

JAKI IRVINE

## DIEGO

Dear Chris,

It's a long time since I've visited this place, but when you asked about sculpture parks this is the one I return to in my mind's eye.

The road to it is long and dusty, like a film running backwards, splitting off the main road and then again, getting smaller and more fragile and worn with time as it makes its way further and further into the faded sun-baked mountains. A sharp turn splits off, leading down to two rubbish bins.

Trees and bushes sit behind the bins.

A river runs nearby out of sight. Despite the dead heat, the ground deep down is still not so hard on account of being near the river.

There are no houses or people, but a dirt trail shows where someone was used to going past the bins, disappearing in through the foliage.

In there, surrounded by trees, dark red leatherette chairs and sofas, formica tables, dark brown ashtrays and stiff newspapers sit around ready for business, like a pub catering for some invisible long lost clientele. The light filtering through the leaves lends the place a kind of muted underwater feeling. Every now

and then something rustles quickly through dead leaves.

A small trail leads off through the trees.

We're at the end of that trail, by the water. It's cold even in this dead heat—wide and shallow with deep brown pools scattered with boulders and rocks and stones. I'm distracted by something that looks like black puddles of heavy oil near the water's edge. Hunkering down, the spillage turns into squirming masses of tadpoles, filling all the shallower parts of the bank.

Nearby somebody has hung a metal mobile with many parts out over the river. Altogether it gives the impression of a bit of three-dimensional bar-room banter... The river's winning hands down making the sculpture look a bit foolish and inarticulate. The water is saying many profound things about life and change and transience, stopping for a sip every now and then, before continuing on in a simple and elegant manner while the sculpture hangs about awkwardly trying to say something smart and sculptural about reflections. Beads of rust are already beginning to break out along its surfaces.

Together tho' the relationship between the complicated sculpture and the water seems to perfectly reflect something else. I look down

to where my girlfriend sits on a rock. She's silent and appears to grow further away at every passing second, flickering in and out of focus. She turns her face towards me, then gazes off, back up at the mountains that climb steeply from the floor of the valley.

Something's gone and it won't be coming back. Not now, not ever.

We both know it although it is going to take a while for things to crystallize.

Right now, all we know is that we have found the right place.

We have buried Diego further back up the trail. He is wrapped in a blanket. We had to go pretty deep to keep animals from digging him up in the night. Then we scattered leaves and dry earth. We did such a good job that the leaves and twigs have become statues of themselves and it will be hard to find the next time we visit, even tho' we know exactly where he is.

When we walk back to the car the sound of dogs howling follows us.

I think we buried something else there as well although we only came to know that later and by then it was too late to do anything about it. It has grown as dark as the ground around it now and all but disappeared.