



O THE POOR HORSES

‘COMMUNISM,’ the old guy says, ‘is the spirit. It never dies. That is its problem. The Party, necessarily, is the body that it seeks, inhabits. The body has the force, it fights, it thinks, manoeuvres – putrefies, and dies. The spirit – it wanders on again, like a butterfly, a ghost.’

‘Yes,’ says Julie, much enthused.

‘Ah, Julie,’ says the dying man, ‘your mother had in mind to call you Aurelia – but she found that was what they called a road. So, it was Julie – after the hero, stabbed in the back. A messy life like they all did then. Epicurus morphing into Stoicism. Lots now start

with a religion. You need be a good reader, even if your nose is stuck into a book – to see what's going on around. But – inside that paper ball in front of you there nest a thousand wasps. It doesn't matter where you start – the seminary, the foundry – it's where intelligence can take you...'

'Yes, of course I see,' says Julie, swept up, excited, in a history that won't be hers.

'It sounds precarious,' the old guy says – some relative of hers, she at first constrained no doubt, to tolerate – 'The tumbler you're attached to. Can he catch you when you fall?'

'Oh no!' she shouts. 'They set you up, to talk you off my Pierre! They are a team – Pierre and Dora! I am with them both. They bear me up, they cast me down. It's passion, stupid!'

'They're acrobats,' the old guy says. 'When you fall, you stand again and bow and smile. It all fits in the act.'

'Just like you say,' she shouts. 'The spirit's in the air, you weave it round. If you are slippery, well – into the sand you go, your time is up. They bind you like two snakes with ruby eyes, they're warm and leathery, the sex fleets like a cloud...'

'Is there an audience?' the old communist guy asks,

quite greedy for the scene.

‘I’m always hidden,’ Julie says. ‘If the elephant goes mad with must – I have the rifle, and will shoot.’

‘That means you’re some kind of spy,’ the old man says, seeing communism slip away. ‘Everything is falling down. There’s war everywhere for silly things, all will end as heaps of stones... So, Julie, you’re not bombing, so you must be in intelligence.’

‘We have to be around to build it up again,’ she says. Maybe she wonders who’s trying to split her from Pierre – perhaps it’s his girl Dora, whom she loves...

‘I know,’ the old guy says, ‘the circus goes round everywhere, it’s made that way. Travel with them – you’re the dross that finds out everything.’

‘It’s not about fooling gravity, and climbing the stairway up to heaven,’ says Julie. ‘That’s maybe how it looks – but really, it’s about the other body twisted round you, it’s monkeys in the puzzle tree, it’s hanging on to creatures with no tails... It’s all sex, and everybody holds their breath until you reach the ground. Tossing the fruit, chasing the tails, hierarching, picking nits...’

‘You? You’ve been up in the cradle, Julie?’ asks the old earthbound guy.

‘What’s remarkable for humans,’ Julie says, ‘is nowhere near what monkeys do. You applaud – but you should cry, in shame, frustration, for your kind.’

‘That’s what I was telling you,’ says the old communist guy. ‘Shame, frustration. With falling on the floor, trying to run up the air, without a branch... When it happens, you think there must be a way to start again. Mankind, Julie: is there more to come?’

Now, neither is listening to the other. ‘Monkeys are cruel,’ the old guy thinks. ‘I love Dora too,’ thinks Julie, ‘But I don’t want Pierre screwing both of us.’



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