

A POVERTY

OF ar, far away on the rim of the great southern oceans, poised on the edge of the greatest island in the world, was the most isolated city on the planet.

It was so distant from every other city on the continent that its nearest neighbours thought it most properly belonged to some far-off alien nation than the island itself.

DESIRE

The city, from the grand heights of its closest parklands, looked like nothing so much as a collection of razor-edged crystals growing from a green plain, bisected by a shallowly meandering river with all enshrouded in a blanket of blue-grey air, the blue, blue light of that southern clime slicing through the glass to blind those who gazed too long upon it.

Its people told each other that it certainly was a fine setting for a city, but their true feelings about the city itself they kept unvoiced. It was a place that all but a native-born handful came to in escape from other places where pressure of life and work had become too much. It was a city made in order to forget, quickly forgotten even by those few stray tourists passing through to the northern red deserts, where forgetting became so seductive that so many wandered off there in search of a final oblivion.

Close up and at ground level the crystals looked more like huge lumps of concreted aggregate than glass, their lower apertures towering over tiny citizens scuttling through their gaps. Frigid winds snapped at their heels as they darted in and out of shafts of blackest shadow and laser beam sunlight looking for warm, safe haven. For those neither living nor labouring in the streets there were few reasons to linger.

The city fathers in their unquestionable wisdom had given all inter-crystalline space over to endless miles of screaming cars and streaming commuters, in their urge to overwhelm those foolish enough to tender hopes for a true urban life.

"A city is for work and the beach is for pleasure," they ruled, and the suburbs, the endless miles of suburbs, as desert of soul as all their inhabitants were deserted by joy, were to be collective filing cabinet bedrooms.

So the people of the crystalline city dutifully abandoned it at the start of each lowering red night, frolicked on glimmering ocean sands every weekend, then drank themselves into numbed oblivion each balmy evening, in order to forget. 