

Dan watched Jenny standing at the bar, longer than she needed to buy the drinks. The place had only just opened and it was, as she had promised, nearly empty; her local, her ground, this northern part of London had always been foreign to him. The wall behind the bar was covered with signed photographs of television and show-business personalities; good wishes, facetious messages; illegible scrawls, illegible talents. Jenny had told him once in Los Angeles that the pub was an informal theatrical agency . . . where you congregated on Sunday mornings, if you lived in the area and hadn't quite made it; or even if, like her, you had made it, but retained a belief that you were nicer if you sometimes pretended you hadn't. Dan had not liked the sound of it then, and did not like the reality of it now; but he knew she had partly chosen it for that very reason.

The man she talked to, the landlord, evidently knew all about her, and was being brought up to date. She turned from him with a smile, some last remark over her shoulder, and came back to the table with the drinks. A solitary young man at the far end of the bar watched her cross to where Dan sat. She was wearing Californian clothes still; a jeans suit, flat shoes; a crocheted skull-cap of lilac, blue and white wool; no make-up. It made her look less conscious, more simple, more of an open-air girl, than she really was.

She put the glasses down: his whisky, her half-pint of draught Guinness, then sat on the padded bench beside him.

‘You seem very at home here.’

John FOWLES, Daniel Martin, 1978.