**JAMES AND ABIGAIL**

A Dialogue Between the **Postie** and the **Parlourmaid.**

A celebration; of the artistic life of Marianne North, artist, born Hastings 1830, died Alderley, Gloucs. 1890, and of the permanent Marianne North Gallery, The Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew.

Words in speech marks are Marianne's own.

**Package for Miss North, could be a bale of calico?**

Never...she paints on paper, doncha know?

She's already gone to Mexico

Painting Frangipan, White Orchids, Dahlias.

She calls it her 'verdant, visionary show'

And next...she's off to Borneo!!

**An American letter marked Ulysses Grant**

**And stamped with the President's stamp!**

Well, it won't be a bill!

Miss North's in Brazil

Citron, Mango, Jasmine and Passion flower...

And.... off to Jamaica for Granadill.

**Letter for Miss North! The address is a bit of a blur!**

**Could be from a Mr Darwin? ...C? Who's he?**

I'll take it, she's in Canada.....Columbine, Flag, Balsam Fir.

**Sir Joseph Hooker, a note... will he call?**

She's sent off her paintings, one and all,

To him, at Kew Gardens, they're hung on the wall.

They're Northianas, named for her..

Borneo Pitcher Plant, Seychelles Tree

Amaryllis, Feather Palm, Torch Lily...

How I wish her father could see.

**For Miss North, a whole stack of mail**

**The note says 'Forward the pile'...**

She's off , under sail up the Nile ,

**Oh Lor!!**

Agapanthus, Lotus and more...there's more!

**Card from.... a Mr Edward Lear?**

**For Miss Marianne North, is she here?**

She's painting Acacias in Chile

Ananuca, Copihue, White Dahilli...

And between you and me

Her greatest achievement, Monkey Puzzle tree...

She's been away for a year.

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Thirty years, and a thousand magnificent oils,

Science and art blur on the boards.

Her work is...'a vice...like dram drinking' she says,

She's a wild bird, she's cherished her world.

She sets off alone, leeches and spiders,

A hut in the jungle, a bullock cart,

Some fellows portmanteau her gear.

'Companions are tiresome', she famously said,

Just the peace of the forests, some singular flora

And the vibrant hues she held dear.

'The axe and the forest fire, the plough and the flock,

Are the vanishing world', her dizzying desire

To preserve those things she adored.

Scorching sun, drenching rain,

Sickness and flux, deep gnawing pain...

A dose of the poppy juice...now and again...

But, would I? Could I?

Yes!

I'd do it all, again and again and again.

Miss Marianne North....puts us all to shame!

**Jane Downes.**

**Bexhill on Sea. July 2018.**