

the Sacred Stone at Mecca, and the first man to discover the lakes in Africa that are the source of the Nile.

JEFF. (*Winks at the audience.*) I thought he married Elizabeth Taylor.

DAD. (*Sails on.*) He'd heard about this great lake, where the Nile came from, and after months of hardship in the heart of Africa, they'd all had malaria and dysentery, and diseases no one had ever heard of then, they were starving and just about to give up, but they were sheltering from the sun, and the native guide went on, up to the top of the next ridge, and started yelling, "Look, Master, look! Behold the great water." Behold—the great water! That stirs my blood that does, that shows you the power of words. A man who'd take on the whole world and conquer it. Not afraid of anything. You ought to read it, you might pick up a few hints.

JEFF. Whafor? I don't want to go chasing all over Africa looking for somewhere to have a swim, all them crocodiles everywhere. Anyway, it's all been discovered now.

DAD. No, it hasn't, you can still have adventures, all over the place, see things, do things. The outback, there's an adventure, you can still get lost there, my word, you can.

JEFF. I've been outback.

DAD. A ten day coach trip to Ayers Rock? It's not quite what I meant.

JEFF. You read too many books, that's your trouble.

DAD. You don't even have to leave home, there's amazing things waiting for you just around the next corner, if you only take the trouble to look, wonder things, like love, the greatest adventure of all. Your Gran said it once,

I've never forgotten it, the greatest explorers of all, she said, are the explorers of the human heart.

JEFF. (*Grins.*) Is that why she became a dike?

DAD. Your grandmother was not a dike!

JEFF. She was licking Aunt Mary's pussy for forty years, what else do you call it?

DAD. I admit her relationship with Mary was—intimate—but she was not a dike. Lesbian, perhaps.

JEFF. Lezzo, dike, what's the diff?

DAD. What's the diff, what the diff, there's a hell of a lot of flamin' diff! What's in a word, Shakespeare said, well, there's a whole bloody lot. Words give life to things, and meaning and beauty. Like your grandma was a very beautiful woman, and just because she found a bit of happiness after your granddad died, just because in her grief she turned to Mary and they found a bit of comfort in each other's arms, that doesn't give you the right to call her names. How would you feel if I went round calling you a fairy, or a pansy, or a poofter?

JEFF. You do, half the time.

DAD. Only when you upset me. Eat your veggies. (*HE goes back to his book.*)

JEFF. (*Turns to the audience.*) 'Strue. Granma was a dike. Well—a lesbian. She was a wonderful woman, though. I used to go down there for me holidays, and they were the best times. Wasn't anything flash, where she lived, a little weather board on the outskirts of town, where nothing worked right, and the plumbing looked like it was designed by Picasso. Obsessed with plumbing, Gran was. Maybe that's where I got the idea for going into the trade myself. And clean? Gran was always polishing every bit of wood work in the house, you'd get up in the morning, and

she'd be there, polishing away, so there was a lovely smell about the place, like lavender floor polish, cripes, I haven't seen that in the shops for yonks. Reminds of a funny story—but, well, that's a bit off, I s'ppose.

In the evenings we'd play Ludo, or Snakes and Ladders or Tiddly Winks, I used to love those games with Gran. She used to keep an old Monopoly set hidden in the drawer, but Mary wouldn't let her play it, real strict, Salvation Mary was, and Gran too, but not as bad as Mary. Funny, int' it, someone as religious as Mary, going on about the devil and all his works, then jumping in the linen battlefield with Gran every night. Just goes to show, doesn't it? But I was staying there once, and Mary went out for the evening. Well, the minute Mary was out the door Gran whipped out the old Monopoly board and had it set up before you could say Ned Kelly, her eyes all glinting. Not a word to Mary, she said. I tell you, it was the best game of Monopoly I've ever played, like Gran and me were doing something really wrong, fire and brimstone stuff. Isn't it funny how ordinary mortal sin can be? First time I ever went to stay there, I was, oh, I dunno, six, maybe seven, and a couple of my cousins were there too, so I had to sleep on a spare bed in Gran and Mary's room.

And I remember, I can see it so clearly, waking up on the first morning I was there, it was still early, and looking across to Gran's big bed, an old brass bed it was, and there was Gran and Mary, tucked up in bed, wrapped up in each other's arms. Gran was snoring, I remember, and I lay in bed looking at them for, oh, ever such a long time, and it seemed—natural, somehow, I dunno. Like the most natural thing I'd ever seen. Like love.

She and Mary used to put the old uniform and bonnet on every Sunday morning, then they'd shove the roast in the oven and head off to the 11 a.m. at the Citadel. I'd have to go along too, coz Gran, she really believed it was the answer. So you'd join in the hymns, and shout out Salvation, and have a real good time. I remember once it was all going on, the band playing, and the Songstresses banging their tambourines, and everybody singing their little hearts out, and yelling Salvation, and it all got so exciting I went up and flung meself on the Mercy Seat. That got the old biddies clucking, I can tell you, just saved another soul for Jesus, everybody likes a bit of drama. I copped curry from Dad when he heard about it, coz he knew what had happened, he knew it didn't mean anything. I was only twelve. But they'd all wanted someone to do it and nobody was, so I did. I've always liked to do the right thing by people.

When we got back, the roast'd be ready, the little kitchen'd be all steamy and hot, with Gran banging on the taps to make 'em work, and making the gravy and carving the meat. Mary'd look after the veggies, that's all she ever did, she was a lazy cow. Boiled the life out of 'em for forty-five minutes. She never did like veggies and I think she was getting her own back on 'em. Afterwards Gran and Mary'd go upstairs to that big double bed, and do whatever they did. Pro'bly just slept, be too tired for anything else. You ever noticed that? When you're on with someone, well, it's always nice to play hide the one sausage, of course, but most of all, the nicest thing about going to bed with someone on a regular basis is when they just let you sleep. That's the bit I like, snuggled up all safe and sound in their arms. Not that I'm an expert on relationships,