

NOBODY CAME

Excerpt from a possible END: Now.

He stares straight ahead, and it is evening. The only light is vestigial now, the light of what comes after, carried in the residue of memory, in the remains of what was various and human, and Death, hovering in the air above.

He takes one step and then the next, Death over him. He feels the pavement underfoot and there is a disappearing everywhere, people's faces, images. He walks, the man holds his arm. Shop fronts, Bombay Plaza, Fish Brothers, Paddy Power, and the crowd of people, him holding his shoe. He sees a woman pointing, saying something, it isn't his mother. Maybe.

He sees an ambulance, a fire engine, headlights flashing. He cannot find himself in the things he sees and hears. A man and a woman, paramedics, carry a body on a stretcher, someone, Spike, blood around his neck and face. He watches them move into the stunned distance. That's where everything is, all around him, falling away, shop signs, people, things he cannot name.

Then he sees the open car door. He walks and the man puts his hand on his head, pressing, pushing him down. All this, all this. He sits, waits, but nobody comes.

Nobody came.

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When we actually caught up with him – he was too far gone, really. He didn't try to flee or fight. It looked like the fight had all gone out of him. I don't think, by that time, he really knew what to believe in, or if indeed he believed in anything. If that was true, he must have lost the old world, the old story. He must have realised, somewhere, deep down, that the price he'd paid just wasn't worth all that money.

He came with us. No trouble.

At one point, just on the corner of Brady Street, he stopped and looked up. He looked up, his face full of confusion, as if the sky he viewed was unfamiliar, and he expected to see a different sky.

We were standing, there on the wide pavement, and he turned and looked at me. He looked at me with a questioning in his eyes, his head cocked slightly – as if he was expecting me to say something, explain something. And he spoke – for the first and only time, I heard him speak. I haven't told anyone about it. There is no one really to tell. I haven't told anyone, because I'm not sure myself. He didn't speak loudly, and with everything going on, all the people around, I might not have heard it right. But, as time goes by, I convince myself that I heard him correctly, but deep in my heart, I know I'm not sure. We convince ourselves of all sorts, don't we? Sometimes we hear what we want to hear – something that'll make sense.

We were both stood on the corner of Brady Street and Whitechapel High Street. For a moment, we were stood still; I can't remember why – waiting for something, maybe. I was close, really close. And he looked at me, as if expecting me to say something, but I didn't – I couldn't, you know? And I was just turning my head, because we were about to start walking again, and he spoke. I thought I heard him say, 'Accident.' It was said quietly. It was said more like a question than as a statement. 'Accident?' he said, and looked at me. And despite everything, despite everything I knew, I couldn't help feeling deep sorrow and affection.

'Yes,' I said. That's all: 'Yes.'

And he nodded, as if he was resigned to, and satisfied with my response.