



CONFESSIONS

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BERNARD, CRYSTALL
& VIAN



SHE'S BEEN my friend for many years, I don't get bored. She doesn't change. She's thin and warm, alcohol. We go to sleep together, she holds me tight, and some time in the night – she leaves. I look for her all day – she's like a roll of silk, a scroll – I unwind her, sometimes there's battle scenes, a warrior with another warrior's head tucked on his back, sometimes – storks, chrysanthemums, or branches of red flowers, the Judas tree perhaps. We don't have sex, but every time, she is an aftermath. I'm straight, she's she – but if I'm gay, he's a young knowing lad who grows mature so quick, until he is my *copain* by the end; what larks we've had, so lighthearted, so many pranks you skid and skip away from them, don't feel a thing, maybe some arrogant guy, he trips you, socks you in the face – no matter, you just slide away. She's my partner, with her I fear no man. I get away with saying what I think.

And I think bigger when I am with her, she's not too good for me, and that's the best thing, probably...

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‘She’ll let you down,’ says Vian: ‘Coat your eyes with scum, and roll you for your cash.’

‘Oh, friends do that,’ says Crystall: ‘You have to be prepared. You’re alone with one – and there’s a rape, a stoning, you can’t prepare.... You can’t worry either....’

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‘Drugs – they aren’t like the drink,’ says Bernard: ‘The strong ones – they’re like a pushy guy you meet, or else your mother.... They let you peer down inside the box – and then you’re in! It isn’t friends at all! The weak ones, the smokes – they slow you down, speed up the clock – who cares?’

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Others in the group – they tell their pompous tales. They leave.

Outside, the street, it’s a battle, often a surrender.

Crystall hugs Vian and Bernard.

They’ve stayed – ‘What rubbish,’ Crystall

says. ‘Those dreary crewmen. There they go, stumbling down the stair...’

‘No,’ says Vian. ‘You can hide. In our little company, right here. This group – they’re secret agents, international hitmen, putschistes, wizards. No one looks in a group of Sherazades and junkies. It’s the safest place. Everyone confesses everything, all the time, and goes out in the street, under the cameras. Everything you’ve done is illegal, or on the edge, you tell it, you profess – so – no one is interested.

‘In their heads – there’s some idea, like when there were those communes – a guru, a spaceship come to take them, suicide, uplift, both.... People with a problem of subjectivities – too much subject, nothing to do with it, nowhere to go unless they’re pulled and lifted. Something written down, or chanted. Now – it’s gone collective – jihad, all exploding together, the true life lived briefly on earth – then in the basket, up goes the balloon, your kids, their kids – all the same, not time enough to grow up differentiated, but each one strong, more determined, more stubborn, more terrible, than the next.’

‘Oh well,’ says Crystall. ‘All will change – a little while, all metamorphs. Sharing needles, sharing those AKs....’

‘Those are the athletes, the warriors,’ says Vian. ‘The drab rest – more interesting. No one’s odd now, eccentric, a bit loopy, frightening, mooncrazed. Everybody is all that, everybody has to be.’

‘Warriors?’ shouts Bernard – ‘Nonsense. This place is flypaper. You come because it’s cheap and primitive, you spend your cash, there is no work. You stay – wrong colour to be a slave – you hope the slaves rebel, they burn you in a barrel, just so’s you get out. Your feet – they’re trapped. Pull out – there go some legs...! You drink the nectar....’

‘Flies don’t drink nectar,’ says Vian.

‘Everybody drinks it,’ Bernard says. ‘Makes it – you hear the drip in every hut.’

You pay to join the group, tell your story. There’s nothing else: it’s expiation, absolution. A cure so’s you can go on taking things without their consequences. Go back lucid in the forest. Falling down, hiding, getting caught, being robbed and being caught, being beaten, being cheated – finding, robbing, cheating, beating.

Bernard – ‘I’m a saint, a thoroughfare, a dog. That’s good,’ he says. ‘The best. You need a name. I could make discs, tell everyone.’

‘We do a fine job,’ says Crystall, hugging the two men. ‘Having people come and tell their tales, the bad things they do to everyone. Of course, if you’re off your head, you have to tell the truth – otherwise, it’s fun. These guys – they heard it’s hedonism, all they do in their short lives, and so, they feel they should apologise. Instead – it’s fun. That’s why they do it – don’t apologise! When I was in Rio, every night a *forro*, close and sweaty, in and out the dance. Gossip about what you haven’t got. We should do that here. Except.’

‘Why?’ asks Vian. ‘Why should we stop?’

‘Oh,’ says Crystall. ‘There’s spies. Those plants – they don’t grow, don’t stand in pots, go green and brown – they’re paid. In their room, they keep a uniform.’

‘They won’t lock us up,’ says Bernard. ‘What good would that do?’

‘No,’ says Crystall. ‘They fine you, make you pay until you’re sad, don’t do anything again.’

Across the road, it says 'Nonstop kino'. They're playing 'The Land of the Giant Ants'.

'I've seen all they show,' says Vian. 'I know their secrets. The ants' too. We could make a movie. "Joyful Street".'

'That's been done,' says Crystall. 'Almost. Ours could be "Hangers – Life in the Closet". 'Boozing and Cruising'. We could do titles, put them on movie theatres: – nothing within! Or people walking up and down discussing which non-existing one to see. Or coming out after they haven't seen.'

'Whimsy, Crystall,' Bernard says. 'The backers sue, even so. Nothing. It's precious – but it costs you more than something.'

'Those big mouthy guys,' says Crystall. 'Alpha talk. You see them going down the mine for nuppence. All day in the dark, then up into the dark. The painters, with their little ladders – nearer my God.... Women could do all that for half the price, be idiots just like them, and swear and smoke like hussars.'

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'I drink,' says Bernard. 'It's company. It's

solitude. You, Vian?’

‘Oh,’ says Vian, ‘I’m addicted to myself. Today the opposite, tomorrow the opposite of the opposite. How curious I am!’

‘I’m dependent on you two,’ says Crystall: ‘I do good. Vian does bad. Bernard turns it into something interesting, he hopes.’

‘Everything’s too serious now,’ Bernard says, ‘for us to have a hand in it. Living’s work, unpaid. Crystall! You have an insight – then something in your eye turns it at once into a banality, a surface....’

‘Are you going, Bernard?’ Crystall asks, alert and tragic. ‘Out? Outside? Those aren’t puttees you are fastening on?’ She laughs, she cries. ‘Be prudent, Bernard,’ Crystall says, over and over.

‘It’s fashion, Crystall,’ Bernard says. ‘They’ve rediscovered spats. Spats on your legs. Leggings. Don’t laugh, you idiots!’ he says and laughs. ‘I’m off to meet some people. I wonder who they are?’

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‘We waited up,’ says Crystall. They take off

Bernard's clothes – that too is what you do.

'He's lost his spats,' says Vian.

'Weren't you intrigued?' asks Bernard. 'Now, the fashion's changed.' He lies, a grub upon the floor. 'I went in, quite far,' he says. 'At midnight they bring squares of toast, with black stuff on...'

'Caviar,' says Vian.

'Oh no,' says Bernard, 'I love caviar. Then I went to this photographer's room. Silver, it was – and soot, like what was on the toast. She talked about the film, the ants. It seems there is a place that wants to wipe us out, and come and build a bigger nest, a skyscraper.... Termites thinking big.'

'Hush, Bernard,' Crystall says. She turns to Vian: 'Maybe it is time to morph our lovely Bernard. Turn him from grub to butterfly. That way he won't get eaten, and he's too pissed anyway to grasp his destiny....'

'Do as you want, Crystall,' says Vian. 'The little boys and girls – if they survive being eaten by the birds, they turn to butterflies, rise up and are eaten by the birds... Of course, they may survive as grubs, and metamorphose into birds, rise up

and eat the little boys and girls...’

‘So,’ says Crystall, ‘if you must end – and end you must – better to do it all yourself, than wait, teeter, waver, take counsel, give blood... get the sickness that you get from eating brains. You know the story – finish it! Bernard does everything – except can’t take off his clothes. That’s something someone always does for you. Where there is earth, you get your hole. In the country, on the steppe – your tunic is usable again. Maybe it was grandfather’s? Don’t bury useful stuff, and don’t be squeamish – you stop needing it, and someone else is waiting. That’s what they hope for – not epiphany. Your clothes.’



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