



ORDNANCE ARMS, CANNING TOWN, NOVEMBER 2018/  
Laura Grace Ford/



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Luxury flats by the station, a scrub of blocks in the imprint of the old market. Last time I was here the pub had emptied itself out, purged the dartboards and pool tables and become something else, a charity shop I think, with convex mirrors and three piece suites and camphor scented clothes. Now there's cigarette smoke, a butterscotch smell of spilt beer.

Sky News on mute, fires in California, then Oxford street, blue flashes and cordons. I scan the pub. Round table in the corner, spider plants on a window ledge, Idris already here with Ali and Michaela.

It's ten years since they evicted us, fifty flats, all contested. The estate was the knot that held us together and it went in three phases, one courtyard after the next. I woke up to green netting on the windows, the builders had the radio on, you could hear them shouting across the din. The song rattled the glass, Adele I think it was, round and round on repeat. The voice, sugared with American emotion, domesticated the men, de-fanged them somehow but still I switched off the lights, spied out of the darkness. They ripped out the forsythia, the yellow roses. That was the worst, seeing the gardens go. I watched them hacking vines of wisteria, laughing as they hurled them into skips and thought how quickly it can switch to something worse.

Some had been lost in the rush to leave, we heard of them on the North Circular, short life tenancies in exhaust blackened semis. The houses had leilandii to keep back the fumes, towering black trees that blocked the light. You could see the ivy, the fabric tacked to the windows as you drove past. It wasn't London I thought, not when you got that high, New Southgate, Edmonton, it was something else, an edge or a crossing. The rest had been shunted out to condemned blocks in Poplar. That was the dead end of it really, the Aberfeldy Estate. I remember the lassitude, damp flats with smackheads stuffed inside them; linoleum floors, dumb bells, heating on full blast. They carved tracks to Poplar High Street for their little bags, you'd see them waiting in the birch grove for the boys in their Nike trainers and padded jackets, messages pinging through tangles of ground elder, *Peng Lemon fat bags, ten out of ten there*. It was like those nature programmes on TV when something's about to be eaten.

At the centre of the Aberfeldy was the Tavern, a cluster of fenced in rooms, perpetual lock ins and 90s dance tracks slung out of the PA. You had to commit yourself, there was no passing through. I remember white blokes palming off granular coke and duff pills printed with diamonds. You could get anything you wanted in there, most of it from the airport, confiscated liquids, stuff taken off the trays. They offered me a bottle of Tom Ford perfume and

the scent landed me in the spice warehouses of Wapping, must have been the cardamom in it, the tobacco. Twenty he said, over a ton these are down Selfridges, the bottle was smoky black glass, a third of it gone.

But others had formed new cells, much deeper underground and Idris was the portal, the gateway to these. He'd always been this figure, an interpreter, showing ways through.

I'd been rehoused in Stepney, the flat was hard won, a parade of housing officers, some stony-faced, some harbouring glints of empathy. The key was tenacity, brushing off the jibes, the sarcasm, watching for traces of sweetness. I'd go there every day and sit with the plastic plants and the lime green walls and signs written in Sylheti and English and Arabic and wait to be acknowledged.

When the offer finally came it was made by a case worker called Ade. I never forgot him, he was like a shepherd or something. I recognised the Baptist background, it was embedded in the phrases he used *A man after his own heart, A millstone around his neck, A multitude of sins* and he'd recommended the Tabernacle, that church in Mile End where they did the night shelters, I must have looked desperate, jagged all over for him say that. I started wearing a crucifix, a little gold one from Argos, and I'd turn it sometimes, let the sunlight catch as it slanted through the interview room. Then I'd weave in phrases *A leopard cannot change its spots, A nest of vipers, Faith without works is dead*, things I'd heard him say, and soon enough they formed themselves into keys and the doors began to open. The keys came imbued with an odd, restless kind of relief. There'd be no celebrating until I knew for certain they wouldn't take it back. The new flat was a nest in a cliff edge, for the first time in years I could think beyond survival.

And now there's a sense the threads are winding themselves into something. That party last week was the catalyst I think.

The spider plants are catching in my hair, baby ones that break.

Idris is telling me about empty houses near the old Barking power station. They were all Sitexed when we got there he says, they're off the map, you can't even get a phone signal. Some mates from Damascus are doing them up, he still has networks stretching out across Newham, the Khandan, pulsing through mosques, community halls, railway arches. There are no locked doors with him, he walks through them and he doesn't need drugs to do it, they're for something else, a tool, a way of envisioning things. It's funny being



drawn back in, I thought it had disappeared, that's what happens isn't it, when you're isolated, you imagine a grey fog outside your window, you think it's all gone.

Songs from the '80s on the jukebox, Thin Lizzy, Dexy's Midnight Runners, Talk Talk. I watch the bloke slotting in the 50ps, studying the names as they light up behind the perspex screen. He must be late 40s I think, they must remind him of leaving school, nights out with his mates, exuberant in Aramis or Eternity or whatever it was then.

The ceiling is nicotine brown. It's years since they brought in the ban but the patina stays, a film of ochre with the raised pattern of the old paper underneath. I know there are rooms where they don't uphold it, secret ones round the back.

Dark furniture, opaque glass to conceal us from passers by. You see only see tops of heads, Adidas caps, mosque hats, top knots it might be, but not their faces. It's like those photofits the police used to have, the sinister ones from the seventies, with a horizontal segment for each part.

There's more coming in from Ilford, faces I haven't seen for years, Ryan and Curtis and that lot in puffa jackets, shaved heads, camouflage trousers, and girls from the parties in Stratford, Keisha and Ramona, with bleached Afros and necklaces made of hexagonal bolts. Idris is going round with memory maps. He could have just sent them on whatsapp but we've gone to ground in analogue for stuff that counts. The maps were learnt by walking, by burrowing under the city; St Anne's at the centre, then paths coming off in spokes, the Travelodge next to the server farms, the empty office blocks on Clove Crescent, the airport. Then he's moving around the group, adding to the lexical terrain. We memorise by performing incantations, they go seamlessly with the valium, the drinking, the games of pool.

Keisha hands me a necklace, fastens it for me. She's obsessed with landfill, those illegal fly tips in Rainham. She makes jewellery from copper wire with flashes of gold and palladium from the phones. She scavenges on the shoreline, under the span of the bridge, the expanse of estuary. I've seen her tweezing particles from circuit boards – Beryllium, Silver, Coltan – forces reverberating from mines in Africa, you can feel them she told me, before you even find the bag of phones, they ripple through the ground, through the cushionless sofas and bed frames and broken TVs, you have to channel them, honour them. Keisha is like Idris' other half, his twin. You see them plotting together, harnessing the properties of *things*.

We read poetry by Césaire and drift in the conjurations of Maya Deren and Matta and Max Ernst. These are our markers, *The Witches Cradle*, *Panique du Soleil*, *The Blue Forest*. The names are pearlescent, shimmering above London like a band of pollution.

Keisha goes round the back of the jukebox and rewires it, connects it to her phone. Our phones are shells now, stripped and replaced with new circuitry, we use them for music, everything else is beyond signal. She's just stopped the 80s and scrambled it. I think about the bloke with the 50ps, his crystallised memories there. A jolt, a pause, then shouts of protest. It's that record Idris sent before *Airstrike*, voices splintering under rocket fire. Nazar. The war in Angola, kuduro sculpted into it. Then air raid sirens like they had in the Blitz, the ones that still echo in the care homes, the day centres round here.

The track takes possession of the pub, it's ours now, scuttling over walls, forming patterns on the ceiling, dripping like sweat. This is what I mean Keisha says, the forces in them circuit boards, see where they come from now? Manganese, Copper, Gold.

There must be forty of us, in black mostly, sharp but unravelled, with hair half bleached, nails half done. The speakers are louder than before, glasses are rattling, skittering off tables, and the young bloke serving behind the bar, with Nike cap and silver chain is one of ours.

The room next door is filling up, there's a couple of blokes on stage with Bontempi keyboards and a set list of Chas n Dave classics. Me and Tonya walk through on our way to the Ladies. A crowd of dressed up cockneys are sitting round tables with pints of Carlsberg, one or two in, tempers still held. The blokes are in buttoned down Polos, fingers knotted with heavy sovereigns, and inked hammers, green with age, criss-crossing from their sleeves. Their other halves are bronzed and majestic in clouds of Armani Diamonds. They're gearing up for a knees up, the old joanna, the outside of edge of that. After them it will be forgotten, something left for the revivalists to shore up.

The toilets are pink and cigarette blistered with names scratched into cubicle doors. We sweep our faces with colour, winter rose and dusty copper. I'm so glad I've found you again I tell Tonya's reflection, she smiles back in the old way and puts her arm round me, I know she says. Her hair is peroxide again, violet in the fluorescent light. Today, when we met in Asda, it was brown.

We return to the pool room. There's a wasted couple at the bar. We're ordering drinks and I watch them for a moment, try to listen in. He's worse



than her, eyes lit up with flashes of blue from the news, waxy and trembling, spasming sometimes as his arms jerk to the beat. There are shot glasses lined up and a pint he slams on the bar. It must be pills I'm thinking, those shit Latvian ones going round. She keeps leaving, looking in the other bar, pushing into new knots, breaking the threads of this, which has become sticky and unhinged. His eyes are straying and he's listing names on our maps, things he must have heard us say – Wapping Old Stairs, St Anne's, Five Bells- he's like a ventriloquist, distorted and stretchy, mouth an elastic band.

I notice Ryan slinking deeper into the fold, keeping his hood pulled down over his face even though the heat's intense and the walls are slicked with sweat. He looks anxious, backward glances at the bar as if he's afraid of the mordant naming. Then I'm nudged and the bloke in the silver chain is waiting to serve us. He's looking expectantly, with a serenity that feels stark against the messiness there, when he speaks he cuts through the bleary cascade. I like his accent, this side of the Lea it's tipping into Essex, the blurring, estuarial part of it. And his face, Irish maybe with something else, Malaysian or Chinese. His dark hair is cropped, his eyes are gingery with flecks of green. He's asking about the party at the power station later and it feels like before with new sparks flying.

We're in circles, passing places around, spoken, repeated, stored. Canning Town Power Station, The Bridge House, Rathbone Market. Then the server farms, the loading bays, the staff rooms in the Travelodge.

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### A124 Canning Town to Barking

We leave the pub together, a vanishing, no one sees us go. There's fog, heavy bands of it, and the smell of burning leaves. The convoy's parked under the motorway flyover. The old van had graffiti all over it, provocative stuff to goad the old bill, innocent times I think. I remember driving on the M11 with Idris when he swerved in front of them, taking his hands off the wheel as the squad car sped towards us.

I get in the front with Tonya, a load more clamber in the back. She blazes one up, I let the smoke envelop me, oak moss, poplar buds, and something else, lemon it could be or polished wood. I look round into the transit cavern, there are grey blankets on the floor and Ryan and them with bottles of rosé.

Pirate radio station in Plaistow. I recognise the voice, Roses Gabor. Idris sent this yesterday with a message, I tried not to read much into it because there were always codes, but now I see it italicised-

*-send to J-*

A thought occurs to me, startling and luminous but I push it back, choose to think about something else. It's a strategy I've learnt, instead of letting the grooves deepen I make new paths, new tracings. But the initial is bright and insistent, hard to push down, it's like goldfish in a pool at night, hundreds darting to the surface, coppery scales glinting. I steer myself away. The song is looping, saturated with opiates and I move through its amber chambers, skewed and descending.

### دور دیکھنے کی کوشش کریں

The van smells of diesel, McDonald's wrappers on the floor.

I feel so much better since I threw my phone in the river. I decided that, after the message to come here I would let the city determine my movements. I'd seen another mate Nitin by chance a couple of weeks ago, then Tonya in Asda today. London is bringing them back.

The van turns right into Barking road.

A corridor of new developments. Blocks of grey flats. I knew someone who lived there once. You could see the river as it goosenecked through Silvertown and trace the Lea all the way to Epping Forest. She said one Christmas morning she'd stepped out to the shock of frost, the sun flaming red in the east, there was no traffic and she listened to sounds she'd never heard before, dogs barking on the towpaths, the buzzing of pylons, the peal of distant church bells. The city was still and she wondered if she might leave the block with no navigation but the sound. She thought of the yew at the lych gate and imagined communion, a weft of wool and fur. She'd pressed against the railings and inhaled the pine scents of the forest, the ferns and bracken beneath. The balcony was black with carbon, you couldn't breathe sometimes and she'd never known the forest carry like that. It was one of those moments you waited for, a glimpse of another reality behind the toxins and grime.

Louise her name was, totally unrelated to this constellation. I'd met her during a stint working in a hostel in Bethnal Green. She was troubled, I remember that, from Norfolk or somewhere and she'd talk about it in a

strange objective way as if she was making a documentary. London had granted me myriad lives, and sometimes they were tangled, but that girl, Louise, she'd stayed separate, a lone star.

The road dips again, dimly lit streets, late Edwardian terraces. A house we lived in for a few weeks, one of many, in and out of concealed rooms. I need to deflect again, think of something else. It's easier now, because it's November and we're encased in the van, but in summer, with all the scents unlocked its impossible not to think of him.

Idris points to a block of brutalist flats, you remember that place he said, we got khandan from Mali permanent now. I do remember it, from years before, five or six it must have been, we'd gone in through a fire escape, the flats were conjoined. There were circular meetings and leaflets written in French, and vats of something bubbling in a back room, okra and chicken and sweet potato. They had the Grande Mosque de Djinn on the walls, it looked like it had been sculpted from sand, a transcendent monument rising from the red earth.

But I try not to think about it.

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### Tesco, Wickes, the Gascoigne Estate

I worked here, a long time ago. I was sent to cover absences, colleagues on the sick. My patient's name was Frank. The council referred to him as client but I couldn't stand that, it seemed callous somehow. It was my job to take him shopping, make sure he got something to eat. Some days were easier than others. That's when I'd see the men in Wickes car park, they'd be waiting in the freezing damp for a start on the building sites as I cut across to Frank's. Frank's flat was always overheated, the radiators would be up full blast and the windows sealed shut. I'd got attached to him, his wry face and thick black hair. They said he'd been brain damaged as a baby, that's why he couldn't speak. He made meticulous constructions, complex cities out of meccano. These architectures were how he communicated, he spoke through arrangements of girders and wheels. Frank was on a combination of medications, when they'd tried to reduce it he'd abandoned the cities and sunk tight into himself, his contentment existed in a narrow pharmacological bandwidth. I'm looking out of the van window at the grey point blocks wondering what happened, dreading the thought of him inert and desolate. I still get flashes of medication sheets in the middle of the night. Would someone be minding him now? Would they care enough to make sure it was

right. That's how it is, you don't forget them, it's like a vast repository of ghosts, no one tells you that when you start.

I'm turning things over, they're coming fast, vivid impressions, as if I'm absorbing Idris' personality, his restless agitation. I'm cushioned against the van door in my big puffa jacket, my head is bumping against the glass. The smell of weed, bass rattling the shell of the van, then laughing in the back, flying from side to side, a bottle smashed. I glance sideways at Tonya, she can't believe it's still going on.

The van stops at the lights, smoked glass building with heavy chains, padlocks around the doors. It was studios last time, unofficial ones behind offices they never managed to let, black rooms with mixing desks and men hunched inside. One of them was a pirate radio station, the antennae was on a tower block in the Gascoigne, not Frank's but a sister one in the same cluster. The blokes knew us, we'd worked with them a few times at parties in Stratford and they took us to see the operation there. The lift must have been stuck because we had to climb all the way up to the 20th floor. They were monarchs, owners of the estate, with keys to everywhere. The front of the block had a high pitched sound, must have been sine waves from the mosquitoes. I remember the red eyed boys smoking on the landings, nods of acknowledgement buffering the mosaic tiles, how they traipsed after us with the station locked on their phones. Then the ammonia tang, the names burnt in with lighters. We stopped to look at the Creek, the Thames, the Abbey Ruins, each level flinging the view further. At the 18th you could see the whole span, Whitechapel, Aldgate, Limehouse, with the river winding through. Then a black steel door, a landing thick with blue light, a pungent reek of skunk.

We were in with the lift mechanisms, steel cables winding. You had to edge round them, I remember the shudder as I leant over the well, steel box a hundred meters below. The tissue they talk about, between this world and the next, that's how it feels; a hair's breadth, a heartbeat. The memory still scuttles across my skin.

Then the maintenance room with another hidden inside, plaster board with egg boxes. You had to crouch to get in, a den musky with testosterone. There was condensation from the ceiling and extension leads coiling under your feet. They showed us a hole in the ceiling, a broom handle fixed with gaffer tape. We climbed a ladder, the rungs were slippery with frost and the roof glittered like granite. It was a clear night and we saw the sweep of their domain. London was supplicated at their feet and the antenna, shooting through the asphalt was their sceptre.



We're stuck at the lights, faces saturated with red. It's all changed now, like hearing through molasses. Idris says Jamil is back in London.

Jamil. He just says it, drops it in like it's nothing. I look down at my hands, the chipped nail polish, little shards of iridescent blue. The words take time to settle. I'm watching the smoked glass windows, the lights reflecting off them and I feel Tonya, fur jacket pressing into me.

Jamil. Potent and giddy. Shores and flows, sizzling fields of colour. I thought he was in Pakistan. Years of lassitude punctured by glimmers of light. But I know exactly when it was.

Under the A13. Cacophony of radio frequencies, 2 Step, UK Funky, Grime breaking into Gospel.

Apparently he arrived today, there was some incident at the airport. I think of police, the way they hold you sometimes, little Guantamos concealed inside. He got robbed Idris says incredulous, they took his laptop and all his duty free. I thought of Jamil, his hardness, his aloofness, I couldn't imagine it happening to him. Softened up, Idris says, thinks after Lahore England's easy, no army, no bribes and that, he's forgotten. I remember that December, the house in Ilford, there'd been home visits, a few pulled in. Paddington Green was where they took them. He was edgy then, always on the look out. Those walks into the town centre, the Christmas lights and market stalls, I remember how guarded he seemed, scanning the crowds and shopping arcades. I couldn't imagine him being robbed, unless he wanted it to happen, unless he'd staged it somehow, which seemed more likely, because everything with Jamil was meant.

Jamil. He'd raised my expectations and sometimes I thought it would have been better if we'd never met at all. I'm stunned by the euphoria unfurling in the moment, residual joy opening like petals. After all this time, a current re-activated.

He wants to see you, Idris says. To him it's all part of the whirling carousel, the episodes of our lives, spectacle and amusement but I know I have to hold back. I'm not who I was. There'd been messages, scrambled at first, then nothing. I couldn't just fall into it, things had evened out hadn't they, life had settled. The elation rising at the sound of his name is a reminder of the danger, if I disrupt things now I might lose myself again and you never forget the black, it stays with you, a reservoir waiting to spill.

I feel a squeeze, a hand on my arm, Tonya.

There's a new sense of plasticity, as if everything's being re-made. That party last week seemed to trigger it, a torrent of chance meetings, rekindlings. I'm caught between euphoria and anxiety, scrambled in both, my nerves are copper wire.

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Barking Reach rebranded, tidal marshland corralled into the masterplan, you see the violet outlines of blocks half-built. I remember them starting this, thinking it was hexed, because it seemed such an unlikely place to build houses. It was isolated, an island really with the A13 and the river and the railway hemming it in. There was an estate there already with one shop, an Asian mini-mart selling dusty cans of peaches and sun bleached birthday cards. The kids had their own language to keep strangers in abeyance, they pelted our van with stones when we drove there once. Idris said they were families from the old Creekmouth Peninsula, Lammins and Scanlons, there was a boy from his school who'd lived there, that's how he knew.

That haunting track again, Roses Gabor, the sultry sweat of it, walls and corridors branching as if it's connecting to the industrial estates, the black stretches of marsh.

I'm trying but it's not working. It's all lighting up. Bestway Cash and Carry, Goresbrook towers.

The van jolts over a fractured road, we bump and bang and they're flung about in the back. Heaps of tyres and elevated containers, yards behind corrugated iron. I've been here before, but it was light last time, men in and out of gateways, queueing for bacon rolls in steamed up cafes, now there's no one. And the sky is ink with a band of green light which must be a residue from the power stations, an after glow or a haunting because they shut them down decades ago.

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1994/ 1995/ 1999/ 2001/ 2003/

It's warm for November, a strange heat beneath the fog. A lane strewn with barrels and plastic bags. Acres of concrete, lines of frost blackened buddleia, the sound of fireworks carried over from the Thames. I press my hands over

my ears to shut out the wheeling screams, it shuttles through old memories, memories I must have inherited.

This is the new place, behind billboards, a row of pebbledashed houses. We push through a plywood fence, follow a path of broken paving stones, the garden is a thicket of briars, roses clinging to black stems, white and pink like sugared almonds. An upstairs window is open, grime filtered through Houston, the hallmarks of Trap. It wraps around. It's strange how it's come back, Robitussin, Benylin, the opiate temporality, as if we're decelerating.

I'm a little unsteady on my feet, my legs are wobbly, the tingling of codeine has given way to a moon walking drowsiness. Tonya holds my arm. I like the smell of her perfume, dark vanilla like play-doh, the fur as she loops around me.

The houses are austere, 1950s I suppose, must have been built at the same time as Power Station C. There's a door open, frosted glass and yellow light coming through. It's like a Christmas card, or a drawing of London when they had the pea-soupers, windows glowing like beacons. We step into the kitchen. The house hasn't been lived in since the '70s, geometric wallpaper still there, orange circles repeating. I wonder how it must have felt then, looking out at the vast power station. I think of the Three-Day Week, the Winter of Discontent, candles under the sink. The darkness must have been like now.

A black and white TV, I haven't seen one for a long time. The picture is bad, bands of white disrupting the newsreader's face. We move concentrically like the wallpaper as we sift through the past, no one's racing now, we hold out our palms and see what settles.

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A front room with Sitex at the windows, grey carpet and dusty brown settee. They're on about Centrepoint, that tower on the verge of occupation.

Idris knows where Jamil is, he has messages, years of them stored up. A letter. He asked me to give you this he says handing it over. I can hardly bear to take it, the envelope feels potent, its contents a cataclysm. I don't say anything, tuck it deep into an inner pocket. I need to save it until I can shut myself away, lock a door. If I read it at all, and I shouldn't, because it could draw me back in. I feel shivery, as if it's ice, I feel it through the jacket.

I'm not sure how he'd got back into the country. I thought about multiple names, safe houses, same way he got out probably. He'd have stayed if he could, Idris told me back then. Tonya's noticed, we've only been reunited a few hours but it's like before, I feel her watching me. As soon as I get chance I'll tell her, until then it's unspoken, tacit.

They show us around the three houses, sledgehammer holes connecting them. There's a narrow landing with bare lightbulbs, wood chip paper. Idris opens the door to a dusty box room with a filing cabinet and a mirror propped on a window ledge. The houses are a temporary base. He's telling me about Section 18s, home office raids. There's no phone signal here, it's a black spot, an anomaly the authorities can't fix, something to do with the old power lines. It's a strange time for Jamil to come back I think.

We go back to the yard, there's a bonfire, larch I can smell, and wormwood, bitter and hallucinogenic. It reminds me of North West London, behind the prison. I hear them talking about the next wave, the melting of Black Friday, the channelling of Christmas crowds. The way they talk is slow, deliberate, as if they're willing something.

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We set out walking. The paths are unmarked, narrow tracks in fields of cinder. In front of us a massive scrapyards patrolled by Alsations, a transistor radio in a portakabin, heat from the floodlights. We walk past twisting armatures, high metal fences. The jagged heaps are alive with unseen links, metals conducting the forces around them. If you stand for long enough they reach you, crackling in lines through the railings. Maybe it's the remoteness that allows the embodiment, the total absorption of place, because usually we're tuned into crowds, vexed by noise and conversation. The path leads through recycling plants, blocs of fridges and washing machines. They look menacing now they've escaped domestic isolation, thousands of them in the half light.

We stoop beneath elderberry boughs, branches November black, berries still on. The fridges are arranged like citadels, you can see corridors in them, cool and metallic. It's as if, left to themselves they'd have been like this all along, that the time shut up in houses was just a dormant phase. Ivy now, a blackcurrant stink like cats, then skeins of briar. The fridges have become ziggurats, Aztec mountains. Sometimes you see stickers and magnets and think how insulting they seem, like brands on a swarm of defectors.

It's quiet now we've lost the fireworks and the motorway and the sonic drift of London, all that's left is a low buzzing, electrical goods in communion. I tell the others to stop, fridge freezers in a crescent like Stonehenge. They exert a strange power. There's a sense of a awe, like seeing a range of mountains or an ocean for the first time. I wonder who put them like that. Did they do it themselves? There are plastic chairs with cigarette ends thrown around and smashed Martel bottles, crushed cans of Leck. It looks like a ritual site. It's a shock to know that there are others channelling the forces, harnessing energies from scrap and landfill and radioactive waste.

Then an expanse of brick, a soot blackened wall. Power Station C, it must be. And those markings again, sigils or runes. Idris says he doesn't know, fascists maybe, Polish ones from the demolition site. There were loads round here a few years ago, they left signs, Viking sun wheels stuck to lamp posts, acronyms sprayed on walls, and sometimes at night around Aldgate and Whitechapel you'd see them trying to stoke it up. I remember a plumber the council sent round with the same wheels and runes tattooed on his arms, he said if it wasn't for 'them' I'd have had a much better flat. He was called Tomasz, about six foot with crinkles on the back of his head like a thumb. You could see he went to the gym, that his brain was swimming with steroids. I couldn't say anything because he'd shut the door behind him on his way in.

We come to a goods yard closed with the power station. There are chambers under bridges, velvet black with decades of coal dust. The power station emits a luminous glow, the same low buzzing. The light is green like the northern lights or an alien landing.

Then, through our feet, pre-echoes of bass, low quaking envelopes.

Feds don't know about it yet, Idris says, the party, the one he messaged me about. There's no escort, no helicopters. The redirection point is a derelict pub at the centre of a sprawl of rigs. Jaldi karo he says and we're walking again. The pub has been occupied for a while and a township spans from the old beer garden. There's a car wash and generators and tarps. I remember a pub here years ago, it could have been this one. If I go back far enough, before I kept the names, they become kaleidoscopic, swirling around with nothing to fix them. That's why we do the recitations, the memory maps, to keep them safe.

Phones illuminate the path in front, iridescent slicks of sump oil, greens and blues rising from the black like magpie feathers, like Chanel Black Pearl. I

edge around exhaust pipes in my stilettos, they're getting scuffed but it doesn't matter, I found them discarded on a verge and now they're getting another chance, patent boots like goths wore.

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No Signal. A veil over 4G, a kink in the network.

The pub is there behind plywood hoardings. Fires in barrels, battered caravans. We're drawn into new circles, men who've crossed the continent hidden in trucks, avenues of ruins behind them. Their journeys are cut up, way stations sutured into the joins.

| |Damascus | | >>>>>>>>>> | | Beirut | | >>>>>>>>>> | | Istanbul | | >>>>>>>>>> | |Athens. | |

And I think of the paths he must have taken.

The Shahada, the Syrian revolutionary flag, the three red stars.

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The windows are encased in perforated steel, dots of light teeming in them. We squeeze through stacks of tyres, push through a side door.

He needs to see you, Idris says, you need to open that letter.

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On the occasion of the exhibition:  
**Digital Citizen – The Precarious Subject**  
at BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art  
25 January – 16 June 2019

**Digital Citizen – The Precarious Subject**  
James Bridle / Alan Butler / Laura Grace Ford / Peter Hanmer /  
Daniela Ortiz / Jonas Staal / Kate Stonehill / Petra Szemán / They Are  
Here / Alan Warburton

