

KISS MY NECK AND SAY YOU LOVE ME by Lawrence Leonard

Julian had strong feelings about love, so strong that sometimes he wondered where they came from. Certainly not from his parents, nor from his contemporaries at college or the desirable girls he sometimes managed to date after parties.

Wherever from, he knew the truth about love as surely as he knew the truth about god, socialism, Zen and the films of Fassbinder.

Love was Sex plus Affection -  $A+B=C$  - and it therefore seemed to him that the purest and most effective way of sampling both must be separately, before compromising each by accepting them together in the name of Marriage.

That was the intellectual base.

In other words, only Sex unclouded by affection could fully disclose its mysteries and push back its frontiers.

At first furtively, and later with increasing confidence, Julian began exploring the world of one-night stands.

Quite early on, he felt that these forays called for a special uniform, neither formal nor his usual jacket-and-jeans. His Mr Hyde outfit, he called it - dark-blue shirt with button-down collar, no tie, grey flannels and blue zipper jacket - and in it he felt equipped to deal with whatever odd situations arose out of his investigations.

By no means did he always meet with success, of course.

Julian lived with his parents and had no freedom to say 'come back to my place', nor was his grant lavish enough to be able to book hotel rooms. Furthermore, not even London's West End, he found, was so full of girls who shared his views that fulfillment was inevitable.

He had worked out the ratio at about one in four, and as he

could only afford to go out once a week and his last success had been on January the ninth, he was looking forward to February the sixth with cautious optimism.

He left his home in Muswell Hill at half-past-one with a ten-pound note in his trouser pocket, walked up to Highgate Tube and booked himself through to Leicester Square.

There was, of course, a ritual to be observed.

First, a pint of bitter at the Dog and Duck in Frith Street and then a large Scotch at the French Pub to give him confidence.

After that, he persuaded himself, it was up to Fate. Oddly enough, he believed in that.

Trying to look like a man with a lot on his mind, which was true enough, he then made straight for Trafalgar Square and the National Gallery.

The National Gallery, he had long realized, was the best place to find girls on their own. He didn't know if they went there for the same reason in reverse, but they certainly went. Also Julian was beginning to grow fond of the pictures.

This time he began with the Impressionists - usually quite a promising room in his experience - and stood thoughtfully behind one or two lonely nubile figures while he divided his attention between them and whichever Renoir they happened to be looking at, but the slightly frosty glances he received told him <sup>this</sup> ~~it~~ was not the moment to push his luck.

He decided to visit the Impressionists again in half-an-hour, and crossed over to the Early Italians. This was sheer luxury on his part, because there was never anything doing there, but Julian liked looking at gold leaf. This time he concentrated on the Duccio Madonna because someone had told him Duccio was a great painter.

It was while he was trying to decide why, that it happened.

"Is that the Duccio? I've left my specs. behind."

He turned round and had a hazy impression of someone quite pretty.

"Yes, it is. Duccio. That's right."

"I wonder how they got the gold leaf to stick?"

She was pretty, Julian realized. Also she was dressed so conventionally that he actually noticed it - sheer stockings, wide blue skirt with a blue bolero jacket and a lacy white blouse buttoned up to her neck. Certainly a winner, though, with what seemed to be long legs -

"I never thought. Glue, I suppose. It's what I like best, the gold leaf."

"Me too." She gave a little giggle and wrinkled her eyes up. She was looking at him now instead of the Duccio. "I don't expect you're supposed to."

"I don't see why not."

"If you were, the best picture in the world would be that one over there - it's nothing but gold leaf."

They went over to look at it and Julian walked behind so that he could see her back. She had large hips and a tiny waist.

After the Early Italians they went to the canteen to have some coffee and she took his arm going down the stairs as if it was the most natural thing in the world. In fact, she seemed rather keen on physical contact, touching his hand whenever she wanted to emphasise what she was saying or point something out to him.

Nor was she at a loss for words, which Julian often was on these occasions, so he had plenty of time to look at her in all the serious places and to make sure she knew he was looking at her in them.

This was important, because he believed in letting whoever-it-was know what he was interested in from the start, it being neither fair to them nor indeed to him if they got the impression that all he wanted was a bit of a chat.

"What's your name?" he asked, suddenly realizing that he didn't know.

"Louise. What's yours?"

"Julian."

"Like the Pope. There was a Pope called Julian, but I forget which century."

"You're not a Catholic, are you?" asked Julian suspiciously.

"No." She gave her giggle again and touched his hand. "Would it matter?"

"For what I have in mind it might," said Julian, darkly.

"Goodness, what a threat you are."

They did the Impressionists after that and then left the Gallery arm-in-arm. It was a grey day outside and cold.

"What shall we do now?" said Louise.

Julian looked at his watch. "It's a bit early for a drink - the pubs won't be open. We could go to a film - " he left the idea hanging in mid-air, thinking of back rows.

"Why don't we go back to my place?" said Louise. "Then I can give you a drink and you won't have to pay for it."

Julian felt himself tingling all over.

"That would be fine," he managed to say.

"You can pay for the cab - it's not far."

'..... not far'? They were in Trafalgar Square. Where did she live - Mayfair?

It wasn't Mayfair but it was a small flat in a very smart block

near Marble Arch and a lot of money had been spent on the interior - mainly on lace curtains, coffee-tables and sofas.

Louise said, "Make yourself at home" and swished out to the kitchen.

When she came back she was carrying a large tray with whiskey and gin on it, tonic water and soda, ice and two glasses.

"What would you like?" she said brightly. "It's all here but if you'd rather have beer, it's in the 'fridge. I haven't any lemons, so if you want gin it'll have to be 'au nature'. Casanova, wasn't it, who used lemons?"

"I don't know. I'd like a Scotch-and-soda. What a super flat."

He looked round at it with disguised distaste.

She poured him a large Scotch and splashed soda into it.

"You don't have to say you like it," she said, meaning the flat and handing him the Scotch.

Julian took a luxurious swig - only at the poshest parties were drinks at this level readily available.

"It must have cost a lot," he said cautiously. "All that lace."

Louise giggled. "It's meant to make men feel sexy."

Julian looked at her with some surprise. He'd never thought of someone furnishing their flat with that in mind, let alone talking about it. On the other hand the conversation was certainly going the right way and much sooner than he'd expected.

"I don't know if it does or not," he said. "I was feeling sexy already." "I hate it," said Louise, as if she was seeing it for the first time. "My room at home is all stripped pine and scrubbed bricks.

Julian began to feel out of his depth. "Then this is someone else's?"

Louise shrugged. "No, it's mine. Have some more Scotch."

As she filled his glass, Julian let his hand stray down her

back, and she gave a little giggle of recognition. There was something about the movement, a practiced quality of provocation, that reminded him of something.

Of course - what a dullard he was.

"You mean it's your professional flat," he said. "You're a pro."

She reached up and gave him a quick peck on the cheek. "That's right. Not for you, though - it's my night off. Come and sit down."

She took his hand and led him to the chintzy sofa.

"But that's great," said Julian seriously. "That means you're doing it for itself - Sex qua Sex. It's what I believe in. Also you're earning a living at something that's socially useful."

Louise looked doubtful. "It's not the way most people look at it."

Julian put one arm round her shoulders and began feeling gently up her skirt with the other.

"I'm not most people," he said. "I think the most exciting thing in the world is people's reaction to sex when it's unencumbered by anything else. That's what you see all the time."

His hand had reached the soft skin of her thighs where her stockings ended, and before he went further he turned her face towards him so that they could watch each others eyes.

"Mm. Maybe you're right," she said. "Although it does get a habit. Come here, Julian - " She took his hand away from her legs - "I'll show you what to do. Just unbutton the top button of my blouse. That's right - take care. No, don't reach inside - I'm just going to lie back like this .....

She moved over to the corner of the sofa and half lay back against the cushions so that her hair fell over them and her legs stretched out, close together and elegant.

"Now come nearer - no, not on top of me or anything like that.

So that you're close to my side."

Not quite sure what subtlety of the sexual act was being unfolded for him, Julian moved over.

"That's it. Just stay there a minute."

Julian looked at her and saw she had closed her eyes.

"Now tell me you love me."

"But - "

"Tell me you love me," she insisted. A small worried frown formed over her eyes.

Julian sighed. "I love you," he said.

"Say it properly."

"I love you." It still didn't sound right. Julian felt as if he was acting in a bad play.

"Now stroke my neck. That's right - gently. No, nowhere else. My neck." She put her head farther back. "That's lovely. Now say it again."

"I love you."

"Keep saying it."

"I love you, Louise, I love you, I love you."

"And I love you, Julian. Kiss my neck now."

Julian kissed her neck softly, on the side.

"That's beautiful, Julian. Don't do anything else. Just kiss my neck and say you love me."

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