woman's potatoes she had thrown flew right into the pot. When I

too, was placed there in, I had ready purchase to keep my head above water. The heat of which was so intollerable I struggled mightily to climb the underwater mound of potatoes. In so doing, I did mash them into a fine pulp before I had built sufficient velocity to escape the pot. Being endowed with high velocity and the tactical advantage of surprise, I managed to tackle many of the warriors. Using my speed and catching them off balance enabled me to shove them all into their large man-cooking oven. The door of which I immediately locked shut. But again I encountered another of their builder women, was the target of her tray, and captured while distracted. Her flung potatoes flew into the cigarette making mesh of the warriors. The remaining warriors dragged me towards the pot of boiling oil. It would have been the end of me had not the sudden attack of the Bangerznmash tribe distracted THEM!"

Duke Peter smiles wistfully as he concludes.

"I kicked over the pot, spilling the oil over the warrior's cigarettes and used the leverage to escape those holding me. The Bangerznmash tribe was triumphant, and with my help had a delicacy now famous in Britain named after them. Retrieving the mash from the pot of water and cooking the Chup Chup sausages. The roasted warriors in their potato armour were stolen away as what remained of the Bubl'nsqvek tribe retreated. Probably to be used as provisions by those savages. The cigarettes, now cooked, were picked up by the Bubl'nsqvek. As they put them to their mouths to light, one chanced to taste it. They immediately set to, to consume the lot."

"Ever since that time, the potato fruit has been known to be edible and, indeed, delicious. Much to the consternation of the Bubl'nsqvek who must now run for their lives from the other tribes for fear of losing their very clothing and armour."

The Duke quaffs his ale.

"I swear this story is as true as the sky is blue, and fie on any who say otherwise."

He pauses, pondering.

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