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MY SPECTATOR

Diary

TOM HOLLANDER

5 MAY 2012



I am extremely lucky and have a charmed life. But this is a hard-luck story. And like much journalistic endeavour, it's drawn from a wellspring of bitterness and resentment. Recently I was invited to Mustique. It's a bland paradise. The beaches are raked each morning, as is the sand underneath the trees just behind the beaches. There is a never-ending rota of parties in beautiful villas hosted by smiling people with globally successful businesses. *Teletubbies* for billionaires. If, infantilised by your surroundings, you happen to leave your clothes somewhere on the island, before you've noticed they will be returned to you, laundered and pressed by the servants of The Mustique Company. If you leave your book hanging open as you dribble into your sun-lounger, unseen fingers will pick it up and put a post-it note marking the spot where you'd given up on the effort of reading. It really is very relaxing. Especially if you aren't paying. But it's quite hard to leave. Particularly if you're flying home economy and habitually do your own washing.

...

Some years ago I appeared in *The Pirates of the Caribbean*, filmed on nearby St Vincent. On Mustique, having no wealth, I often found myself at the children's table explaining which character I had played. With a glint I'd tell the kiddies that 'Lord Cutler Beckett' worked for the East India Company, in which long ago a few English people exploited many dark-skinned people in hot countries.

...

There is a very rich old German lady on Mustique whose family have made the same thing for hundreds of years. She is sharp-eyed and still beautiful. Like many people who have inherited a vast fortune, she prefers to think of herself as an artist. And if she isn't someone who actually makes art, she has definitely bought a lot of it, occasionally 'curated' it, and has probably, over the years, slept with some of it too. I tried to impress her, but Lord Cutler cut no ice. To get her attention I was forced to mention that my father spoke German as an infant until the Nazis seized his family homes and gassed his relations and he fled to England to the accompaniment of machine-gun fire and Alsatians. I said 'homes' because it made me sound at least formerly wealthy and make her respect me more. Also playing the Jewish card would put her on the back foot, I thought, she being old enough to not be a fully reconstructed German and therefore at least Dinner Party Contrite. 'Oh, I am so sorry. And did they go to... Auschwitz?' Bingo. 'Er, Theresienstadt, I think.'

'And are you very sad?'

Sad? I'm thrilled. 'Well actually I never met any of them. So it's getting easier.'

...

If you are forced to leave Mustique via infelicitous Barbados, there is a four-hour wait for the connecting flight. My girlfriend and I went to a restaurant and ate less good food than we were used to before attempting an afternoon stroll along the beach. After Mustique it was surprisingly hard for us to find a nice bit. We kept walking. It was very hot. We were bitten by sand flies. The beach became very narrow and we had to wade. Our feet were cut into by stones and dirty waves knocked us against the sea wall. We rounded a bend and were relieved to see the expansive frontage of the Sandy Lane Hotel stretching before us. Thank

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goodness. We could go in, have a cup of tea and get a taxi to the airport. I stayed there once, ten years ago. With my then girlfriend. She paid. I still get sent the brochure.

...

'It's OK, darling, we'll go in here.' We staggered gratefully out of the heat past the pink-cushioned chairs on to the cool shaded terrace. Two security guards asked us if we were staying in the hotel.

'Er no, but I did a few years ago...'

'Then I'm afraid I'm going to have to ask you to leave, sir.'

'No look,' I explained, 'I really did. And Michael Winner, and Philip Green, and Simon Cowell and Sporty Spice ... we all had breakfast just there. You don't understand. I still get your brochure.'

He radioed for back-up. My other half had walked away. An assistant chef was passing and did a double-take. 'It's OK, guys, I'll handle this.' As he smuggled us to the front of the hotel to get a taxi, he said how much his kids enjoyed the Pirates franchise and that his wife was partial to the odd costume drama. I sat on the pavement and tried to put on one of my shoes. He looked down at me. 'Are you staying nearby?'

'No, we're just passing through.'

'Oh yes?' He studied my sea-matted hair and freshly burnt face.

'Yes, you see we've been on Mustique.' He looked sceptical. 'Well, be sure to stay with us next time.'

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Stuart Fisher

May 4th, 2012 3:44pm

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I'm pleased not to have read Tom Hollander's Diary every week. The phrase 'what was that all about?' springs to mind.

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