



NAKED AMBITION
Jean-Louis Coullou'ch,
Marina Hands frolic
naked in the 2006
film version of Lady
Chatterley's Lover

Rural AFFAIRS

JO CARNEGIE swapped her city job at celebrity gossip magazine *Heat* for a far more racy role in the country – writing bestselling bonkbusters. She knows better than anyone why Liz Hurley was right about there being far more sex in the sticks...

When Liz Hurley so provocatively posed for *Tatler* earlier this year in Jimmy Choo Hunter wellies (there's a waiting list for them now), enough fur to assume multiple creatures died for the cause and a designer gown more suited to the local hunt ball than conversing with goats, it kicked off some serious dinner party debate about the sexiness of the country. Personally, I thought it was a jolly good ruse for shifting some sexy bikinis at her newly opened

swimwear store at Bicester Village, the designer label Mecca for Cotswolds glamour pussies. But despite the self-promotion, la Hurley did have a point: things can certainly get friskier than a Jack Russell on heat in the country. I grew up in the sticks, well Bedfordshire, moved to London for my career as an editor at *Heat* magazine, but have now returned to my rural roots, though across the border in Wales. I can say that, without doubt, dangerous liaisons are as common as country muck and that rural gossip is far more titillating than townie tattling.

Perhaps one of the most unusual starts to an affair that ever I've heard about was in a pantomime horse during a Christmas village production. Thrown together in such intimate conditions, the married man and attractive divorcee ended up indulging in sweaty equine embraces off stage, too. It didn't take long for the wronged spouse to discover her husband's philandering on the village grapevine, but rather than setting fire to his clothes or sewing prawns into his lover's curtains, she coolly invited the mistress out for lunch at the local gastropub. As the two women chatted over a glass of Dom Perignon, the wife casually let it drop that she knew the woman was sleeping with her husband. Quite a conversation stopper, but after a half-hearted attempt at denial, the mistress came clean. The fallout was typically British and practical. The wife admitted she'd fallen out of love with the husband years ago anyway and the young farmer she was secretly seeing on the side was more than satisfying her. Rather than embark on a messy and public divorce, the wife offered the mistress the chance to buy her half of their £800,000 barn conversion home and with it the wife's ticket out of the unhappy marriage. The last I heard,

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the husband and mistress were shackled up happily together in the marital home while the ex-wife had moved in just down the road with another man she met on the internet. I suppose it's handy if any of them run out of sugar.

Of course, not every situation is resolved so amicably. Take the husband of an errant wife who confronted her lover in the middle of their sleepy high street and threatened to blow his head off with a shotgun. Or the time, aged 11, when I cycled past the phone box on the village green to find our neighbour bashing her husband over the head with the plastic receiver. I didn't buy mum's excuse that Roger and Susan 'were just "playing together"' and the truth emerged some years later that she'd caught him sneaking out to phone his mistress. Roger had then been promptly kicked out and disappeared for 20 years, before moving back into the marital home last autumn as if nothing had happened. There's nowt as queer as (country) folk.

But the really outrageous shenanigans are reserved for the horsey set, a world populated by sporty types with lithe thighs, rock hard buttocks and unstoppable sexual stamina. 'Horse box hopping' is common at some of the bigger, three-day events where each night (and sometimes in between classes) the occupants play a sexual merry-go-round with their naughty neighbours. It's not just the showjumpers either, the racing set is just as amorous in its goings-on. My village is still buzzing from the story of the jockey who was sleeping with his pretty young groom – and her mother. Well, the groom knew nothing about it until she caught them at it one day in a stable. Said groom isn't working for him now and quite possibly not speaking to her mother either, but there will be plenty of even prettier, younger things lining up to take her place. If you can't play the game, then get out. It's just what happens.

So, why are there so many frissons amidst the fertiliser? A (townie) friend of mine is convinced it's something to do with all the stallions and bullocks rampaging about, setting off something sexual in a person's psyche. But like I said, he's never ever been to the country. No, it's simply to do with the fact that country folk are more attractive. We lead active, outdoor lifestyles that keep us in shape and looking years younger than our jelly-bellied, pallid-faced city neighbours. Forget the outdated stereotype of a red-faced Farmer Giles chewing on a piece of straw. His modern counterpart is young, handsome with rippling muscles achieved by hard manual labour lugging hay bales about. And, let's be honest, that's far sexier than an urbanite pounding the treadmill

at his private health club at 6am. Only recently on a visit to the Cotswolds I nearly crashed when a mud-encrusted Land Rover came roaring round the corner towards me driven by a handsome, topless blonde Adonis. If he hadn't been going like the clappers I may well have retrieved my car from the ditch and set off in hot pursuit.

Attractiveness aside, I also think it's because country folk have more time on their hands – and space. 'There's loads more places to do it,' pointed

out one of my friends the other day. Then, of course, there is the close proximity of country life. If you are seeing the same person day in, day out, almost anyone can become attractive. That old 'familiarity breeds assent' type of thing. There's a trend in my village at the moment for people hooking up with their childhood sweethearts. At least you know what you're letting yourself in for, I suppose, although it would be rather alarming to discover that 30 years later your first love was still wearing the same pair of underpants for a week running. Then again, what the hell – they probably won't sticking around that long anyway... ■

Naked Truths, Jo Carnegie's racy new bonkbuster is published on 8 October (£6.99, Corgi Books)

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