

BERNARD

HANNAH Dust-jacket?

VALENTINE What about my computer model? Aren't you going to mention it?

BERNARD It's inconclusive.

VALENTINE (*To Hannah*) The *Piccadilly* reviews aren't a very good fit with Byron's other reviews, you see.

HANNAH (*To Bernard*) What do you mean, the wrong bloke?

BERNARD (*Ignoring her*) The other reviews aren't a very good fit for each other, are they?

VALENTINE No, but differently. The parameters—

BERNARD (*Jeering*) Parameters! You can't stick Byron's head in your laptop! Genius isn't like your average grouse.

VALENTINE (*Casually*) Well, it's all trivial anyway.

BERNARD What is?

VALENTINE Who wrote what when...

BERNARD Trivial?

VALENTINE Personalities.

BERNARD I'm sorry—did you say trivial?

VALENTINE It's a technical term.

BERNARD Not where I come from, it isn't.

VALENTINE The questions you're asking don't matter, you see. It's like arguing who got there first with the calculus. The English say Newton, the Germans say Leibnitz. But it doesn't matter. Personalities. What matters is the calculus. Scientific progress. Knowledge.

BERNARD Really? Why?

VALENTINE Why what?

BERNARD Why does scientific progress matter more than personalities?

VALENTINE Is he serious?

HANNAH No, he's trivial. Bernard—

VALENTINE (*Interrupting, to Bernard*) Do yourself a favour, you're on a loser.

BERNARD Oh, you're going to zap me with penicillin and pesticides. Spare me that and I'll spare you the bomb and aerosols. But don't confuse progress with perfectibility. A great poet is always timely. A great philosopher is an urgent need. There's no rush for Isaac Newton. We were quite happy with Aristotle's cosmos. Personally, I preferred it. Fifty-five crystal spheres geared to God's crankshaft is my idea of a satisfying universe. I can't think of anything more trivial than the speed of light. Quarks, quasars—big bangs, black holes—who gives a shit? How did you people con us out of all that status? All that money? And why are you so pleased with yourselves?

CHLOË Are you against penicillin, Bernard?

BERNARD Don't feed the animals. (*Back to Valentine*) I'd push the lot of you over a cliff myself. Except the one in the wheelchair, I think I'd lose the sympathy vote before people had time to think it through.

HANNAH (*Loudly*) What the hell do you mean, the dust-jacket?

BERNARD (*Ignoring her*) If knowledge isn't self-knowledge it isn't doing much, mate. Is the universe expanding? Is it contracting? Is it standing on one leg and singing 'When Father Painted the Parlour'? Leave me out. I can expand my universe without you. 'She walks in beauty, like the night of cloudless climes and starry skies, and all that's best of dark and bright meet in her aspect and her eyes.' There you are, he wrote it after coming home from a party. (*With offensive politeness.*) What is it that you're doing with grouse, Valentine, I'd love to know?