



THE CURE

THERE'S a little conclave. How to react to illness that might not be terminal ... You have to face the person restored – think of them, probably the first time, as objects of convenience, desire, loans, or trips to the woodlands or the races ... They say it's a prosperous place, where the friends live and compete, thriving though many many others there are scrabbling poor. They're a little bourgeoisie that links career hopes to ideas of progress, altruistic friendships, even when the friends are prickly, even boring and obsessed.

'Jarrett sent a message,' Jenny says: 'He's sick, so there's no sense in it, or him.'

'If patients don't have what everybody has,' says Silke, 'They're incommunicable.'

Dagmar's worried: 'Not saying what they have. That's the mystery strain they can pass on. Then you become the mystery.'

'It doesn't sound attractive,' Sarya says: 'You have to visit them, just don't listen to what they say, don't eat their food. No flowers – just donations please. They all say that.'

'Oh come on, Sarya,' Jenny says: 'They're not ghosts – they're just unquiet. They don't all die. I mean, they do ... Messaging: – those are urgent: – heavy stuff; they can't rest until they drop their load.'

'No visiting,' says Silke: 'He won't cure, and we might die of him.'

'At last,' says Dagmar, 'I always thought it was insane, to say people were sick through their own fault. But lately, it's been coming true – not just booze and fags, but walking up and down, taking the buscoughing.'

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Jarrett's message –

'Men and women, lying separately: narrow beds in a long room. A ward: – ward like wards in a lock, all locked in our desire. Sick with it, incurable. For me – desire is food. Desire – for love, sex, adventure – is always with us. This is different, the real thing. Food: my desire: – its texture, taste, smell. Desire – the keenest prick: the yearning. Food: resist! resist satisfaction, resist the end of desire.

Desire is 'not eating', a purity that lies in 'not eating'

A long room, full of tiny beds, men and women who hallucinate. Sometimes, I dream.

Those cherries, those olives – stoned. We're all stoned . We don't desire other people's desire – that's meaningless but if we were what we think we are, connected, desire should seek desire. But we don't desire other people, them or

their desire, we don't seek anything. All's in us, our desire.

There's the time of history and the time of logic, reason. Do they intersect? Ride awhile on each other? And scoot away, on different tracks.

There's another time – the time of desire. Maybe another, too, after that; getting better, losing our desire. Every day, and every way, I want less and less. More desire.

Lots are dying – it doesn't hurt a bit. That's what desire does to you. Drives you, drops you.

More people laid out in the same beds.

The last words – 'oh no'! If the chemicals would let us, those would be what everybody says. Those pills would cost a fortune on the street. Here, we don't pay for them, but they're no fun, bring no tranquillity.

Nearly the last words: you get to say a scrap – love: philosophy a making peace, and sometimes war. You get to say your epitaph, but then you have to die:

Pink and scarlet poppies, bunches of them in my head.'

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'You're looking for a reason, Jarrett,' Dagmar says: 'That's not on the order of the day. Centuries ago, they tried it – maybe you'd offended God, had bad hygiene, were poor and undeserving – or it was a chance for you to think of things malign, benign, and ultimate. Now – it's science. Science gives no reason for a human use. It's quite mechanical – you suffer what you have because it happened to you ... nothing more. If ... then: no motive, no reason.

'Now, you want a motive – political; or a cosmology. It cannot be. We're back to luck – bad luck you got it, good luck you didn't die.'

'You didn't visit me,' says Jarrett: 'Though it's true, I didn't want to see you ...'

'We were your friends,' says Dagmar, starting to lose patience: 'We didn't want what you had, but of course, we *are* your friends, for ever, even if we never meet again. Then too – sick people are no fun. They're closed and self-absorbed. Who wants an hour or two of that?'

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'I can imagine how I caught it,' Jarrett says: 'We walk beside other living things – our life is made of that. Usually, they are indifferent, sometimes they love us, sometimes they kill us. Try to.

'In my life, there was a puzzle, the puzzle of our century; its politics. It presented you the option: joining in or copping out. Your fate – was similar, whatever you might choose. Pure luck. If you chose the joining in, there was the slow grind and toil – or rush of blood. Spontaneity. The good, the irreproachable, the honest action – simple people, acting left: trade-union consciousness at best. Then, keenly argued, there was the reason why the spontaneity stalled; there must be: – organisation. The grind. A party, discipline. The line. Consciousness. Consciousness of the need for organisation and the line. You would say it's strategy. But the myth, delight – is with our instinct, imagination. It's been hard not to celebrate spontaneity, so long as it was of the left. Hard too not to value organisation. Even a hunting party has it.'

'Well?' asks Dagmar.

‘You need both,’ he says: ‘Probably. No one knows, because it always turned out bad, whatever way you tried. But, I call them sides, in conflict, as that was mostly what they were.’

‘On the whole, for me, it was the party, though I didn’t like being in it,’ Jarrett goes on: ‘Group. movement, tendency – a line of questioning, of seeing. But all that’s past. Quite irrelevant. Not the one and not the other. What I found, when I was sick – all I had left was my desire. Insatiable continuity, in a life devoted to its contrary: – turning everything on its head.’

‘Did it hurt?’ asks Sarya, ‘Inside?’

‘They hook you up, so you are someone else,’ he says: ‘Dope. To stop you ringing on the bell.’

‘You’re antique,’ says Dagmar, thinking about politics: ‘Your lesson has been learned – it’s been synthesised, not to make things change, but just to make things work. We’re out of your heroic, awful phase, Jarrett. Think of something new. Maybe illnesses are old thoughts – you must suffer them, expel them – or they’ll kill you.’

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