

# A·N·WILSON

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*'A darkly bitter confection'*

— The Times Literary Supplement

## Scandal

Sexual  
eccentricity,  
treason, blackmail  
and murder . . . in  
the highest of places

A. N. WILSON

# Scandal

or *Priscilla's Kindness*

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Why should good hours of sunlight  
be wasted on the judgement seat by  
those who, presently, will take their turn  
in the dock?



PENGUIN BOOKS

Penguin Books Ltd, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England  
Viking Penguin Inc., 40 West 23rd Street, New York, New York 10010, U.S.A.  
Penguin Books Australia Ltd, Ringwood, Victoria, Australia  
Penguin Books Canada Ltd, 2801 John Street, Markham, Ontario, Canada L3R 1B4  
Penguin Books (N.Z.) Ltd, 182-190 Wairau Road, Auckland 10, New Zealand

First published by Hamish Hamilton 1983  
Published in Penguin Books 1984

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Printed and bound in Great Britain by  
Cox & Wyman Ltd, Reading

For John Blackwell

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## *Author's Note*

Every now and then, a British politician resigns as the result of a public scandal. The characters in this story are all caught up in such a scandal, but they are all completely imaginary. The story happens in a real place, and in recent times, but it is wholly fictitious. Derek Blore belongs to an unnamed political party which is not to be identified with any of the four or five major political parties in Great Britain today. This is not a *roman-à-clef*.

## One

Bernadette Woolley was aware that her name was professionally inappropriate. She tended to get a lot of jokes about it. There had even been recommendations that she should change it. The pious connotations put men off, it was averred. Non-Catholics recognised her allegiance at once because of the label, and scorned her for it; while co-religionists, reminded inappropriately of the Virgin apparition at Lourdes, blushed, or sniggered, or asked for another girl.

But – one of the many false impressions under which Bernadette teetered through life – she always felt you couldn't change the name you were born with.

The other girls were luckier. Either they had perfectly acceptable names like Charmaine, Rita or Cindy; or they were shameless enough to be known by parodies of the professional nomenclature: Lulu, Fifi, Busty, or Miss Caine.

Bernadette's name was only one of the many features which marked her out, in her own words, as 'a bit of a loner.'

She had never particularly wanted to sell her body. Her ambitions all those years ago, at the time of the quarrel with her mother, had been to become an air hostess. She had dreamed of travelling to Bangkok and Los Angeles. She would have worn smart uniforms, and been given free make-up and hair-does. Like the girls on the Qantas adverts, she would have been good at bringing the passengers their trays, and smiling at the executives as she supplied them with drinks or smoked salmon.

These blessed ones, who stood about with gleaming white teeth collecting their passengers at Gatwick or Luton, and jetting with them across the hemisphere; who were probably adored by the pilots, and treated to proposals of marriage every few months, had possessed the edge over Bernadette from the beginning. 'O' levels, a diploma, even typing, were accomplishments which she had never managed to acquire in the admirable government school at Bognor Regis.

Her mother worked in a hotel as a cleaner and chambermaid. They had come to Bognor from Liverpool when Bernadette was a baby. Her dad – formerly a cook in the Merchant Navy – had got a summer job there. It was not a summer to which Mrs Woolley very frequently referred. An infidelity, and an elopement, had occurred. Bernadette had never seen him, although he was believed to be running a hotel of his own in Blackpool and ‘doing well.’

Such good fortune had not been enjoyed by his abandoned wife and child. They had few friends, and little money. Mrs Woolley, exhausted by long hours of hotel work, had never wasted much conversational energy on her daughter. The first fifteen years of Bernadette’s existence had been fraught and dull. A failure, during her last year at school, to obtain employment, was written down by her mother as fecklessness. They had got on each other’s nerves. A domestic dispute of some triviality – an inquiry whether Bernadette expected Mrs Woolley, after a hard day at the Excelsior, and only fifteen fiery bloodstained minutes for her morning refreshments, to scour out a frying pan, which had been left dirty for several days – caused their final parting. Bernadette had not expected her mother to clean the pan. She had not noticed it was there. She was an imperceptive girl, not gifted with prescience.

A girl from school, a Wendy Jenks, had been fortunate enough to obtain employment at an emporium called Pants Plus in Oxford Street. Hearing of Bernadette’s misfortune, she had asked her manager if her friend might not be employed in the same establishment. The answer had been no, but Bernadette gave an opposite impression to her mother, and left Bognor on that pretext for the capital.

A similar shop, selling jeans and cheesecloth blouses, *did* employ her for a few weeks in Notting Hill, enabling her to rent a small bed-sitting room in the environs of All Saints’ Road. But a fundamental lethargy had made the conditions of work uncongenial. The boutique opened at ten every morning. Bernadette discovered in herself an inability to appear at this hour. It wasn’t as though she *did* much with her evenings. She had soon lost contact with Wendy Jenks, and spent her evenings sitting alone with a transistor and a bag of chips, allowing the hours to slip past in a melancholy haze. Sleep mercifully blotted out consciousness some time before the close-down of Radio One, and held her, as though drugged, in its powerful embrace until the sun was high in the sky. She tried alarm clocks. She tried going to

bed earlier. It got no better. Half past ten, eleven, it was sometimes nearly dinner time before she arrived at the shop.

Sandra, the manageress, said it wasn't fair on the others if Bernadette turned up at all hours. She wouldn't be pleaded with. After five weeks, Bernadette got the sack.

Day after day, during those weeks of employment, Bernadette had walked to the shop past a newsagent in Pembridge Road, displaying advertisements on a glazed notice-board outside the shop. A little huddle of men were always peering at the cards there, and it was some time before Bernadette recognised what the advertisements had to offer. FRENCH LESSONS GIVEN: BIG CHEST FOR SALE: VERY YOUNG, QUALIFIED MASSEUSE. Telephone numbers – even, on occasion, an address, were scrawled beneath these legends in felt-tip pen.

Coming out of the newsagent with her True-Life Romance and her packet of Silk Cut, just after her dismissal by Sandra, Bernadette started thinking. She went on thinking all the way to the Wimpy, and by the time she was squeezing ketchup from the plastic tomato on to her cheeseburger, she was doing some hasty sums.

The bedsitting room cost £18 a week. On the half-landing near her room there was a payphone with a number on it.

At the boutique, Bernadette had been paid £60 a week. But they had given her much less than that in her envelope. Sandra had explained it all to her. By the time she had paid her tax, and her national insurance, it only came to £41.70. Take out the rent and that left her with £23 each week to live on. She had no idea what people charged for Bubble Baths, Strict Riding Lessons or Instructions in Swedish; but it was surely possible to learn the value of these things as she went along. Moreover, it would be a way of meeting people. She might even make a boyfriend.

Bernadette had been brought up strictly. She had been shy of boys at school, and her mother would never have had one in the house. Other girls had had boyfriends. She never had. There was a difficulty in knowing what to say to them. In the previous five weeks, as she sat alone in her room and listened to the love songs on Radio One, Bernadette had been desperate for someone to take her out to the pictures and kiss her afterwards under lamp-posts. But no one had ever asked her. She did not know anyone. And now that her job was finished, there was no chance that she would ever meet anyone again.

Life had been hard on £23. She wondered if she dared ask as much

as £10 for a visit from one of the men peering at the advertisement-cards. Supposing she did, and she had four such visits in a week? There would be no tax to pay on it, and she could start saving. One day she might even have a jeans shop of her own.

By the time the cheeseburger had been consumed, her mind was made up. If she could have remembered the number on the payphone, she would have gone to the shop directly. As it was, she had to go back to the bedsit and write it down on a card. She sat on her bed and contemplated a suitable wording for the advertisement. She did not feel capable of anything too clever or fancy. One of the cards was a drawing of a spider's web, with a little fly caught in it, and COME INTO MY PARLOUR written in big letters at the top. Bernadette did not feel equal to that sort of poetry. And fear prevented her from putting an esoteric message which she did not quite understand herself. In the end, she simply wrote BERNADETTE and the telephone number. In the afternoon, she paid the shopkeeper £1 – rather a lot she thought – to put it in the window. When she and her mother had been hard up and wanted to sell some furniture, they had put a card in the local shop at Bognor and it had only cost a few pence.

In readiness for her first caller, she took a bath and made up her face with her limited supply of lipstick, blusher and mascara. She was not bad looking. Her complexion was pale and freckly, and there was nothing anyone could do about being somewhat flat-chested. She worried a bit about the spots on her shoulder and back, which no amount of Clearasil seemed to shift. But her fair, sandy hair looked pretty, as she combed it down over her shoulders. By the time she had finished painting herself, endeavouring to make her thin pale lips more sensuous by a rather smudgy application of pink, she looked more like a child who had been playing with her mother's make-up box, than a professional woman about to embark upon a profitable career.

She sat for hours, smoking a lot and too nervous to eat; and, as time passed, she felt a growing sense of failure. It had not occurred to her, once the card was in that window, that she would not have men queueing on her staircase almost at once. The next night passed equally miserably, and the next; and it was only on the third day that she discovered that the shop had not yet displayed her card, and that she would have to wait another two days before it did.

There was no money left in her Post Office account by the time the



card went in and she received her first call. It was a very foreign man, and when he arrived, she was frightened by his being rather old. She tried to get £10 out of him, but he claimed not to have more than £8, and when he had gone, she felt sore and bruised and ashamed. Why did women willingly do this? Why did they want to get married, so that men could do it to them all the time? No one had ever told her how much it hurt, or of how terrible men looked as they writhed about on top of you.

Still, £8 was £8. The next day, she had only two callers. One was quite a young man, handsome. She felt she wouldn't too much mind him doing it to her. He paid his money and took his trousers off, but it just wouldn't work. She was too shy to say anything, and so was he. The thing just dangled there like a funny little sausage. And she had thought the man was crying when he hurriedly got dressed again and went down the stairs. It was quite a contrast with the next man, after whose visit she thought she would have to go to the doctor in case she had torn something or had been done an injury. Again, there was nothing remotely pleasurable about the experience. He had kept up a flow of really smutty talk, and she had just tried to smile politely, but hadn't known what to say. Even so, adding up the minutes actually spent on the job, she had earned forty pounds in the space of about two hours' work.

A week had passed, and another week. On some days, she received no telephone calls. On one day she had eight visitors. She was still too shy to say much to them; and she remained completely baffled by the fact that anyone could consider this activity pleasurable. During a pious childhood, week after week, she had been warned against sin. The priests at mass preached about it. They spoke as if everyone would be doing it all the time if it wasn't a sin. She had had to buy some cream from the chemist because it made her so sore. Some of the men were too big for her, and even the ones who weren't could be a bit rough.

After about fifteen visitors, she began to wonder if £10 wasn't quite cheap. The next time a client called – a dignified man, an executive probably, with a nice suit – she had told him it was £15. He had paid up without complaining. He obviously went with a lot of girls. He wanted to do it a bit different from the others; but in the end he paid her £20 so he could stay rather longer. By the end of three weeks she had been visited by sixty-three men and she had £740 in her Post Office savings account.

She had never dreamed of possessing such riches. Already, however, she was surprised to discover that it was not quite enough. On a sum like that, she could have bought herself some nice clothes, and still had enough to spare for a holiday until she found the next job in a jeans shop. But it was hard to contemplate going back to a bossy woman like Sandra, for little more than £23 a week.

She wandered through Soho one day and had her hair done at a really posh place. Then she went into a shop and bought some things which should be useful in her job: red satin knickers trimmed with fluffy nylon fur; bras to match; fish-net tights and naughty nighties. She spent about £150 on all this. The hair-do had cost £23 and she spent a further £40 on make-up. Then she wandered in the Tottenham Court Road and bought herself a cassette recorder and a portable television. A few more sorties like this – new frocks were bought, and a white fur coat – and she found that she only had £47 left in the Post Office.

But the clients kept on coming. The more they came, the bolder she grew. Some of them were talkative; they wanted to tell her about their wives, or remember scenes from their youth. Others were rather quiet and shy, and concentrated on what they were doing as though something might go wrong. Quite a few of them were like the handsome young man and didn't manage to make the sausage go all big. It seemed funny to pay good money when you knew you couldn't do it; though, years later, Julie told her that they were trying to cure themselves, poor old darlings.

The £47 became £250, and she was beginning to set her heart on a new bed and an electric blanket, when she was visited by Mr Costigano.

There was nothing about him to warn her of danger. He was a squat little man, with brylcreemed hair, well combed back from a rather blotchy red face. He was, perhaps, less obviously respectable than some of her visitors. He was conspicuously unembarrassed about discarding his flashy blue and white tie, his silky blue shirt, and his check trousers and blue blazer with silver buttons. While he did this he continued to smoke a cigarette and stare at her as she lay back in her newly acquired tarty outfit. At first she thought he was going to be a limp sausage, but everything went quite normal when he had stubbed out his cigarette. While he enjoyed himself, he chewed gum and sang quietly to himself, 'Thanks for the Memory'. He didn't seem to know many of the words, but he repeated the

words that he *did* know quite often.

It was only when he had finished that he lay back and said, 'So, Bernadette, what's your real name, then?'

'It is my real name.'

'Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear.'

She wondered what was wrong. He lit another cigarette as he put on his underpants and began to reclathe himself more fully. As he stared at her he grinned and blew smoke into the air.

'Bernadette, eh?'

'Yeah.'

'Little Saint Bernadette.'

'Can't change the name you're born with.'

Mr Costigano sighed and repeated, 'Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear.' When he had hoisted his round little belly into the check trousers and was buckling them up at the belt, he said 'You and I will have to have a little confabication, Saint Bernadette.'

Her heart leapt as he said this. She realised that he had come not as an ordinary client, but as a predator. Was he a policeman? She knew that what she was doing was against the law; but she was not sure how *much* against the law.

'You shouldn't be doing this, my darling,' he said, no longer troubling to aim for the ash-tray, but flicking ash hither and thither on her carpet. 'I mean this modelling's a dangerous business, know what I mean? You get all the nutters coming here, I expect, don't you? All the old sex maniacs.'

'I'm all right,' she said lamely. Perhaps he was not a policeman; perhaps a social worker.

'I mean you need someone to look after you, don't you?'

So he *was* a social worker. She wondered if he would find out that she was only just seventeen, and whether she would be taken into care.

'D'you mind my saying this, Bernadette? Don't get me wrong, but this isn't a game for amateurs. Amature, that's what you was just now. I'm not trying to be nasty, but you was. Now, when you get amateurs coming in on an act, it muddies the water, dunnit. You see what I mean, Saint Bernadette?'

She didn't. She tried to smile, but she felt that she might be about to cry.

'Now take your case just as an example. Supposing one of these loony buggers comes up your stairs and starts getting nasty, know

what I mean? Supposing he wanted to rough you up nasty?’

She became frightened at the menace in his voice. None of the men had been ‘nasty’. Some of them had hurt her, but that was only because she was a bit small for them, and not because they meant to. The thought of being roughed up had not occurred to her until Mr Costigano mentioned it.

As he spoke, he wandered round her little room, and picked up an almost empty milk-bottle which reposed by the gas fire and the jar of instant coffee. He cracked the top of the bottle on the fender so that it became jagged, a dangerous weapon.

‘Supposing someone was to come at you with this,’ he said. ‘Supposing they was to change the shape of your lovely little face, eh, Saint Bernadette? What would you do, eh? Scream, would you? And who d’you think’d come and break the door down? Eh? The fuzz, would they? D’you think Old Bill’d come to your rescue? To help a whore? You must be joking.’

On the contrary, Bernadette intended no pleasantry. She had never felt less like joking in her life. Her lip trembled with panic as he brought the broken milk bottle closer and closer to her face, until she could feel its jagged edges against her cheek.

‘No need to be frightened, darling. Not now I’m here to help you.’ He lowered the bottle. ‘I’m just warning you, see. Of the *kind* of trouble you girls get into. No, you’re all the fucking same, you amateurs. You think you can get by on your own and you can’t, right? You’re just a bit too greedy, aren’t you, right? And it happens to all the amateurs. Oh yes, I’ve known hundreds. Hundreds. D’you know what happens?’

She shook her head in terror.

‘Some fucking loony comes up those stairs, right? He comes in here and rapes you, right? And then he’s not going to stop at that, oh no. Not this fucker. He picks up a broken bottle and puts it in your face, don’t he? And then he has a cigarette, don’t he, or maybe a cigar.’ Mr Castigano blew smoke in her face and brandished his Rothman’s King Size threateningly. ‘And he stubs it out on your beautiful little body. Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear,’ he concluded contemptuously. ‘Amateurs!’

As he spoke, the dangers and folly of the last ten weeks suddenly swept over her and she collapsed into tears. But, even as she wept, she felt a sort of gratitude to Mr Costigano. If he had not made his terrifying speech, she might have gone on for weeks, and never

realised the dangers she was in. As it was, she made up her mind to leave London tomorrow and go back to Bognor. She could throw herself on her mother's mercy; say that the idea of working in the jeans shop had been unsuccessful; try to get work as a chambermaid in the same, or a similar, hotel.

'We'll have to take you in hand, I can see,' he said, putting his arm round her to comfort her.

Mr Costigano had taken her in hand at once. He asked to see her National Insurance Book. When Sandra had given her the sack, she had hardly had the time to collect any stamps, but she had her 'cards' and these were shown to Mr Costigano, who peered at them.

'Where's your social security then?'

'I don't have social security.'

'Oh, dear, oh dear,' he said once more, sending a chill into her soul. For she knew that she should have her documents in order, but could not face going to the social security office and filling in a lot of forms she did not understand.

'You could get yourself into trouble, you know, not paying no stamps,' he said with a wink. But, before she could ask him further about it, he had slipped the cards and documents into his pocket book. 'Get your things together,' he said.

'What?'

'Your toothbrush, your teddy bear,' he leered. 'You're coming with me.'

'It's ever so kind of you,' she faltered. 'But I shall be all right.' She thought hastily of the lies she would have to tell at the social security about losing her cards. 'I'm going away,' she said. 'I won't do this any more, I promise. I'm going back to me mum.'

'You just come with me,' he said quietly, tightening his grip on her arm.

In the event, he did not even give her the chance to pack. When she was dressed, she was bundled down the stairs, along the street, and into a motor-car which was parked on the corner of All Saints' Road. Huddles of disconsolate negro youths dawdled and gangled on the pavement. But there was no one else about. She could not cry out. The nig-nogs wouldn't help her.

They drove through the afternoon traffic down to Soho. Mr Costigano parked the Fiat raffishly on the pavement in Berwick Street, quite near the shop where she had bought the naughty nighties. She could easily have run, but by then she knew it was too

late. He led her through a dark alley, and pushed open the door on which the orange paintwork was crumbling and faded. He showed her into a room where a stout woman of about fifty was eating a chocolate éclair and licking the stubby fingers at the end of which scarlet nails protruded like the claws of some exotic crustacean.

'I'm just having a cuppa tea,' she said, 'd'you want to join me? Hallo, dear, who are you?'

'This is Bernadette,' said Mr Costigano. He explained that the plump consumer of éclairs was called Muriel.

'Where have you been then, down the convent?' she shrieked with merriment. 'Come in, dear, no need to be shy.'

A rather leathery smile lit up her moist red lips. She was less frightening than Mr Costigano, and, after she had had her tea and smoked a cigarette, Bernadette felt more at home. He left them alone together eventually, after a certain amount of conspiratorial chat which Bernadette did not fully understand. She gave him the key of her room and her Post Office book, and he promised to send on her things.

Muriel revealed to Bernadette that she was now going to live in a nice house in Meard Street, with lots of other girls for company. She was slightly formidable and worldly, but Bernadette began to feel that, perhaps, after all, it was for her own good.

'Much safer, dear, and more friendly. They're nice girls, and you'll get your money. No need to worry.'

That was how the second phase of her London existence began. She needed a certain amount of training. Her job, it was explained, was that of a hostess. The older girls sat at the window of the house and waved to the gentlemen as they walked up and down. Bernadette, more timidly, sat downstairs in the bar drinking bitter lemon. When a client had been assigned to her by Muriel, she sat with him at a table in the tiny basement. Muriel brought them drinks – egg-cups full of sweet wine – for which the men paid £20. When she insisted on another round for the same amount most men seemed to pay up.

'Just to clear it with the police, lovey. It has to be seen to be a drinking-club, you see.'

When the £40 had been pocketed by Muriel, regular clients were shown upstairs, where they paid a further £20 for what Bernadette had to offer on the low-slung divan.

'Make it more if you can, dear,' Muriel would say. The other girls,

Charmaine and Lisa, for instance, who were from Jamaica, would often come downstairs again with as much as £50. They explained that you make them pay an extra £10 for taking all your clothes off; and then £15 a go for different positions. Bernadette was learning, but not very fast. Muriel always pocketed the funds, and it was a poor look-out for any girl who tried to keep anything back for herself. But they were paid a weekly sum of £75 in cash and – as they said – there was plenty of time off to enjoy themselves.

But she had only been there for a few months before she became ill. At first she thought it was just the ordinary sort of pain she had felt from the very beginning: the soreness it caused, to have these gentlemen endlessly poking away at her. But then she had become inflamed and she knew it was more than just ordinary soreness.

Muriel turned quite nasty when she heard the news. She had cuffed her and accused her of not being careful to make sure all the clients wore sheaths. They had sent her off to the clinic for pills and ointment and assured her that if she gave her real address she would be found by the police and put in prison.

It only took a few weeks to heal, but that was the end of the second phase. During the third phase, she was moved from Muriel's house and went to lodge at Julie's, on the other side of Mayfair in Shepherd Market. Mr Costigano arranged for her, while she still had the disease, to do other sorts of work. She posed in 'photographic studios' and gallivanted about with no clothes on in 'peep shows', finding her way back to Julie's house each evening in time for a meal and few hours of tellie. When she was better, and had been 'cleared' at the clinic, she was free to work again, and she was able to do this without giving up her room at Julie's.

They were, in many ways, the happiest three years of her life. She did not enjoy the work any more than she had ever done. It was still a mystery to her why some women said that they enjoyed sex, but she had no longer any feelings of embarrassment about it. She managed to do most of what the customers wanted, though there were a few 'house rules' about 'positions' which it was considered unwise to adopt.

It was not the work which made life in Julie's house so agreeable. It was the companionship. Julie herself was a jolly, friendly woman with dyed peroxide blonde hair and false eyelashes dripping with mascara. She had been working in the Market, as she always called that part of London, since the war. Some of her clients had been

famous. There were lots of funny stories about the black-out and the Blitz.

'Oh dear, I'll die!' she would exclaim, exhausted by her own merriment, when she recalled a customer in disarrayed colonel's uniform running up Shepherd's Market without any trousers during an air-raid.

As well as Julie to amuse her, Bernadette had the companionship of all the other girls. On her landing there were Cindy and Lulu. At the top of the house, there were Melanie, Colette and Fifi. Cindy had wanted to be in the Ballet Rambert, but the ambition was thwarted when she had her 'accident'. The scars on the edge of Cindy's face, revealed when the make-up came off, and her misshapen elbow, which had been wrongly reset by the doctors, were a visible reminder of the truth of Mr Costigano's assertion that it was a dangerous profession. Fifi was really called Linda Murray and had been a waitress in Glasgow before she came south. Colette really was French. She said it made her feel at home to have another girl around with a French name; and on Corpus Christi, one year, she had even reminded Bernadette that they should have gone to church. Neither of them did in the event, but it made her feel at home to have the suggestion made.

On and off, Bernadette was still in touch with her mother. They had not seen each other, and neither of them was addicted to letter-writing. But short epistles had been exchanged. Bernadette had filled her letters with lies about the success of her career in the boutique, her continued aspirations to be an air-hostess. Her mother's replies hinted at poverty and complained about a bad knee. Neither of them was Mme de Sévigné, but at least communication of a sort was maintained, and, on Bernadette's side, at least, a feeling of guilt. She knew that her present way of life was wrong. She knew equally that her mother would flay her if she ever found out. The feelings of guilt rankled, eating into the reassuring pleasures of jokes and laughter with Julie and the girls.

One Sunday afternoon, when things were quiet, she sat with Julie watching an old film – *The Lady Killers* – and she decided to have a bit of a talk.

'I've had a letter from me mum again,' she said.

Any comment to Julie was likely to set her off in the performance of some old song, rendered with throaty gusto as she waved her habitual glass of vodka and tonic in the air.



'On Mother Kelly's *door-step!*' she intoned . . .

'I think she's a bit worried about me,' said Bernadette, 'and she has a bad knee.'

'Do you send her a bit, dear, now and then?'

'No.' It was shameful. It had never occurred to Bernadette that her mother could profit from her metropolitan activities. She felt it would somehow taint Bognor to send immoral earnings there by post.

'Are you still telling her you're working in a shop?' Julie asked. 'She must guess. I don't know why you keep it so dark, I don't really. But then I was born into the trade. My mum was doing the Market in 1920. Come the black-out, she went back to it. They didn't notice how old you was in the dark!'

She roared with laughter and sipped her vodka. Bernadette wished she was a bit worldly like Julie, who had by now started to sing, 'I've danced with a man, who danced with a girl, who danced with the Prince of Wales.' Neither of them was really watching the film, so Bernadette blurted out:

'But I want to give it all up, Julie. I've had enough, I have really!'

'What's stopping you?' asked Julie sharply. 'You're always free to come and go as you choose. You know you are. I've never heard anything so silly.'

Bernadette thought that was the end of the matter. She had been rather astonished at the reply. The memories of Mr Costigano's first visit to her room in Notting Hill were still so strong that it had not occurred to her that she might now be free. All the time, it seemed, she had been sitting in a cage of which the door was not locked. Mr Costigano still came down to see her from time to time, and to pass the time of day with Julie. Once Julie had said, 'Stan said he wanted you for something special, but I've told him he's not having you.' Stan was what she called Mr Costigano. What the 'something special' entailed had remained unspecified. It had passed by, unnoticed, as she imagined that her confession had passed by that she wanted to leave.

But, the next time Mr Costigano was drinking in the bar downstairs, he turned to her, as she was waving goodbye to a client, and said, 'Well, now, Bernadette, my darling, what's all this I hear? Leaving us, are you?'

She had settled on the bar stool at his side and explained about her mother's knee, and said she was starting to feel she'd had enough of the job. She did not explain about not enjoying it. She did to the other