

Hospitalfield
Pamphlet Series

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THE LAST DAY OF THE RAILWAY LANDS

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precarious domestic shelving but, were one prepared to undertake the difficult journey into the wild regions at their bases, they conjure strangely over-proportioned, megalithic standing stones.

Boy watches the black specks of birds taking flight from their nests amongst the exposed silhouettes of I-beams and girders before turning and, with his weight supported by the railing, coasts absently to the community centre's other end. He faces southeast now. Looking over the potholes and patchwork repairs covering Copenhagen street and the ruins of a shanty town occupied by only the very bold or desperate beyond it, he can see the yellow haze that coats the distant City. Through this, the grey shapes of a few tall buildings protrude. They appear almost like a painted backdrop to his life, a two dimensional illusion suggesting of a world beyond the day-to-day activity that surrounds him. He knows that people must live there because occasionally he sees points of lights blink on in the far off windows. He has no recollection of ever standing amongst these great towers though he has been told he did, on occasion, in his very early childhood.

No one from the Cally has been there since one morning, nineteen or twenty years earlier, just after Boy started school, when the earth groaned,

quaked and fell away, leaving a vast, gaping hole. Right before them, Kings Cross Station, the mouth of Caledonian Road and Priory Green estate slithered inexorably into the fresh, immense opening in the ground. It seemed Bloomsbury and Clerkenwell went down with them and the hole continued out, perhaps as far Holborn or maybe to the Thames. Only a few hundred meters of solid ground had saved the Bemerton and Barnesbury from a similar fate. They gave silent thanks to Piccadilly line for not shuddering in sympathy and collapsing as it wound beneath them. Few speculated about the hole's scale after the first turbulent years following its arrival and, by the time things settled into a routine, the remaining inhabitants of the Cally focused on more immediate concerns. Curiosity was tempered by the need, once it became clear no help was coming, to feed children, repair homes and keep things sanitary.

Despite the suddenness of the event there had been many witnesses or, at least, those who claimed to have seen it happen. It was said the weight of soil and rubble had been so great that the flames which leaped from the crumpling gas mains were extinguished before they could consume any of the estate's inhabitants. Instead, like these fires,

"Might I just say," requests a voice from behind him with greatly affected courtesy, "how delighted I am to learn of the death of your father."

The shrill squawk of laughter that follows this entreaty immediately identifies the speaker as Aleksy Bos.

Bos, who at 66 is four years Frank Allen's senior, had long been close to the deceased patriarch and, though never a member of his inner coterie – his irresponsible turn of phrase and anarchic temperament had excluded him from that – was perhaps his oldest friend. He is a short man, dressed now in a venerable, dark, three-piece suit. Only the very slightest semblance of a hairline remains on his brow but the few strands are scraped back with Brilliantine and dignity. His moustache is a silver echo of the one worn by Boy's Father. Well loved by all except Boy's mother, as he aged he acquired a puckish reputation that left him something of an enigma. This constructed him in the imagination of most as a valued but politically impotent figure at the Allen court. He has been figure in Boy's life since childhood and turning now the young man meets the apparition of the old.

Leaning over in a decorous bow, inhibited only by age, Bos extends a hand gracefully with forefinger and thumb pinched in supplication. Inclining his face toward the cracked paving slabs of the community centre's steps he continues.

"His demise gratifies me most profoundly. My sincerest felicitations to the House of Allen."

Boy offers him a raised eyebrow of reproach that carries a silent, appreciative acknowledgement of Aleksy Bos' contempt for the sombre pomp of the occasion.

"Forgive me! And now please allow me to mortify my flesh." Bos grips his black necktie just below the knot and uses it to deliver a brace of corrective lashes to each of his shoulders.

"You look very smart." he continues fondly, abandoning his own tie and stepping forward to straighten Boy's. "It is absolutely imperative we drink heavily forthwith."

"It is." says Boy and, for a instant registers the acute pain in the eyes that now studies his torso for further creases and imperfections. "I think there's some beer at the back of the hall somewhere."