



In Gratitude

Jenny Diski

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The future flashed before my eyes in all its pre-ordained banality. Embarrassment, at first, to the exclusion of all other feelings. But embarrassment curled at the edges with a weariness ...

I got a joke in.

“So – we’d better get cooking the meth,” I said to the Poet.

In July 2014, Jenny Diski was diagnosed with inoperable lung cancer and given “two or three years” to live. She didn't know how to react. All responses felt scripted, as if she were acting out her part. To find the response that felt wholly her own, she had to face the cliches and try to write about it. And there was another story to write, one she had not yet told: that of being taken in at age fifteen by the author Doris Lessing, and the subsequent fifty years of their complex relationship.

In the pages of the *London Review of Books*, to which Diski contributed for the last quarter century, she unraveled her history with Lessing: the fairy-tale rescue as a teenager, the difficulties of being absorbed into an unfamiliar family, the modeling of a literary life. Swooping from one memory to the next—alighting on the hysterical battlefield of her parental home, her expulsion from school, the drug-taking twenty-something in and out of psychiatric hospitals -- and telling all through the lens of living with terminal cancer, through what she knows will be her final months, Diski paints a portrait of two extraordinary writers -- Lessing and herself.

From a wholly original thinker comes a book like no other: a cerebral, witty, dazzlingly candid masterpiece about an uneasy relationship; about memory and writing, ingratitude and anger; about living with illness and facing death.

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Peter Chatman:

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