

one

I READ THE PAPER. STANDING OVER THE MARBLE-topped bar I read the paper. Says I'm tired, played out; that I've shocked parents, stirred nationwide publicity, and that I have left this city. This paper, it tells me I'm on an extended holiday with friends in the North. Int that nice—bloody lie. I'm here, still in this city; waiting for a train to take me south. At last I'm going away. I don't know where. I bought a ticket for London, but I don't know. I fancy going home for a start. Whisky—feel it burn all the way down. Cigarette—feel the nicotine cling. That woman in green, she needs some lessons in how to pour beer. The bloody trains they're late again. Not surprising, everywhere there's fog. I love You. I love You. Write it with the wet beer on the marble. I love You. That's why it's taken so long for me to get out of this place. When Leicester went bust, there was only You to keep me here. But now I've got to go. I can't stay any longer. But I tell you this: when all this is over I'll be back. Don't you worry I'm coming back; back to Banners and The Ratcliffe, Le Gourmet and The Marquis and The Old Barley Mow, and all them places I can't really name. I have, I do, I love You.

I have got to get away. My only luggage, my only tie, my only connection, only thing I have left from this place is You. And now if I go away all I'll have will be a picture, a

memory; a ghost walking into my tiredness as I wait for trains, for a lift by the roadside. That feeling that eats at my guts as the train rocks across some switch, some anonymous set of points. It'll be a memory calling up to me from the record bars and radio shops as I wait high up in a truck's cab to get through Doncaster on a Friday at five. It'll be a dream of footsteps in the hall, the turn of a key in a door; the name of this city, of this part of England; the voice of Nat King Cole on Cable Street. Another whisky. I want You. I still want You. I want to get rid of all the tears and sweat and blood and the laughs of this place. I want to cry it all Out Of my system, get it all on one record in an old beer cellar; an afternoon, a whisky bottle and running fire; everything fun and overflowing. and too rich; and the volume turned up so the sound don't mean a thing anymore.

I'm waiting for this train; and all the time I keep thinking about You, and I'm clogged up, and the whisky burns slowly down, and the cigarette smoke gets forced down through where the drivel and statements and lies have come from, right through to where I know I love You.

If I lean back my head, just one little bit, I start spinning all around inside. I feel sick, right up to the eyeballs; sick of a music that's taken me down and down and down; and I still love You. I want to draw back your hair to where it meets the skin, and feel your blood pumping on and on behind your closed eyelids. I got that feeling that all this has happened before, but I know it hasn't. This is the first time I've ever felt so full and sick right through. One day You'll read this, and by then it'll all be over and we'll both have got over this and we'll both have moved along and apart; but when You

read it You'll say just as You always said: "I know. I know."

Are you with me? I know there's room for improvement. All the words and all the pictures just won't be able to get across what I feel like leaving this place behind. I loved this place, just as I loved You. But now it's all bust up. Things'll never be the same. All the gossip and the talk, it's found its semi-colon. From now on my only penetration will be my moving around. There is blood on my lip where the paper of the cigarette has torn at the dried-up skin. I look into the whisky and try to think. Think. Think. What have I got from twenty-one years? What made me go into this place? Why am I getting out? Where am I? What have I got for these twenty-one years?

I love You, but the show's over. The show in this place is finished, and I've got to move on. If anyone should ever ask You why I left; why I had to go, tell them I left because of You. If it hadn't been for You I would have fought through and carried on. But it wasn't like that. You were really there.

I'm waiting, waiting for this bloody train. Why's it take so long? I look at my face in the mirror behind the Vodka bottle. I got a black eye, a real and very rich black eye. I start on the questions again. Why has all this happened? Who am I? Do I really know? Aye for sure, I can read my name in this paper, and it isn't all lies. it says quite a bit about me. It int all lies. No, that won't do.

Try again. I am one of the little people, anonymous, and I'm going away; and wherever I go I'll still be the same wild and rather frightened little man. I'm not scared of anybody. I'm just scared of myself. I'm like a traveller. I shed a skin at this place, leave my little message—Kilroy was here—

and move on to another red blot on the map. I take away a memory. Get rid of a skin. Then I move on.

See that Strand Ad: lonely young man, trilby, raincoat, in the middle of the night, any street, any city—that's me. Like a bug, like some creepy crawly thing moving across all them maps in an atlas, looking and listening and making notes in a small black book like a man from M16. One of the rootless, self-made refugees., and I have to keep moving for fear I might discover myself—to be nothing; for fear that some student might slap me on the back and break into a private dream; for fear I might become involved, have to take sides, get committed; like a Mr. X from a Graham Greene entertainment—one of the little people.

Standing at bus queues, on railway platforms, airport lounges, on quaysides, at coach stops never feeling quite at home. Coming from and going to but never arriving, never departing, always passing through. Seedy, unpresentable, holding the tipped cigarette as if it were love like the singer holds, the hand mike, and then drawing on it like it contained some secret quality, everlasting life or death, or complete immunity. I walk back and forward, hands deep down in my pockets, feeling my money and secretly counting it like a miser, and then as if regretting my care, as if I didn't want to have an this unclean dirty loot, as if I didn't want to be weighted down any more by this mediaeval coinage, spending it on bars of chocolate I don't really want, drinks that won't mix, cigarettes of peculiar brands, without any reason or purpose but just to get rid of the stuff, take all the weight out of my pockets. I'm one of the little people as creeps on you, tries to crawl right inside on you; one of the refugees who

should have been left behind, or got fitted in on a shelf, or found their place somewhere in the pattern of things.

I'm a little one-eyed flea. I and my savage eye—no, none of this, not really. I arrived only because I had to stop to get petrol. I'd run out of cigarettes. I stopped, and I found I liked it, and so I stayed. Simple.

But then after I'd been here a bit I thought I knew. I thought I'd found the place where I belonged, the job I liked but I didn't; I hadn't. And so now; now all this is over. Now I've got to leave I want to push across, retch on retch all the shapes I can remember that seem to make up the puzzle—why I turned up in this place, and stayed, and now why I have got to go.

Why am I here? What am I like? And where do I go from here, after I've come through? I want to find out, and to do so I want to go back, back to the things that brought me to this place.

The train comes in. I get on it. The churnings of this tired out mind keep on. Look to your family, your home, where you came from. You were promised a future as wide as Texas, the chances your parents never had. You threw the dirt on yourself. You did yourself down. There's no hard feelings. It just turned out this way. At the back of you is the greatest phoney of them all, the biggest cheat of the lot of them. You couldn't stick anything long enough to reap in the goods. You've seen a great deal, but you don't know a thing.

No, no, no. I have seen the tired suits of the crowd. I have heard the diary read aloud. I have seen the love letter passed to the Judge. I have read the telegram that stopped the clocks. I have dialled for the time and heard at the third stroke. I

have been sick on the crossing to Calais. I have felt in my pockets and found the black king of a chess set, with the cross on the top. I have felt the spot where the hair meets the skin. I have fallen in love with the wrong person at the wrong time.

And now I stand in the corridor looking back at the platform theme music—and when they write the book of the film they will preface it with “De Profundis”. Looking back at the platform as the train pulls through the tunnel, looking back as if You were there, as if You were waving good-bye from the platform. You are.

The fugitive kind will follow their kind. I was too involved. I made mistakes. The witchhunt: it’s over. Only my own questioning voice is left. I take a seat, and look out of the window.