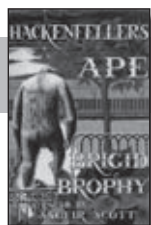


#### HACKENFELLER'S APE

RADIANT and full-leafed, the Park was alive with the murmuring vibration of the species which made it its preserve. The creatures, putting off timidity at the same time as winter drabness, abounded now with no ascertainable purpose except to sun themselves. Their seasonal brilliance—scarlet, sky-blue, yellow—interspersed the deep, high-summer greenness of the foliage. The ground, too hard to receive their spoors, shook beneath games that revealed a high degree of social organisation. Elsewhere the grass lay folded back, shewing where solitaries of the race had eased themselves into forms. On the gravel paths, scuffles and hoots gave evidence of courting rites; and in every part the characteristic calls of the kind lay clear and pleasant upon the vivid air.

In the central meadow they were playing cricket. Westward, the shouts and splashes of the boating lake lingered, like gentle explosions, above the expanse of shallow water. North-west, the canal stood black and transparent like indian ink, between banks mottled by sun. Once or twice a day a boat slowly passed, silencing the fish in their continual scratching of the surface, and propelling towards the sides tangible hanks of water, curled into wreaths, braids and pigtails. North of the Park, a tarmac road had been laid over the landscape. At all times it was arid; this weather made it torrid. A row of cars was already here, standing outside a wire-bound entrance which led to the only section of the Park that could not be enjoyed free. The bodywork of the cars was scorching. Their wind-screens threw off, at a squinting angle, dazzling blots of light. Some belonged to people privileged to go in when the general public was excluded and who were at this moment inside. Others belonged to members of the public who, misinformed, had come too early; who had been refused at the turnstiles; who now had to fill in time and eat their parcelled luncheons elsewhere. The children were the most resentful of the contretemps, sulky because their parents had proved not to be omnipotent. They resisted as they were pulled away: to gain time, they gazed upward as they went, pretending they could not walk straight, staring at an aeroplane that was doubling to and fro in the sky.



From *Hackenfeller's Ape* by Brigid Brophy, published by Secker & Warburg. Reprinted by permission of The Random House Group Ltd.

#### HACKENFELLER'S APE

These were the young of a species which had laid out the Park with an ingenuity that outstripped the beaver's; which, already the most dextrous of the land animals, had acquired greater endurance under the sea than the whale and in the air had a lower casualty rate for its journeys than migrating birds. This was, moreover, the only species which imprisoned other species not for any motive of economic parasitism but for the dispassionate parasitism of indulging its curiosity.

That curiosity, however, was not to be indulged on Sunday before half-past two. The adults pulled the children on, past street vendors of orangeade and sticky bags of plums, who were already waiting for the crowds to arrive in earnest. Two or three old men, hoping to capitalise the guilt the adults must feel in denying the children, dangled dirty woollen caricatures of dogs and lambs on the end of a string, or thrust upon the mothers toy windmills with violently-coloured plastic sails, which there was no wind to turn.

It was a hot, flawless Sunday early in September.

Within the enclosure, Professor Clement Darrelhyde sat on an iron bench, quietly singing the Countess's cavatina from the second act of *Figaro's Marriage*.

*"Porgi, amor, qualche ristoro  
Al mio duolo, a' miei sospir!  
O mi rendi il mio tesoro  
O mi lascia almen morir!"*

A soprano aria: so he sang falsetto. His voice was true but spindly, rather like a harpsichord; which made it almost exactly in period.

*"Grant, O Love, some recompense  
To my sorrow, to my sighs!"*

He sang to the accompaniment of an aeroplane's noise, miles above, and for a moment he craned up to watch the vapour trail deposited on the sky. Perfect cricketing weather, perfect boating weather, this was also perfect flying weather. The Professor admired aeronautics, with its vapour trails and parachutes, and its discovery of cloudscape seen from above; the only achievement of his own century which he would compare with Mozart's music.

#### HACKENFELLER'S APE

He brought his nose down and flattened out, resuming the vigil he kept over the opposite side of the path. There were few passers-by to cut off his vision, and none of them noticed him or the womanish noise he was uttering. They came bounding along, absorbed in their own energies and sense of privilege. They scrutinised the outlandish scene at large, anxious to miss none of its wonders, questing for creatures more melodramatic than the Professor.

He was here on business—observation. What he had come to observe, however, and had fully expected to observe every day for three weeks, was not happening. Meanwhile, he sang.

He enjoyed the sunshine on his face and the patterns of the hot white dust at his feet.



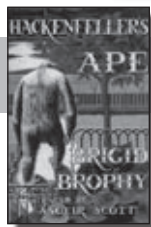
*"Al mio du-o-lo, a' miei sos-pir!"*

The persistence of the aeroplane's noise, however, reminded him of an uneasiness in himself. Uneasiness seemed to be the background of all ruminations belonging to the twentieth century, just as all its landscapes were presided over, somewhere in the distance, by an aeroplane. The beauty of the flying machine was neutral. Carrying bombs or peace it left the choice, almost belligerently, to Man.

*"Either restore to me my treasure  
 Or let me at least die."*

Beneath all the blooming and splendid scents of this most assured time of year, there was another which reached the Professor: an odour shabby, seedy, somehow disgraceful: the smell of the caged animals.

Something moved on the far side of the path. The Professor sprang up, and approached the cage.





#### HACKENFELLER'S APE

A false alarm. The male monkey, with that disregard of his own dignity which, rather than his physical appearance, marked him as non-human, had stood up to scratch his buttocks and then once more squatted down on them. Nothing else had changed. The two animals were still at opposite sides of their small cage, still unmoving, presenting to one another a disgruntled three-quarters profile.

In irritation, the Professor tapped the metal label fixed on the bars.

#### HACKENFELLER'S APE

Anthropopithecus Hirsutus Africanus

♂ ♀

*Percy and Edwina*

Hackenfeller had been (the Professor half knew, half assumed) a sober Dutchman who, exploring into Central Africa some time during the nineteenth century, had come upon a species not previously recorded. It was the same size as the gorilla, but in appearance and character nearer the chimpanzee. In captivity it moved on all fours; but in the jungle, as Hackenfeller had noted, it ran erect with its hands holding on to branches overhead. Children sometimes used a similar method when they learned to walk, but in the adult man it was forgotten until he had to relearn it in crowded buses and trains.