

Christ Was Called Christine

by K. Harrison

It is morning on Bombay Hill and it is my belief that I am slowly dying from the feet up; an event which, it seems, one can be at once aware of and oblivious to. Nothing has changed colour in the sunroom, indeed such is the mood of frivolity in the air that the reds and blues in the stained glass window are reaching out, dancing over my ancient body. I am poised, ready to surrender to the great yellow ball in the sky. She may juggle and cut me like the glass or take my lively heart and turn it to dust in a moment of spite. There is time, though, to summon up the past in shafts and prisms; to entertain like the court jester to the golden queen. The room is full of a voice rising and falling in endless narrative. I recognise it as mine and slowly look down at my wrinkled bare feet. They give nothing away.

On her way to Bombay Hill Christine handled her car like a plane and flew over the green carpet of the Waikato. There was something disquieting about the flat, luxuriant rivers and fields as if the earth beneath held bones that were waiting to tell their story to something other than the fat, indifferent farm animals. Once the moa bird would have roamed here, little head glumly turned toward the Milky Way; dwarfed only by the white spectre of the kauri tree. A land of giants.

In the passenger seat Steven nervously smoked a cigarette. His black hair swept cleanly back from his forehead and a dotted scarf was tied just so around his neck and in the quick moment that Christine looked across at him she felt her breath flush a crimson liquid through her body.

"Swashbuckler!" she said, emphasizing the 'swash'.

"What?" He primly removed his boots from the dashboard and drew his legs close together.

"Swashbuckler is a word I think of when I look at you... sometimes," she added for safe measure. She thought back to the tidy motel where they had not long before made untidy love. Something about being in the motel had made the love risqué, illicit. Afterwards they had bitten into the opulent juices of nectarines and peaches as if to induce a rebirth, encourage a pureness. But all that remained were the sticky stone pips in an obscene little pile by the bed. Steven and Christine had partaken of sex and fruit on this most sacred of days. Today was the day Christine was to meet Steven's mother and she felt grubby. Steven stubbed out his cigarette.

"I'm really looking forward to seeing my mother. She's a good woman. You'll like her."

"I'm looking forward to it too." She tried to sound sincere but a high note rose up and escaped from her voice. Christine glanced at herself in the rear vision mirror. She had wanted to make a good impression on the family, but her plum red lips shone rather too brilliantly and she felt a jab of guilt as the weight of her fabulous dress fell between her thighs.

There between the black jewel of your eyes and thighs, Jayant Azaria, my heart skipped a beat. We dance in the little room, rolling and stretching, using our hands like the wings of diving herons. I lie in the soft midnight of your body as we ascend from the water. The taste of our salty catch lies caught in our mouths; slowly, sadly we wash it away with fruit from the shop. As we feast you tell me that you are bad for me. My mother is driven mad with our association, the village is angry. We can never wed. I will turn into a thin, lonely bluestocking; never able to lick the pink from the

skin or sing with children and I hold fast your hand and laugh and say I don't care, I'll be bad and blue as you like. You pluck a lush tune on your sitar and snake me in writhing, seditious sound.

On the other side of Hamilton, Christine began to sing...

"Summertime and the living is easy. Fish are jumping and the cotton is high. Your daddy's rich and your ma she's good looking. So hush little baby"... Steven raised his voice above hers.

"She's had a hard life, my mother." He looked out of the window, away from Christine. "They are different from you, my family. Different from us, or at least what I have become. Not better or worse, just a different set of values. It's an ethos thing."

"What do you mean... Ethos. What are you talking about?"

A hint of panic crept into her voice. Steven sighed and ran his hands through his hair.

"Don't worry about it."

A little while later Steven reached across and ran his hand over her crepe-de-chine covered thigh.

"They wouldn't wear this satiny stuff, for example."

"What's wrong with crepe-de-chine?"

"Nothing, there's nothing wrong with it. I think it's great."

Christine tightened her grip on the steering. A tiny trickle of sweat ran down her leg and another high note rose up and escaped from her voice. "But I got it for almost nothing at the St. Vincent de Paul Opportunity shop."

"It's not the cost of it... it's the look of it... To them it could be a bit showy, sort of posh, if you know what I mean."

When Christine had found the dress hidden in amongst the musty, shapeless outfits, she was so delighted she drew it close to her and almost cried. It was a puffed up dress. A vivid, timeless... skite of a dress. It was torn in a few places but she had found some rosettes, just like the ones sewn on by the original owner, to cover the tears. Christine decided the dress had been designed for a special occasion; maybe a dance or a ball. She was aware that it could be described as florid, indulgent, even weird by those without a sense of humour and now it seemed an error of judgement to have worn it today, of all days. Christine had a vision of Steven's sister aggressively tearing up a cooked chicken and shaking her head... "She's a nice enough girl, Mum, but a bit strange; I mean who wears a dress like that to a barby?" The mother nibbling on a drum-stick and nodding her head in agreement. The men mumbling under their breaths... "Whadarya?" as she floated past them in her puffed up dress. Christine squirmed in her seat; the crepe-de-chine itched where it clung to her body. She put her foot firmly on the accelerator and sped through a red light.

I hover, barely perceptible, two inches above the cushion. My body holds its sitting position and the room is silent. The bucket full of words has emptied and only Mother can be heard from the bottom of the well. She whispers, *I known where you have been my child; visiting the dark heathen beyond the hill. It's not right.* Mother is punching some scones into shape. Her fleshy white arms ripple as she moves. *He is not a heathen, Mother. Jayant is an Indian with strong spiritual convictions.* Tears form in the corner of Mother's eyes, her face folds with pain. *They are one and the same, my dear. Your father is dead and I cannot shoulder the worry of you and this farm all at once. It's just too much.* The tears fall into the dough and remain there like little