

I'd hardly ever been to the Kingsfield in those days, so Ruth and I had to consult the map a number of times on the way and we still arrived several minutes late. It's not very well-appointed as recovery centres go, and if it wasn't for the associations it now has for me, it's not somewhere I'd look forward to visiting. It's out of the way and awkward to get to, and yet when you're there, there's no real sense of peace and quiet. You can always hear traffic on the big roads beyond the fencing, and there's a general feeling they never properly finished converting the place. A lot of the donors' rooms you can't get to with a wheelchair, or else they're too stuffy or too draughty. There aren't nearly enough bathrooms and the ones there are are hard to keep clean, get freezing in winter and are generally too far from the donors' rooms. The Kingsfield, in other words, falls way short of a place like Ruth's centre in Dover, with its gleaming tiles and double-glazed windows that seal at the twist of a handle.

Later on, after the Kingsfield became the familiar and precious place it did, I was in one of the admin buildings and came across a framed black-and-white photo of the place the way it was before it was converted, when it was still a holiday camp for ordinary families. The picture was probably taken in the late fifties or early sixties, and shows a big rectangular swimming pool with all these happy people – children, parents – splashing about having a great time. It's concrete all around the pool, but people have set up deck chairs and sun loungers, and they've got large parasols to keep them in the shade. When I first saw this, it took me a while to realise I was looking at what the donors now call 'the Square' – the place where you drive in when

you first arrive at the centre. Of course, the pool's filled in now, but the outline's still there, and they've left standing at one end – an example of this unfinished atmosphere – the metal frame for the high diving board. It was only when I saw the photo it occurred to me what the frame was and why it was there, and today, each time I see it, I can't help picturing a swimmer taking a dive off the top only to crash into the cement.

I might not have easily recognised the Square in the photo, except for the white bunker-like two-storey buildings in the background, on all three visible sides of the pool area. That must have been where the families had their holiday apartments, and though I'd guess the interiors have changed a lot, the outsidies look much the same. In some ways, I suppose, the Square today isn't so different to what the pool was back then. It's the social hub of the place, where donors come out of their rooms for a bit of air and a chat. There are a few wooden picnic benches around the Square, but – especially when the sun's too hot, or it's raining – the donors prefer to gather under the overhanging flat roof of the recreation hall at the far end behind the old diving board frame.

That afternoon Ruth and I went to the Kingsfield, it was overcast and a bit chilly, and as we drove into the Square it was deserted except for a group of six or seven shadowy figures underneath that roof. As I brought the car to a stop somewhere over the old pool – which of course I didn't know about then – one figure detached itself from the group and came towards us, and I saw it was Tommy. He had on a faded green track-suit top and looked about a stone heavier than when I'd last seen him.

Beside me Ruth, for a second, seemed to panic. 'What do we do?' she went. 'Do we get out? No, no, let's not get out. Don't move, don't move.'

I don't know what I'd been intending to do, but when Ruth said this, for some reason, without really thinking about it, I just stepped out of the car. Ruth stayed where she