

**Your main commentary should be focused on *DO*. Other topics may also be addressed**

Val put before him grilled marinated lamb, ratatouille and hot Greek bread. He said, 'Shall I get a bottle of wine?' and Val said, disagreeably and truthfully, 'You should have thought of that some time back; it'll all go cold.' They ate at a card-table, which they unfolded and folded again, after.

'I made an amazing discovery today,' he told her.

'Oh?'

'I was in the London Library. They've got R. H. Ash's Vico. His own copy. They keep it in the safe. I had it brought up and it was absolutely bursting at the seams with his own notes, all tucked in, on the backs of bills and things. And I'm ninety per cent sure no one had looked at them, ever, not since he put them there, because all the edges were black and the lines coincided...'

'How interesting.' Flatly.

'It might change the face of scholarship. It *could*. They let me read them, they didn't take it away. I'm sure no one knew it was all there.'

'I expect they didn't.'

'I'll have to tell Blackadder. He'll want to see how important it is, make sure Cropper hasn't been there...'

'I expect he will, yes.'

It was a bad mood.

'I'm sorry, Val, I'm sorry to bore you. It does look exciting.'

'That depends what turns you on. We all have our little pleasures of different kinds, I suppose...'

'I can write it up. An article. A solid discovery. That makes me a better job prospect.'

'There aren't any jobs.' She added, 'And if there are, they go to Fergus Wolff.'

He knew his Val: he had watched her honorably try to prevent herself from adding that last remark.

'If you really think what I do is so unimportant...'

'You do what turns you on,' said Val. 'Everyone does, if they're lucky, if there's anything that turns them on. You have this thing about this dead man. Who had a thing about dead people. That's OK but not everyone is very bothered about all that. I see some things from my menial vantage point. Last week, when I was in that ceramics export place, I found some photographs under a file

in my boss's desk. Things being done to little boys. With chains and gags and dirt. This week, ever so efficiently filing records for this surgeon, I just happened to come across a sixteen-year-old who had his leg off last year—they're fitting him with an artificial one, it takes months, they're incredibly slow—and it's started up for certain now in his other leg, he doesn't know, but I know, I know lots of things. None of them fit together, none of them makes any sense. There was a man who went off to Amsterdam to buy some diamonds, I helped his secretary book his ticket, first class, and his limousine, smooth as clockwork, and as he's walking along a canal admiring the housefronts someone stabs him in the back, destroys a kidney, gangrene sets in, now he's dead. Just like that. Chaps like those use my menial services, here today, gone tomorrow. Randolph Henry Ash wrote long ago. Forgive me if I don't care what he wrote in his Vico.'

'Oh, Val, such horrible things, you never say—'

'Oh, it's all very *interesting*, my menial keyhole observations, make no mistake. Just it doesn't make sense and it leaves me nowhere. I suppose I envy you, piecing together old Ash's world-picture. Only where does that leave *you*, old Mole? What's *your* world-picture? And how are you ever going to afford to get us away from dripping cat-piss and being *on top of each other*?'

Something had upset her, Roland reasonably deduced. Something that had caused her to use the phrase "turn you on" several times, which was uncharacteristic. Perhaps someone had grabbed her. Or had not done so. No, that was unworthy. Anger and petulance *did* turn her on, he knew. He knew more than was quite good for him about Val. He went across and stroked the nape of her neck, and she sniffed and stiffened and then relaxed. After a bit, they move over to the bed.

Antonia Susan Byatt, *Possession*, 1990, GB.  
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