

MRS JONAH

From 'The Word of the Wives; Monologues from the unheard women of the Bible'
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(Flicking through a magazine).

"Is your man telling the truth?" Bingo.

(Reading). 'A cheating man is often given away by his face. Either blushing or seeming excessively pale can be a sign of the strain of lying. Darting eyes or, indeed, a concerted effort not to blink excessively, might be the giveaway. Touching the mouth, tugging the ears or agitated hand movements can all indicate a dishonest response. He might parrot your questions, change the subject, or think for too long about the answers to your queries.'

Good grief! That could be every conversation we've ever had.

(She throws down the magazine).

This is no good. It doesn't have a paragraph on the actual chances of your husband setting off on a spontaneous boat trip, then being thrown overboard and swallowed by a giant fish before being vomited on the beach back home three days later. I told him, 'I just want you to be honest!' He was silent. I pleaded with him, 'What are you thinking?' and he huffed, 'Nothing!' Like he always does. He must be thinking something. Why do men always insist that there is absolutely nothing going on in their heads? Maybe there isn't. But in my head the answer is, 'I'm thinking of things far too complex for you to understand,' or 'I'm thinking of things I wouldn't dream of sharing with you,' or 'I'm thinking your bum looks big in that.'

I told him, 'I think we need to talk. About us.' He groaned. 'This isn't the moment, woman! I've had a nightmare of a trip and I've another one to go on.' So I asked, 'Where now? Africa? Want to be swallowed by a lion this time? Only I've heard they have bigger teeth than fish!' 'Nineveh,' he sighs.

I've always wanted to go. That great city. Three days just to walk across it. Thousands of people, the lights, the smells, the clubs, the buzz. Although people don't usually come back; it lures you in, or traps you. And it's dangerous. There are people there who think nothing of pulling out all your fingernails one by one.

I nagged him into opening up. Harried him till he didn't have the energy to resist. It was quicker than usual. Apparently, three days in the belly of a big fish will take the fight right out of a person. I told him, 'You don't even like fish, you won't touch it when I cook it.' 'Tell me about it!' he shouts back. 'I don't think it was a revenge attack!'

We sat down and he talked and I can't tell you the relief. Just to hear what's going on behind those worried eyes and feel like he'd let me in a little bit. Turns out, God's been speaking to him. 'Is that all?' I was relieved. 'All, woman? Is that all?' He shouts. 'If God wants me to go to that hole and tell them he's seen their wickedness, likelihood is he wants to forgive them and, frankly, I don't think they deserve that chance.' The root of the matter. Jonah knows better than God. I had to stifle a giggle; he ends up swallowed by a fish when he didn't even need to get in a boat! Nineveh is across land, out east in Assyria, but in his disgust at the thought of it, Jonah goes to the docks and heads west to Spain. The doofus.

He's had a thing against Ninevites since for ever. Says they're without exception debauched and depraved. I did say, 'Jonah, sweetheart, for a first, that's a mighty big brush you're

painting with. Let it go – it must be heavy. For a second, you’ve never been there. You’ve never met a Ninevite. Don’t you think you’re being a teensy bit . . . well, a bit of a bigot, frankly?’ ‘This is why I don’t talk to you!’ he yells. ‘You don’t understand!’ I do, actually. I understand. I get it. Their godlessness winds him up tight enough to snap and he’s not street-wise. He’s scared they’ll eat him for dinner. Once they’ve pulled his nails out.

But he’s gone this morning and I’m glad. If I know Jonah, he’ll sulk all the way, but at least he’s gone to tell them that God’s on their case. The God of second chances. The God who gave Jonah a second chance to do what he was told, so you’d think he’d be sympathetic. Please God, keep him safe. And please keep speaking to him, show him that you made those people and you love them. And please God, can you save Ninevah so that I can go there one day? Just for the shopping; I don’t fancy a manicure. And God, when he gets home, will you help him to talk to me properly, and tell me the truth? Swallowed by a big fish. I mean, really. Really?