

# CHRYSALIS CRUCIBLE

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## Chapter Seventy-Three

September 1972

Dear Prof. Norton:

*You are not a dumb man. You probably anticipated this letter to you. I've got to sort out some more things about faith and sex.*

*I'll start with the easy one—for you. Sex. By this time, I presume the whole physical side is “old hat,” as I indicated in an earlier letter. But what, at your distance in time, do you make of the whole affair with Petra? I presume she has long-since dropped out of your life. When did you even last think of her? Sorry to revive memories if they have been laid to rest.*

*Sometimes also, faith presents as a grand, transcendental temptation, a mirage even, one I wish I had never given in to pursuing. Life would have been much simpler, surely! It's difficult enough negotiating all the vicissitudes of life on this planet without a complicating metaphysical overlay constantly impinging upon and at times wreaking intellectual and moral havoc.*

*Dan's cynicism, Lorraine's rebellion, Susan's indifference, and my own agonies of self-analysis and doubt. Why should I not, like Job's wife, simply curse God and be done with it? Why hang onto a faith that so often seems to get in the way of life rather than enable it, let alone enhance it? Why this incredible yen to believe in Jesus?*

*I know that even raising these questions is part of the biblical “revelation” (can I ever escape it?), that the origins of Western cultural scepticism and atheism are embedded in the Good Book itself. Just try the lamentations throughout the Psalms for starters, or the book by that name, or the prophets. “Why do bad things happen to good people?” They ask the question endlessly. The wicked always prosper, and thereby throw into question the second fundamental biblical assertion about God, namely, that he is good.*

*What about Jesus' cry of dereliction from the cross. “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” A powerful atheistic cry if ever there was one! The first fundamental biblical assertion about God is not so much that he exists but that he is present, even accessible to us, in all the wild vagaries of life's journey. Who has a consistent belief in that without some pretty serious and often despairing—even desperate—wrestling?*

*Dan's, Lorraine's, my sister's, my own struggles testify abundantly to that, as does life after life, including that of Jesus, ultimately pointing to such profound questioning of God's presence. “God is There and is Not Silent” (Francis Schaeffer) indeed! A tad too quickly affirmed...*

*My faith is changing even as I write. Is it always that way, you who now have twice my life experience under your belt? Or does faith plateau at some point, providing for smooth sailing for the rest of one's life? Somehow I doubt that.*

*Where will I come out in the end? At your age? And then what? And then? Like the Huxley short story about the little boy who desperately wanted to turn the next page of his living book, only to discover that his very drivenness to know expelled him from the “Garden.”*

## CHRYSALIS CRUCIBLE

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*But the Garden is not all mystical delight. These days it is mostly struggle and doubt. Is it the Garden of Eden after all? Does expulsion mean liberation, transformation, celebration? Sometimes that Tree of Knowledge looks very tempting indeed! Maybe I'm going through an inverse rebirth—at least by the standards of my religious upbringing.*

*Well, Professor Norton, I presume by now you have this all figured out! And if not, what's the matter with you, anyway? At least you know what will become of me by the end of my time here. I wish I did. Is it Kafka's *Verwandlung* into a new dimension of existence utterly terrifying and alien? Or is it rather a Halleluiah chorus? Or more of the same, whatever that is? I wish you were telling...*

*Back to sex. I have to. If God created it good, why did he create it so compelling, too? How did he ever expect that most males would keep that little poker out of receptacles delectably designed for it? I mean, just curiosity alone about all kinds of variations on mountain peaks with their triangular verdant valleys surely would guarantee a lot of exploring! And once hiked, those valley and mountain trails would become awfully appealing to try out again, especially different peaks and valleys, given the "monotony factor" in human experience. And men would be wanting to "raise the flag" in a lot of those new terrains. It only makes sense.*

*So along comes God, who made the mountains and valleys so achingly beautiful, who capped those volcanic thrusts with irresistible bite-sized nipples, who made man's sex drive so dominant. Along he comes and puts up "No Trespassing" signs on all but one of those valleys and twin peaks. Hiking is allowed only on one mountain "range" once it is staked out.*

*It seems unfair, unreasonable. Further, his Son comes along only to jack up the prohibition by saying you may not even scan the other mountains with any view to conquering them. So he creates all that impossible beauty, then he snatches it away just as the eyes turn toward it, as the hand reaches out for a touch. Not unlike the Tree in the Garden, I guess.*

*But why? Why especially if those mountains are indeed invitingly beautiful, every one, and declared "good"?*

*Is sin (sexual anyway) just arbitrary after all? Paul's saying he would not have known sinful desire had the law not so pegged it? Give me a break! Why couldn't God just let us sort it all out as we grow into puberty and maturity? We indulge that appetite, repeatedly until we all find our own kind of sexual level, libido, as it were, and like most things in life, it settles down, we settle down, and life goes on. Isn't that just what is happening anyway since the sexual revolution? Well, let's face it, since time immemorial?*

*So what if Marilyn Monroe steps up to the mike in stunning dress, every curvaceous contour of her body literally sewn into place, and sings a throaty, sexually evocative "Happy Birthday" to President Kennedy with all of her astounding nubility blowing the circuits of every male who even hears about it, let alone Kennedy who must have, in the moment, been going mad with desire? Why not indulge the craving fully, repeatedly, until, well, one is ready to move on to other things? (Mind you, I know, President Kennedy never really did move on, possibly challenging Wilt the Stilt amongst American notables as Ultimate Philanderer.) So much for truth-telling in the "I do." Whatever did Jacquie think? But then, as I am realizing, since when did American leaders—or any world leaders—ever value or honour truth and integrity?*

*Sure, of course that could get messy. He's ready to say "Next!" and she is not. And of course Jacquie was in the picture, too, not to mention the kids and Marilyn's long-suffering Joe DiMaggio...*

## CHRYSALIS CRUCIBLE

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*I remember Jim Billings telling of his hippie days in Vancouver. One girl in his commune would yell out at times, “Does anyone want to lay me?” And she’d always get willing takers! What’s the harm in that? Presumably, she was an attractive female piece of flesh (being crude I know) with no boyfriend or anything. The obliging guys were just doing what came natural— God-endowed, in fact. If it was dark, she wouldn’t even have to be good-looking—just good feeling—and she presumably was not too picky about the guys herself! So the deed was done, mutual pleasure was exchanged, and people moved on. Aren’t one-night stands beautiful that way? No obligations, no regrets, no consequences (hopefully). Just incredible gratification!*

*But what happens after that? Two people flip over each other, and there are no restraints. Just “what feels good.” The ride is wild and intense. But soon enough, the desire plays out, as it always must. She farts. He belches. They both sweat. And their bodies aren’t quite the “10” they each imagined. Then what? NEXT?*

*So it starts all over again. Like Dr. Zhivago. Maybe it lasts a few months, even years, but no larger framework informs the affairs, no overriding commitment, and no form to the freedom. So why not exit the building through the wall, if one is so inclined, so resourced, sledgehammer in hand. On to the next one again, and again, and again... ad infinitum, ad nauseum. Sartre’s La Nausée and concomitant “spleen” (Baudelaire) of such a surface existence. À La Recherche du Temps Perdu, indeed, for Proust in his voluminous masterpiece. Lost Time Sought but never found. Relationships discarded like clothing so fast and furious that time indeed is lost, possibly never found. Suddenly one wakes up old and transformed, not unlike Kafka’s character awakens metamorphosed into a despicable (to all he holds dear) insect. “What was that all about?” Such becomes the searing question of a life misspent in pursuit of wanton Desire that never satisfies.*

*I’ve heard the preachers and read the Bible a thousand times on this one: “Say unto wisdom, Thou art my sister; and call understanding thy kinswoman: that they may keep thee from the strange woman, from the stranger which flattereth with her words. For at the window of my house I looked through my casement, and beheld among the simple ones, I discerned among the youths, a young man void of understanding, passing through the street near her corner; and he went the way to her house, in the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night: and, behold, there met him a woman with the attire of an harlot, and subtle of heart. (She is loud and stubborn; her feet abide not in her house: now is she without, now in the streets, and lieth in wait at every corner.)”*

*I can accept that.*

*I don’t want sex with just anyone. I have no interest in serial monogamy. I really want sex in context of commitment and transcendence of pure desire.*

*I’ll never fail, I’m sure, to notice with winsome wince the excruciating enticement of a woman’s body. Close to the surface will ever be libido in response to the double sensual triangle of effulgent bosom, preternatural peaks protruding (near mystical desire!) and mid-corporal dark triangle. But I don’t want just triangles squared, however enthralling, like so much sexual meat one might purchase at the third world market— full of flies and feces!*

*I know it will only satisfy if framed appropriately, properly contained. Rivers, oceans, and fires are surpassingly wondrous within boundaries, wantonly destructive if such confines are breached.*

*Well, you’ve heard my case, Professor. I presume I know most of your response—if you are still professing the Christian faith, that is. Apart from the potential dangers of VD and unwanted pregnancies (I won’t even touch homosexuality), you would talk about the psychological impact of two becoming one flesh, even for*

## CHRYSALIS CRUCIBLE

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*just one night, and the emotional scars left on all. You'd suggest the "Happy Hooker" was perhaps not so happy after all, rather compulsive and needy, that 007 was modelled on a happily married man, and that Ian Fleming's secret agent fantasy would likely have long since contracted syphilis and died raving mad like Nietzsche. You'd propose that hiking well-known trails repeatedly, even "til death do us part," is perhaps not so bad after all. Fewer nasty surprises for sure! The view and the flag raising could vary infinitely, even if always in the same valley! And you'd say overall, perhaps God knows best, which presumes there is a God and that He's written a book...*

*And since you're not answering just now (you've been consistent in that resolve), I'll sign off.*

*'Til next time.*

*Sincerely Andy*