

Chapter 6 – Confessions

Last Modified on 04/23/2019 6:47 am EDT

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Gin Bottle Blues

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January 2015

Chapter 6 – Confessions

I curl up in the front seat of the car as we drive along the motorway, windows rolled all the way down. Charlie's aviators reflect the bright midday sun and his hair billows back in the wind. He drives with his right arm resting on the window, the left draped casually over the steering wheel.

Even behind the sunglasses, I can tell he keeps glancing nervously at me. I feel like my insides have been scooped out and dumped on the road in front of me, and we keep driving over them, over and over as the wheels turn at seventy miles an hour. It's a good feeling.

"You're still barefoot?" he comments, after a while.

"There didn't seem to be any point in just wearing one."

At this point, Charlie has to answer his phone – it's Racine. He holds it illegally between shoulder and ear, head cocked to the side while staring straight at the road.

I can't help but suppress a small smile when her voice immediately begins to squawk.

"Thom nearly drowned, and you punched him?" I hear her say, between the roar of the wind and the chatter of my thoughts. She really does know everything. "You're the worst brother ever!"

Charlie fobs her off, laughing, and we grin at each other when he hangs up.

"Thanks, Charlie," I find myself saying. "You're a good brother, really."

“Am I better than Racine?”

“A better brother, yeah.”

“So do you want to go to Australia?” he says. “I admit that was kind of why I brought you here. I think it would be fun.”

I find this hard to digest. “That’s an amazing offer,” I say slowly. “I’d have to think about it.”

“Sure. I understand.”

“I will decide soon, I promise. I just don’t want to run away from anything.”

The trees flash past us, sentinel to the understanding that has grown between us. Charlie turns the radio on.

Clouds stream in ribbons across the sun, creating stripy shadows across both of us. I feel like I know what we’re hovering on the edge of.

“Are you going to speak to him?” Charlie says.

I don’t answer straight away - mainly because I have the sensation of a fist clenching my throat. It’s hard to breathe.

I lower my shoulders and straighten my posture, forcing myself to inhale deeply, using one of the techniques I taught myself to stop the panic attacks.

“No,” I respond instinctively, without finishing the thought in my head. Charlie frowns.

“I think you should confess.”

Despite my reservations, and a deep-seated horror of the potential consequences, I know he’s right. It’s inevitable.

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I feel like I’m walking to the gallows as I trudge up the steps of our building, trying to sidestep shards of broken glass and cigarette butts. I’ve declined Charlie’s offer to come in with me.

My key is turning loudly in the door, scraping past the interior metal grooves, and it swings open heavily. A bright square of light is all I can see as the bleak midday sun is blazing in

the flat.

“Hello?” Harry says suspiciously.

“Hi.”

“Mate, where have you been?” Harry exclaims loudly, when he sees me. Oh, yeah – I didn’t tell him I was leaving. “I thought you might be dead! And...” He looks down. “Why aren’t you wearing any shoes?”

Wishes?

“Don’t hate me,” I say, feeling sick.

“Why would I hate you?” he asks, without missing a beat. “You’re my best friend, man... Are- are you okay?”

“I have to tell you something.” He doesn’t speak. “I...” I know I’m probably scaring him.

“Go on...” he urges.

I inhale a rattling breath with difficulty. Harry’s staring straight at me, looking the most serious I’ve ever seen him. I notice with surprise that his face is completely unbruised now, and he’s back to his old handsome self.

I have to force the words out, as it’s going against my every screaming nerve. This has gone on for too long.

“I hate myself for this, I really do, but- I’m- *I’m in love with Lucy.*” The last four words burst out in a rush and there’s a huge pause.

Harry sucks in a sharp breath and flicks his lighter against the rolled-up cigarette hanging between his lips. His face clouds for a moment.

“I know.”

“You *do*? Fucking Racine!” I shout before I can stop myself, flinging an arm out to steady myself as I stumble into the wall. I knock against a painting and it careers wildly but doesn’t fall.

“No- no-“ he protests. “-no, no one told me. Like I said, you’re my best friend. I could just tell. That’s why I broke up with her.” It seems almost like he was ready for this

conversation.

“What?”

“I couldn’t stand to watch what it was doing to you. It was hurting you. And we were never going to get married, anyway.”

There’s a ringing in my ears.

My delayed response comes out wry. “So... you broke up with her for me.”

“In essence, yes.”

There’s a silence while I try and fail to think of something to say.

Harry breaks it.

“Are we still friends, then?”

To my shame, I feel my eyes grow moist again. I’m sure I’ve spent this whole weekend crying like a girl.

I think for a moment, before a warm glow settles over me, like smoke.

end
