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Nothing but the Truth

by GEORGE MILLER

It started raining again as the taxi reached Danny's place, but they didn't go inside immediately.

Instead they stood, clinging together for a long moment under the dripping portico surrounded by suitcases, feeling the thickening dusk roll against them like a cold, damp wave.

Finally the tall, broad-shouldered man shook himself, like a dog emerging from the wet, and smiled at the girl beside him. She looked at him with clear, blue, little-girl eyes, and smiled back, a little nervously.

«Lets go inside, Marie. You don't want to catch your death of cold on your first day in London.»

Suddenly the girl grabbed the lapels of his raincoat and buried her head against his chest.

«Don't lets go inside, Colin,» she mumbled indistinctly. «Lets take a taxi and find a hotel instead. I want you all to myself tonight. Lets . . .»

Colin frowned. «Honey, I thought we'd settled all that days ago, before you left Rhodesia. Danny's expecting us. He's the best and dearest friend I have in the world. I haven't seen him for seven years. This is a special occasion for me —for us—and I want Danny to share it. It means a lot to me.»

As he spoke the girl dug her head harder against his chest. «But what about me?» she asked in a small voice. «Just because you say he helped launch you as news photographer why have I got to be paraded in front of him like a prize heifer? I don't want to meet him. He knows I've run away from home—that you joined the plane in Nairobi so that mummy and daddy wouldn't know—that we aren't married yet. Lets go to a hotel, please . . .»

Colin shook his head unbelievingly. «You mean you're quite prepared to register as Mr. and Mrs. and live a life of good old-fashioned sin, but you don't like the idea of being honest and open about the situation with an old friend. Of course Danny knows all about us. And he wrote me a month ago to say if I followed you to England we had to stay with him.»

Gently he disengaged Marie's hands from his coat and bent down to pick up the cases. «Come Marie, he must be wondering what's happened to us.»

*

«Colin!» Danny threw open the door and stood beaming on the threshhold, brimming over with unconcealed delight.

Danny, dressed in smartly-tailored Italian leisure pants and shirt, and a jacket decorated with red, black and grey diamonds of suede. looked exactly what he was—the second most fashionable Society photographer in London. Fortyish, small, pulsing with vitality, he was as smooth and well-groomed as a Siamese cat, as elegant and in as perfect taste as his flat.

«Colin!» he said again. «I've been dreaming up all sorts of brilliant epigrams for this moment, but now its come my mind's a complete blank. What a bore! But welcome home anyway.»

«Home!» Colin laughed. «It sounds funny somehow—so domesticated.» He stood grinning at Danny.

Danny dropped his eyes, flushing slightly.

Marie coughed.

«Oh Danny, I forgot the most important thing. I want you to meet Marie.»

«Thank you,» Marie said with an edge to her voice.

«Marie!» Danny seized her hand and drew her into the cosy-warm lounge with its black and white sheepskin rugs and cleancut Danish furniture. «My poor poppet, you look wet and bedraggled. Shoo those cats away and find a nice warm spot in front of the fire. You know you're much prettier than Colin ever hinted. You must promise to pose for me before you leave.»

Marie pulled a face. «I was photographed once back in Salisbury but it came out terribly. I guess I'm just not photogenic.»

«We'll see about that, my dear. Now Colin let me look at you.» He rested his hands lightly on Colin's shoulders and rocked back on his heels. «You've changed. You used to be a muscle-bound teenager, but now you've burst—that's it—you've burst and grown a new outer skin. It's much better than the old one, you know.»

Colin chuckled. «You make me sound like an over-ripe paw-paw. Anyway you haven't changed, you old bastard. You're exactly the way I remember you seven years ago.»

«Seven years?» Danny said, suddenly sombre. «Surely it can't have been that long?»

The two men were silent, the atmosphere charged with memory.

Marie drummed her long fingernails on the mantelpiece above the fire.

«I'm thirsty,» she announced suddenly. «And I'm tired too.» Colin looked at her sharply. He could see she was close to tears.

«Honey,» he murmured, concerned.

«A million apologies,» Danny cried, walking towards the door. «I'll fix you a drink and then you can relax in your room, or take a bath, or contemplate your navel, or whatever you like. And then we'll take you on your first English pub crawl, and we'll end up in some superb restaurant. Forgive me for being such a terrible host.»

«What's the matter?» Colin whispered anxiously as soon as Danny was out of earshot.

Marie turned away from him. «Lets go to a hotel,» she said stolidly.

Colin stared at her hard-mouthed.

Marie fiddled angrily with the ornaments on the mantelpiece. «Ever since we arrived its been perfectly obvious you'd both be much happier if I weren't around. You don't care, do you, if I'm hating every minute.»

«Oh Marie, don't be such an idiot? We haven't been here ten minutes yet.» Then puzzled, «What on earth are you doing?»

Marie had flipped open a silver box lying on the mantelpiece, picked up a letter lying inside, and was busy reading it. She turned to Colin excitedly.

«Look, its an invitation from the Duke and Duchess of . . .»

«Marie, put it back at once! Have you gone out of your mind or something? We're Danny's guests and . . . put it back quickly. I can hear him coming.»

She replaced the letter seconds before Danny returned with a tray of drinks.

But Colin noticed, with relief, that she eyed Danny with new respect from then on.

*

It was all very discreet. Marie's and Colin's rooms were at opposite ends of the corridor with a study and bathroom in between. Colin went straight to his room and emerged a minute later in his dressing gown.

«Won't be long,» he called cheerfully as he closed the bathroom door.

Danny fussed around a moment in Marie's room, picking up a few petals shed by a bowl of chrysanthemums, straightening a picture, then he excused himself.

«Danny!» Her voice was sharp enough to halt him with one hand on the doorhandle. «I gather Colin's told you everything there is to know about us so there's not much I can add. But there's one thing you should know.» Her cute little-girl face had hardened. «Colin and I are living together now, but don't think we'll go on this way for the rest of our lives. When my parents come to London next month we'll straighten out everything. They'll change their minds and let us get married, and even if they don't I'll be 21 at the end of next year and we can do what we like then.»

Danny shot her a shrewd glance. «Why have you told me this?»

«Because I want you to know that Colin's mine for keeps now, whatever you may think.»

A shadow crossed Danny's face. «I must ask you to excuse me now . . .»

«No! I want you to help me.»

Danny walked back into the room puzzled. «Help you? But how?»

Marie leaned towards him urgently. «Tell me about Colin—what he was like when you met him, how he lived, what he did. I want to know everything about him. What he ate, who he dated . . .»

«But that was almost ten years ago . . .»

«I don't care. He never talks about the early days. But I'm marrying him, aren't I? I mean, its only natural to be curious about one's future husband, isn't it?»

«Curiosity is natural enough,» Danny said non-committaly. «But what can I tell you? We met in 1956 when he was a kid doing his army training and I was desperately trying to break into the big time here after giving up news photography overseas.

«I was doing some athletic stuff for one of the muscle magazines and I needed a model. Colin replied to my advert, and he got the job. He was stationed near London and he'd come into town on weekend leave and virtually live in my studio. He had a magnificent physique in those days. Of course he is still well-built but ten years ago he was a young Adonis—and he knew it, incidentally.» Danny chuckled.

«I soon knocked the nonsense out of him, and when he stopped admiring himself in the mirror long enough to think about his future, he decided he'd like to learn something about the other side of the camera. So when he came out of the army a year later I took him on as my assistant—just for his keep at first—but later, when I became established, for a salary. I wanted him to live, eat and sleep photography so he moved into my flat with me . . .»

«He never told me that,» Marie said sharply. «Colin said he was your pupil. He never told me he worked for you for nothing or that he lived in your flat.»

Danny shrugged his shoulders. «Is it that important?»

«But don't you understand—I have a right to know everything.»

Danny smiled. «Well let me finish the story. Colin was a natural photographer and it wasn't long before I saw he was holding himself back by playing

second fiddle to me. Then, in 1958, the crowd I'd worked for in Korea, Universal Press, offered me a roving Middle East assignment. I wasn't prepared to take it—by then I was doing too well here—but I put in a strong recommendation that they hire Colin instead. He got the job, and a week later he was on his way to Beirut and though he didn't know it then, a couple of Britannica Awards and a Pulitzer nomination. I'd say he's the top news photographer working in Africa today.»

Marie frowned. «Yes I know all that. But what about those two years with you? You're as bad as he is . . .»

Danny walked to the door and toyed with the handle, «Marie,» he said, «you're very young still—not yet 20. Colin's ten years older than you, and I'm ten years older than he is, so treat this as the advice of a disagreable old uncle. You're getting married and I'm happy for both of you. But you're marrying Colin as he is now and as he will be for the rest of his life. You're not marrying his past. That's dead. Curiosity is one thing—but obsession is another.»

He opened the door and slipped out into the corridor.

*

The bathroom door wasn't locked.

Danny closed it carefully behind him, then as an afterthought turned the key and walked through the steam-filled atmosphere to the washbasin, where he stood examining his reflection in the mirror.

Colin leaned back luxuriously in the water and grinned.

«This is just like old times, except that you've got a man-sized tub at last. Don't tell me you had it specially installed for me.»

Danny did not turn his head.

«Colin,» he said quietly, «why did you come back?»

Colin exhaled slowly. «Well that's a fine welcome isn't it?» he remarked to the soap dish.

«Colin, you must tell me. Why have you returned? Its a terrible thing you're doing to me, and that child inside there. I've been doing my best to cover up, but she's obviously suspicious. I suppose you told her I insisted you both stay with me.»

«Of course. I couldn't very well say I cabled you three days ago to say we were coming.»

«But why, Colin, why? Saying goodbye to you in 1958 was the biggest wrench of my life, but it had to end. Didn't we decide it was all over then? Didn't I convince you that our relationship was unfair to your true nature? You know as well as I do you were never naturally gay. If you stayed with me for two years it was only out of some crazy sense of obligation. I convinced you, and you agreed we'd keep out of each other's way—and now you've come back.» He ran a hand across his forehead and shook his head helplessly.

Colin stirred uncomfortably in the water. «Danny, don't you see you've just answered your own question. Parting was your idea, not mine, but it's true you convinced me. You insisted that I was the normal healthy male who had to be put out to stud to produce a brood of normal, healthy children. I never had any ideas on the subject until you convinced me. So I took that Universal Press job you stage-managed. Oh yes, I heard the full story later—all those letters you wrote to New York pestering them to employ your protégé . . .»

Danny coloured. «You regret it all then?»

Colin shook his head emphatically. «Of course not. But you were wrong Danny. I was never a sexual innocent dominated by the insatiable satyr you seemed to think you were. If I stayed with you for two years it was only because shacking up with a fellow comes as naturally to me as sleeping with a girl. I stayed with you because I loved you and because sexually we were completely compatible. Its as simple as that. Do you honestly believe that when I went to Beirut and later to Nairobi I was transformed, and that men lost their power to attract me? Do you?»

«You wrote me often about your girl friends,» Danny said accusingly. «You can't deny that.»

Colin sighed. «I'm not denying anything. But I wasn't going to be so tactless as to tell you all about the boy friends too. Why do you think I'm still single at 29? And why don't you look at me, for Christ's sake?»

Danny stared straight ahead into the mirror. «If you yell like that, Marie will hear us,» he said.

Colin beat his clenched fist against the water, sending a small cascade on to the floor. Then he continued more quietly. «All these years you've been hovering somewhere in the back of my mind, Danny. Oh I've had girl friends all right but every time I was on my own and lonely it wasn't them I thought about. It was you, Danny. And then I met Marie, and for once I thought this might be the real thing. She's really just a grown-up child, but she needs me so badly that when the question of marriage cropped up, for once it didn't seem grotesque. So that's why we are here.»

Danny closed his eyes briefly. «But what have I to do with you and Marie?»

«Don't you understand. I'm old-fashioned enough to believe in this 'Till death do us part' lark. If I marry it's for good and no boy friends—or girl friends—around the corner. But first I had to be sure it really is over between us . . .»

«It was all over seven years ago, and you know it.»

Colin sat up abruptly in the bath. «I don't know it, damn you! You built up this whole fantasy around our relationship, Danny. I think that in your heart of hearts you wanted to renounce me back in 1958 in case I ever renounced you. You were terrified of being hurt, so you built up this obsession that I was an innocent boy seduced by a sophisticated reprobate.»

Colin laughed mirthlessly. «Have you forgotten so soon? Do you remember how proper our first meeting was back in 1956—but the second time I came to London to pose for you we ended up in bed together? Why Danny? Who made the first move? Wen you'd finished the conventional shots who suggested I should pose for a strip tease series in uniform? I did, Danny, not you, and by the time you'd finished taking those pictures we were both so damn randy that what happened was inevitable. Have you forgotten already?»

«Forgotten?» Danny asked in a strangled voice. «Do you know I dug up the original negatives only a few weeks ago and printed up a new set of enlargements. They're in my bedroom right now, in my desk. If I've looked at them once I've looked fifty times and every time is like that first time. I . . .»

«Then look at me now,» Colin interrupted hoarsely. «Danny, look at me now.» He stood up suddenly in the bath.

Slowly, reluctantly, Danny turned his head. Colin stood defiantly, the clean, athletic lines of torso blending with the sturdy, muscular arms and legs.

Danny took a step forward. «Colin, you're mad to have come here,» he whispered.

His eyes flickered from the tousled blonde hair to the strong square chin, from the broad shoulders to the flat, lightly-haired abdomen. Then they were transfixed with the slow stirring of desire.

A hand touched his shoulder lightly. Unconsciously Danny had edged forward to within a few feet of the bath.

He raised his eyes to look directly into the steady grey eyes of his former pupil.

«I haven't forgotten,» he murmured. «Oh God, I'll never forget . . .»

*

«No I'd rather not come, honestly,» Marie insisted. «You can come back and pick me up after you've had a few drinks at the pub, and then we can go out to dinner somewhere. You two look so grim and serious I'm sure you have something to talk about.»

The men exchanged glances.

«We'd love you to come . . .» Colin began tentatively.

«Don't be too long,» Marie said primly. «I'll expect you back before eight.»

«She's right,» Danny said suddenly. «Lets get all our dreary reminiscences out of the way before dinner. If you get bored, dear, we'll be in the King's Arms. Its only a block from the square.»

The front door closed behind the two men.

Marie stood clasping and unclasping her hands while the footsteps of the men died away. Then she strode purposefully to the other end of the flat and threw open the door to Danny's bedroom.

«Good Lord!» she said out loud.

Danny had furnished his bedroom in Moorish style. It flashed with exotic colours in the hand-woven carpets, the intricately embroidered bedspread and the magnificent mosque lamp hanging from the ceiling.

Open-mouthed she crept to the bed, ran her hand over the richly-hued stitching, and reached up to touch the lamp.

Then she remembered.

She opened the top right-hand drawer of the desk, and began to search systematically through its contents.

The pictures were in a plain brown envelope at the bottom of the second drawer. Marie examined them carefully.

The one at the top showed a brawny, youthful Colin against a plain black background, arms akimbo, dressed in paratrooper's battledress. In the next picture he had shed his battledress tunic, undone half the buttons of his shirt, and was staring straight at the camera with narrowed eyes and lips parted. In the third he was stripped to the waist, his muscular shoulders glistening, and one foot was resting on a chair while he removed one of the highly-polished, calf-high boots. In the forth picture the boots were neatly stacked by the chair and Colin was in the process of slipping his trousers over his narrow hips. Number five, a rear view, from a low angle, showed him peeling off his underpants.

Grim-faced, Marie flicked through the remaining five pictures, her eyes growing wider, her mouth tighter. As she stared at the last one she gave a little, muffled cry.

She held the photographs by the corners as though she were going to rip them apart. Then she dropped them and turned furiously to the bedside table.

She seized the small alarm clock in its morocco leather case and hurled it with all her might at the exquisite mosque lamp. The clock bounced to the carpet amidst a clang of copper and a cascade of delicate glass slivers.

Weeping she fled to her bedroom and pulled her suitcase from under the bed. She began throwing her clothes into case without even bothering to fold them properly.

*

Marie was still standing under the portico waiting for the taxi when the others returned, half-an-hour early. As soon as she saw the two men approaching she crossed the road and began walking rapidly away from them.

«Marie!» Colin yelled, then to Danny, «please wait for me in the flat. Something's gone wrong . . .»

He sprinted after the small figure, half-stumbling under the weight of the suitcase, and caught up with her before she reached the corner.

«Marie,» he cried again, and reached out to grab her shoulder.

She shook herself free. «Get away from me you—you—pervert.» She quickened her pace.

Colin stood, stunned, for a moment, then hurried to catch up with her again. «Marie,» he said urgently, «I don't know what's happened but I've a pretty shrewd idea. You've been snooping around Danny's flat and you've . . .»

«You'd have made a fortune as a strip tease artist in one of those queer's clubs I've heard about. Isn't it a pity I spoiled your fun by coming into your life.»

«Marie, shut up and listen to me.»

Something in his voice made her stop. She turned slowly to face him and looked up at him with her nose slightly puckered, as though faced by a particularly smelly compost heap. «Well?» she said.

«You were listening at the bathroom door, weren't you?» Colin asked quietly. «And you've seen those pictures too,» he went on without waiting for a reply. «I'm not going to fall on my knees and beg forgiveness for what I did ten years ago. It was a foolish thing to have done but I was nineteen at the time. Now lets forget the past. We're getting married, remember.»

«Married?» Marie suddenly began laughing hysterically. «Married you say? Won't you have to ask Danny for a divorce first? Oh God, to think I might have gone on without knowing the truth . . .»

«What truth?» Colin demanded. «What do you know of the truth about Danny and me? Five minutes listening at a keyhole and you talk about the truth.»

«I know he picked you up off the streets when you were 19.» Marie almost spat the words out. «I know he systematically debauched and perverted you—so much so that even when we were supposed to be eloping together you had to come back for a last orgy together. Oh, the filthy swine! I pity you, Colin, but I'll never forgive him for what he's turned you into.»

She picked up her suitcase and turned away.

«Wait!»

Marie stood still.

«All right, now its my turn to speak. You're way off beam, Marie. If any debauching was done ten years ago I was the one who took the initiative, not Danny. It was my idea to come back here before we married, but not for the

reason you think. I wanted to be sure that with you I'd be entering a new life, with no looking back on what went before.»

«So he persuaded you to have your last fling together in the bathroom, knowing I was only a few feet away . . .»

Colin snorted. «Last fling! Let me tell you something, Marie. Tonight in the bathroom I deliberately went out on a limb. I tried to seduce Danny again, and do you know what happened? At the crucial point he turned me down flat—for your sake, Marie. Oh he wanted to go the whole hog, but he didn't. Do you understand? Nothing happened tonight. And do you know something else? The fact that we were both able to hold ourselves in check is the green light I was waiting for. If you marry me, Marie, you need never worry. I've closed that chapter of my past.»

Marie turned to face him again, her face contorted with loathing. «Marry you? Marry pansy-boy Danny's queer boy friend?» She laughed shrilly. «Why don't you go back to the flat and pose for some more dirty pictures. I'm sure Danny and you can think up some interesting new poses.»

Colin's eyes glittered dangerously, but his voice was calm. «If I go back to Danny's flat, Marie, it will be for good. I'm willing to make a go of marriage with you, and never see Danny again. But if you force me to it, the alternative is just as attractive to me.»

A taxi entered the square and stopped nearby. Marie brushed past Colin and climbed in. Colin turned to follow. She slammed the door in his face as he reached her.

«Remember this, Marie,» he called through the window. «Nothing has changed. I'm still the same person you knew and loved this afternoon. Whatever I am now, I was then. Only one thing is different—you know the truth. One day you would probably have known it anyway, when I thought you were adult enough to learn to live with it.»

The taxi jerked forward, picked up speed and turned the corner.

Colin stood with his hands thrust deeply into his pockets. Then he relaxed and crossed the road slowly.

*

Danny was waiting in the hallway of the flat, a few shattered slivers of coloured glass in one hand, and a bent photograph in the other.

He pulled a long face.

«Well?»

Colin walked into the lounge and stood reflectively before the fire. «The truth's funny thing,» he said, half to himself. «It opens your eyes. For the last year I thought I was courting a woman. Now I see she was only a naive schoolgirl. Do you know I've just had a narrow escape from a fate worse than death?»

He burst out laughing and threw his arms out wide.

«I'm free, Danny! For the first time in years I know the whole truth, and I'm free.»

He bounded across the room to the startled Danny and crushed him a powerful embrace. He bent down and nuzzled Danny's ear, teased his cheek and found his lips. It was a real man's kiss, straining, hard, yet tender.

Breathless, laughing Danny untangled himself at last.

«Welcome home, you old bastard,» he murmured.

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Ein international bekannter Wissenschaftler ist gebeten worden, eine Studie über die Homosexualität der Neger in aller Welt zu schreiben. Seit dem Erscheinen des bekannten Werkes von Prof. Karsch-Haack «Das gleichgeschlechtliche Leben der Naturvölker» ist dieses Thema wenig bearbeitet worden. Wir bitten unsere Leser, dem Wissenschaftler zu helfen. Bitte geben Sie uns Hinweise über Literatur aller Art (etnologisch, soziologisch, schöngeistig, religiös), die sich mit der Homosexualität der Neger beschäftigen. Ausser Buchtiteln interessieren Zeitungs- und Zeitschriftenaufsätze. Weiterhin ist Material über das Verhältnis von weissen Homosexuellen zu Negern erwünscht. Interessant wären in diesem Zusammenhang vor allem auch Erfahrungsberichte. Bitte zögern Sie nicht, evtl. einige Erlebnisse mitzuteilen. Vertrauliche Behandlung wird Ihnen zugesichert. Der betreffende Wissenschaftler ist uns für seine liberale und tolerante Haltung bekannt. Seine Studie will im aufklärenden Sinne wirken. Deshalb richten wir an unsere Leser diesen Appell, uns recht viele Hinweise zu geben, die wir dann an den Wissenschaftler weiterleiten werden. Legen Sie bitte auch Auslandporto bei. Vielen Dank für Ihre Hilfe.

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