

# PANDAMONIUM

BY PETER SOUTER

PANDAMONIUM

We hear distant crowd noises, people having fun, maybe the occasional sound of an unusual animal...

SUNSHINE

So.

SWEETIE

So.

A long pause.

SUNSHINE

So... Fancy a quickie?

SWEETIE

Don't be ridiculous.

SUNSHINE

Why is it ridiculous?

SWEETIE

It's January.

SUNSHINE

It's January *here* but for all you know it's March in China.

SWEETIE

Now who's being ridiculous?

Pause.

SUNSHINE

How about a recreational one? It doesn't have to be about saving the species. It could just be... a fun thing.

SWEETIE

There are people watching.

SUNSHINE

There are always people watching. Occupational hazard.

SWEETIE

Think about something else. Read the paper.

SUNSHINE

What paper? We haven't had a paper for days.

SWEETIE

One blew over this morning.

SUNSHINE

You kept that to yourself.

SWEETIE

I was going to eat it later but you can have a read first. If you like.

Pause.

SUNSHINE

Who needs sex when you've got a two day old copy of the Scottish Daily Record?

SWEETIE

Read it, don't read it, I'm past caring.

SUNSHINE

You've changed.

SWEETIE

What do you mean?

SUNSHINE

Airs and graces. Since the thing.

SWEETIE

Since what thing?

SUNSHINE

Since they made you Face Of December in the BBC Woman Of The Year list.

SWEETIE

Oh that.

SUNSHINE

Gone to your head. Given you airs. And graces.

SWEETIE

You're just Colicky. You should go easy on the bamboo for a bit.

SUNSHINE

I'm not Colicky. I just wouldn't mind some action once in a while.

SWEETIE

Romantic.

SUNSHINE

I wasn't talking about romance.

SWEETIE

Clearly.

SWEETIE (CONT'D)

Are you finished with that stick of bamboo?

SUNSHINE

No.

SWEETIE

You should eat less. Just because you're in the land of the fried Mars bar doesn't mean you have to let yourself go.

Pause. We hear Sunshine pointedly munching on his stick of bamboo.

SWEETIE (CONT'D)

(Loaded with meaning)

Cedric gave me a turnip this morning.

For reasons yet unknown, this is a game changer. Sunshine seems suddenly tense rather than just grumpy.

SUNSHINE

Well, now we know what the cover story will be in *tomorrow's* Scottish Daily Record.

SWEETIE

Sunshine. We need to talk.

SUNSHINE

Oh lets. Just what I need. A damned good talk.

Sunshine ignores her and munches his stick.

SWEETIE

That was the last straw. Right there.

SUNSHINE

No, there's plenty of straw left. You're just not having this particular bit of bamboo. It's mine.

SWEETIE

(Slightly tearful)

You're impossible.

SUNSHINE

Just go get your own. There's plenty growing on your side.

SWEETIE

I'm leaving you.

Pause.

SUNSHINE

Looks like rain again. Did you know it rains 265 days a year on the western coast?

SWEETIE

Did you hear me?

SUNSHINE

(Sharp)

You're not going anywhere. There's a twenty foot bullet proof screen round both our enclosures. And the connecting tunnel. The ironically named 'tunnel of love'.

SWEETIE

So you did hear me.

SUNSHINE

I did hear you. But I've heard it all before.

SWEETIE

I'm serious this time. I think we should go our separate ways.

Sunshine sets down his bamboo.

SUNSHINE

You can't. They've built us these lovely enclosures. Tunnel of love. Tyre on a rope, the whole shebang. We are joined by history, geography, biology and a whole bunch of other GCSE subjects.

SWEETIE

I want my independence. I deserve it.

SUNSHINE

Again I draw your attention to the 20 foot bullet proof glass screen.

SWEETIE

I could get away. If I wanted to.

SUNSHINE

The whole point of it is to prevent escape, I think you'll find.

SWEETIE

I'm resourceful.

SUNSHINE

Anyway, what's the point? You've got your own side of the enclosure. Just stay over there if I'm getting on your nerves.

SWEETIE

I could block up the tunnel.

Sunshine is suddenly focussed.

SUNSHINE

You can't do that. You've got all the fresh Bamboo growing on your side.

SWEETIE

Exactly.

SUNSHINE

That's for both of us. Not just for you.

SWEETIE

It's on my side.

SUNSHINE

On your side of *our* enclosure.

SWEETIE

Unless I block up the tunnel and strike out on my own.

SUNSHINE

You can't make a unilateral decision like that.

SWEETIE

Says you.

SUNSHINE

Is this about that bloody striped freak?

SWEETIE

You mean Cedric?

SUNSHINE

Yes. *Cedric*.

SWEETIE

(Protesting too much)  
Why would it be about Cedric?

SUNSHINE

I see you. Eating turnips.  
Presenting your bottom to him.

(MORE)

SUNSHINE (CONT'D)

In a manner that few would consider decorous.

He picks up his bamboo again.

SWEETIE

Alright! Yes! It is about Cedric! Partly. I'm going to be with Cedric. I'm going to be free and happy and have lovers and all the turnips I can eat.

SUNSHINE

You're really not.

SWEETIE

He's kind.

SUNSHINE

He wears pyjamas in the daytime.

SWEETIE

I think he's handsome. And virile. Virile and handsome.

SUNSHINE

He's a comedy donkey in jimjams.

SWEETIE

He satisfies my needs, emotionally and physically. (Unlike some) Without trying to exploit me.

SUNSHINE

He's only doing all that emotional empathy nonsense to get his leg over.

SWEETIE

You're just jealous.

SUNSHINE

I'm really not. He's an embarrassment to all black and white creatures. Watch the Jocks, they pay no attention to *Zebbras*. This place was going to the dogs until we turned up.

SWEETIE

"Jocks". You sound ludicrous.

SUNSHINE

My pronunciation is flawless. Back in Sichuan Province my keeper was a World Service buff.

SWEETIE

Ludicrous and bumptious... (Mine liked to read his Thesaurus aloud.)

SUNSHINE

Anyhow. Nobody is getting independence around here.

SWEETIE

I-I-I'm going to rise up and-and-and fight for my freedom. There's nothing you can do to stop me. This union is over.

SUNSHINE

You're a *Panda*. You can't run off with a Zebra. That's just not...Darwinian.

Pause. Sunshine perhaps feels he's gone too far.

SUNSHINE (CONT'D)

There's still a bit of munch left in this Bamboo. If you want?

SWEETIE

I've moved on.

SUNSHINE

It's chewy.

SWEETIE

I'm not hungry.

SUNSHINE

I've mashed up the end for you.

SWEETIE

Things have got beyond mastication.

SUNSHINE

Speak for yourself.

It's Sunshine's turn to consider the whole Cedric thing.

SUNSHINE (CONT'D)

It's not natural. He's not even another type of bear.

SWEETIE

He's a mammal. And *he's* got friends. More than can be said for you, you unsociable old git. Isolated you are. Alone in the world.



SUNSHINE

He's got *hooves*. How would you hold hands?

SWEETIE

He takes me for rides if you must know.

SUNSHINE

I bet he does. What would your children be like? Spots or stripes? They could turn out tartan. Then where would you be?

SWEETIE

The patriotic mascots of a reborn nation.

SUNSHINE

Or the mother of some Morse code.

Pause. Sunshine chews over his bamboo and the problem.

SUNSHINE (CONT'D)

What else do you do? With *Cedric*? Apart from swap root vegetables.

SWEETIE

We talk.

SUNSHINE

Talk?

SWEETIE

He's very erudite as it happens. And he treats me as his intellectual equal. We discuss current affairs.

SUNSHINE

Appropriately enough.

SWEETIE

He's not permanently grumpy like you. You're the original bear with a sore head you are.

SUNSHINE

That's it then is it? Just talking? No... funny business?

SWEETIE

You said yourself. 20 feet of bullet proof glass.

Sunshine plays his ace.

SUNSHINE

I know about the ladder.

SWEETIE

What?

SUNSHINE

I know about the ladder.

SWEETIE

Ladder? What ladder?

SUNSHINE

I found it when I...

SWEETIE

When you?

SUNSHINE

When I was going through your stuff.

SWEETIE

I knew it!

SUNSHINE

I was bored and hungry. I thought you might have a carrot in your bedding. You were asleep. I didn't want to disturb you. So I had a little root about in your straw.

SWEETIE

That's outrageous.

SUNSHINE

Is it? What about what I found? A stolen window cleaner's ladder! I should have been suspicious about that bit at the top of the bullet proof glass that they don't clean anymore!

SWEETIE

So I've got a ladder. What's it to you?

SUNSHINE

A nookie ladder.

SWEETIE

Don't be crude.

SUNSHINE

A cross-species nookie ladder. Stolen so you can go behind my back with that... pantomime horse.

SWEETIE

You're over reacting.

SUNSHINE

Am I??

SWEETIE

Chew your bamboo some more. It'll calm you.

SUNSHINE

I don't want to be calm! I want to know why we only do it two days a year yet you've got a secret stolen inter-species nookie ladder hidden in your bedding?

SWEETIE

Nothings my own with you around. Interfering.

SUNSHINE

What's he got that I haven't? What's he got? Is it the stripes?

Sunshine is suddenly more conciliatory. Almost desperate.

SUNSHINE (CONT'D)

I can be stripy. I've acres of white back there. There's nothing he's got in the way of decoration that I couldn't replicate with a tin of black Dulux and a three inch brush!

SWEETIE

It's not the stripes.

SUNSHINE

Is it hooves? I could wear shoes.

SWEETIE

It's not the hooves.

SUNSHINE

What then? I'm your type! Literally! We're both Pandas? Why are you stealing climbing equipment for secret trysts with a bloody Zebra??

Sweetie digs deep.

SWEETIE

The magic's gone Sunshine. I want more. I want more romance. I want more passion. I want... out. I want to be... independent. From you.

Pause.

SUNSHINE

I see. Well. Fair enough. If that's what you want.

SWEETIE

I don't want to fight anymore. I'm going over the top tonight. And this time I'm...taking the ladder with me.

SUNSHINE

I see.

SWEETIE

Lets just be civil on this, our last afternoon.

SUNSHINE

(Spent)  
Okay.

SWEETIE

We can just be civilised. Higher mammals. You eat your precious bamboo. I'll read the paper.

SUNSHINE

Okay.

Long pause. Sunshine is depressed.

SUNSHINE (CONT'D)

Lets face it. We're doomed anyway. Together or apart.

SWEETIE

Who's doomed?

SUNSHINE

Us. Pandas. Look at us.

SWEETIE

What's wrong with Pandas?

SUNSHINE

What's right with us? We're genetically predestined for extinction.

SWEETIE

That's a gloomy perspective.

SUNSHINE

In the wild we only eat Bamboo! Our diet has the nutritional value of conservatory furniture!

(MORE)

SUNSHINE (CONT'D)

There are 1600 of us left on the entire planet because we only bonk on TWO days of the year.

SWEETIE

We can 'bonk' any time we like. (Though making love would be better) We're just not in heat... that often.

SUNSHINE

I rest my case. Then there's the camouflage.

SWEETIE

What about it?

SUNSHINE

What the hell are we camouflaged as? The three of Spades?? Obese dice?? What natural habitat are we supposed to merge seamlessly into? A skip full of footballs??

SWEETIE

(Quietly)

I think we're... pretty.

SUNSHINE

Really? The two black eyes thing is working for you is it? We look like we lost every fight we've ever been in. We're the Frank Bruno of the animal kingdom.

SWEETIE

We look sort of cute.

SUNSHINE

Exactly! We look cute! Cute!! That well known fear-inducing survival tactic adopted by...oh, that's right, *just us!*

SWEETIE

I think you're being a bit harsh.

SUNSHINE

(Spent)

Look just go. What's the point? Go and start a new species with Cedric. The Zandas. The Pebras. The bloody Tartan Bears.

Pause.

SWEETIE

Still. Looking on the bright  
side...

Sunshine is forced to giggle, his energy spent.

SUNSHINE

Would you like this last bit? It's  
leafy.

SWEETIE

Don't you want it?

SUNSHINE

No. I'd like you to have it.  
Parting gift.

SWEETIE

Okay. I will.

SUNSHINE

(Defeated)  
Have the paper too.

Sweetie eats and reads.

SWEETIE

(Genuinely moved)  
It's terrible about this boat in  
Italy.

SUNSHINE

Very sad.

SWEETIE

All of human nature on display.  
Bravery and self sacrifice.  
Incompetence and vanity. Just  
showing off the boat. Allegedly.

SUNSHINE

Makes the flipping peacocks look  
subtle and understated.

SWEETIE

Oh look at this.

SUNSHINE

The old couple and the life jacket?

SWEETIE

Yes.

SUNSHINE

Yeah, I saw. They only had one  
between them so the old human made  
his mate wear it and forced her to  
jump.

SWEETIE  
Then he drowned.

SUNSHINE  
Yes.

Pause.

SUNSHINE (CONT'D)  
But it must have been a comfort. I reckon. Knowing the one he loved was okay.

Long pause.

SUNSHINE (CONT'D)  
That's what love is. Loving someone so much you... forget yourself.

SWEETIE  
Pandas are not strong swimmers.

SUNSHINE  
We sink like a stone.

Pause. Suddenly there's tremendous sub-text.

SWEETIE  
Would you..?

SUNSHINE  
Of course. Without a moment's thought.

SWEETIE  
Despite Cedric. And the turnips. And the ladder. And the potential for tartan kids.

SUNSHINE  
Without a second's thought.

Pause

SWEETIE  
I believe you. I believe you would.

SUNSHINE  
I know I'm a bit...grumpy at times.

SWEETIE  
All the time. Apart from two days a year.

SUNSHINE  
But. I love you. It's not just about the mating. For me at least. You're my... soul mate.

Pause.

SWEETIE

(Gentle)

I'm sorry Sunshine. This was an arranged marriage. A Chinese publicity stunt. 'Ignore our human rights record, have some cute Pandas.' So here we are. Stuck with each other on the other side of the world. In a country that wants to... break away. Symbolic really.

SUNSHINE

Emblematic. Yet allegorical. And Metonymical..... (My keeper had a thesaurus too)

Pause. Deep, unspoken, troubled love.

SUNSHINE (CONT'D)

Of course. There is another way.

SWEETIE

Another way?

SUNSHINE

An alternative solution. To the whole independence thing.

SWEETIE

What do you mean?

SUNSHINE

We could have...an open relationship.

SWEETIE

Oh.

SUNSHINE

But stay together.

SWEETIE

Oh.

SUNSHINE

Panda-max.

Pause. A subtle sea change.

SWEETIE

You'd do that for me?

SUNSHINE

Yes.



SWEETIE

You wouldn't mind? About the ladder  
and everything?

SUNSHINE

Well, you'd still have to hide it.  
But only from the keepers.

SWEETIE

Oh. Wow.

SUNSHINE

Wow?

SWEETIE

Well. Wow.

SUNSHINE

Yes wow? Or no wow?

SWEETIE

You're holding a referendum?

SUNSHINE

Yes.

Pause

SWEETIE

Yes wow.

Pause.

SUNSHINE

Okay then.

We hear him start a new stick of bamboo. Another beat then...

SUNSHINE (CONT'D)

Sheila will be pleased.

SWEETIE

Who's Sheila?

SUNSHINE

Sexy little penguin, between the  
seals and the arctic fox.

SWEETIE

Oh.

SUNSHINE

You think you're the only one who  
knows how to use a ladder?

THE END

