

No Man's Land

By

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1 EXT. LONDON. VARIOUS. BEFORE DAWN. 1

MONTAGE:

Opulent towers seize the first light. At their feet, cardboard box homes and sleeping bags sprawl, submerged in lingering night.

In the shadows sits JOE. Scruffy, homeless; perhaps fifty. He's lost in a memory. A small, black SHOEBRUSH wanders between his hands.

The streets' last, lost revellers dissolve with the darkness.

A figure is revealed; JAMINI, a teenager, perhaps; non-caucasian without doubt. A frayed, discoloured BACKPACK hangs from his shoulder.

The city's pulse quickens. Workers take to the streets.

Jamini slips through the crowds, aware of physical space. Avoiding eye contact.

A POLICE SIREN.; he flinches and changes direction, heading away from people; toward solitude.

2 EXT. INDUSTRIAL WASTE GROUND. EARLY MORNING 2

Jamini squeezes through a hole in the high perimeter fence.

In the wide open space stand a few hills of rubble, a small, ramshackle HUT and a SKIP.

He heads for the hut.

3 EXT. HUT. EARLY MORNING 3

It's derelict. The window boarded, moss and damp distort its walls.

He creeps toward it.

The door gives. With care, he enters.

It's dark, save for light leaking through cracks and holes in the walls. He secures the door, pulls a tattered BLANKET from his backpack and sits, wrapped up, listening hard. He can't fight sleep.

4 EXT. SCRAP YARD. EARLY MORNING

4

Joe and LEN stand alone in the muddy scrap yard.

SFX (BACKGROUND): METAL CRUSHED and CUT. LARGE VEHICLE ENGINES REV and RUN.

Len looks a little younger than Joe. He's a business man. Dressed for the scrap yard, but groomed. A neat, short haircut. Trousers tucked in high-laced boots; polished, beneath flecks of mud.

He looks Joe over. He's a wreck.

LEN
How you keeping, Joe?

JOE
Never better. What're you paying for mixed?

LEN
I don't need mixed.

This is a blow. Joe's flustered.

JOE
You always need mixed.

LEN
Not today.

Len's done. Joe pulls at a frayed seam.

JOE
You don't even want to see it? There's a lot.

He can't resist.

LEN
Where?

JOE
Not far.

Now he's heard enough. He walks away. Joe follows, confused.

JOE
There's lots, Len

Len doesn't falter. Joe stops. He fidgets; rubs and tugs at his clothes here and there.

(CONTINUED)

JOE
It's easy money, Len.

Still no response.

JOE
Len!

SFX: Machine gun stutter of HYDRAULIC HAMMER in the distance.

Joe jumps at the sound. The fear overcomes him; twisting the sounds of the working yard into hallucinatory screams and the crack of weaponry.

Joe is hyper alert, danger all around; the battle engulfs him.

Len studies him, then rushes to help.

Fear, insurmountable fear, from every direction, has Joe rooted to the spot; Len is a monster.

LEN (CONT'D)
Where's your brush? Your brush.
Joe.

Joe can't answer. Len searches his pockets. Joe fights him. They fall to the muddy ground.

LEN (CONT'D)
Dammit, Joe. Find your brush.
That's an order. What have you got?

Len manages to pull Joe's shoebrush from his pocket. He holds it so Joe can see it, guiding it into his hands.

Joe knows the brush and begins to focus. He brushes furiously at his nails, his hands. He produces a shiny MEDAL from somewhere and sets about brushing that, intently, hyper-focussing. His whole being is centred on the bristles as they work over the metal.

The twitching subsides, the breathing slows. Joe brushes. Calmer now, but no less focussed.

5 INT. HUT. EARLY MORNING

5

Jamini sleeps in the near blackness of the hut. The weak light quickly grows brighter and moves across the interior.

SFX: LARGE VEHICLE ENGINE GETS LOUDER AND THEN STOPS. VEHICLE DOORS SLAM. MEN'S VOICES.

Jamini twitches, murmuring. The men begin emptying the scrap from the skip into their van.

(CONTINUED)

SFX: METAL BEING DRAGGED FROM THE SKIP AND CRASHING INTO THE BACK OF THE VAN.

Jamini's up in a flash. Back to the wall, alert. Wide eyes seeking information.

SFX: MORE CRASHING METAL. MEN TALKING LOUDLY. GRUNTING.

In the darkness their voices mix with imagined sounds of the JUNGLE, SHOUTS FROM WOMEN AND CHILDREN and SCREAMS OF SUFFERING.

Jamini whispers a sweet lullaby to himself and reality begins to return. He checks his WATCH. A man's watch, expensive at one time. It sits loose on his wrist. He clutches it to his chest.

The van doors are slammed.

SFX: FOOTSTEPS COME UP TO THE DOOR.

Jamini barely breathes. The handle rattles and breaks. A dark patch grows out on his trouser crotch. His eyes are wet.

SFX: FOOTSTEPS HEAD AWAY. DOORS SLAM. THE ENGINE STARTS AND DRIVES OFF.

The lights dim and turn red, before fading away. Silence returns. The lullaby is begun again. Jamini checks the door several times before pulling more clothes from his backpack.

6

EXT. INDUSTRIAL WASTE GROUND. DAY

6

Joe slips through the fence. He sees the open gate and the skip; its tarpaulin hanging loose. He runs to it.

Finding only dregs of the scrap metal remaining, he erupts with fury. Jamini watches from the hut. Taking his back pack, he tries to leave. Joe falls silent. The door creaks. Joe strides toward the noise. Discovered, Jamini makes a break for it.

JOE

Come here!

He's quicker than Joe, but skids in the mud. Joe yanks him back.

JOE

Where is it?

The boy struggles free, but after a few strides stops dead; clutching his wrist and scanning the ground.

Joe has his watch.

(CONTINUED)

JOE

Where d'you get this?

Jamini rushes back to get it, anger clear in his native tongue. His finger tapping his chest - *it's mine*.

Joe shakes his head, points to himself - *it's mine now*.

With a sinister smile, Joe makes the watch vanish from sight. Holding up empty hands; a twisted sideshow.

Jamini explodes, loudly, physically, but comes no closer.

They glare at each other across their no-man's land.

7 EXT. LONDON STREETS. DAY 7

Dwarfed by the city, they each drag a pitiful bundle of scrap through its streets. Jamini trails behind.

8 EXT. BRIDGE OVER CANAL. DAY 8

A narrow bridge crosses the canal in an industrial backwater. They rest and look out from the bridge.

Jamini peers over the edge at the canal below. Joe launches an EMPTY BOTTLE into the filthy water. Jamini watches it float back toward them.

Quickly, he scans the bridge. Finding an EMPTY DRINK CAN, he drops it off the side. Both vessels head under the bridge together. The two drifters look at each other, then rush to the opposite side of the bridge.

The vessels reappear. Jamini's can slightly ahead. He grins in delight. Joe smiles, conceding defeat.

Jamini watches the can float on. Then, excitedly, points to something in the bushes below.

9 EXT. CANAL SIDE. DAY 9

Joe is half-lost in the undergrowth. Jamini stands on the tow path watching, intently.

Joe pulls hard on something unseen. It won't budge. Embarrassed, he gives it everything he's got. It gives, suddenly. A SHOPPING TROLLEY flies out. Joe falls on his arse, much to Jamini's amusement.

Joe is not amused. Jamini struggles to stifle laughter. Joe heaves himself to his feet. Jamini is dying. As Joe pushes himself upright a great fart escapes. Jamini erupts.

Joe is embarrassed and angry, but Jamini's uncontrollable giggling soon forces a smile and then hot-teared laughter.

(CONTINUED)

The laughing subsides and they smile. It gets awkward.

They appraise their find, instead. They're excited, but it's short lived. A wheel is missing. Joe kicks it toward the canal. Jamini stops it.

He loads the scrap carefully into one corner of the trolley. Its weight keeps the trolley level. Now it rolls. Jamini stands back, very pleased with himself.

Joe's impressed. He goes to ruffle the boys's hair. Jamini recoils, violently, smacking the hand away.

JOE

Sorry! Sorry. I just...I'm sorry.

Exposed and agitated, Jamini strides off along the tow path. Joe watches him, a moment. Then he follows, struggling with the trolley on the uneven ground.

10

EXT. BIG, EMPTY CAR PARK. DAY

10

The car park of a derelict superstore. Mesmerising in its vacancy.

Joe pushes Jamini in the trolley; as fast as he can. They shout and laugh.

Jamini uses a STICK as a rifle. Sporadically shooting imagined enemies all around them.

Joe stops, out of breath. Jamini continues firing. He jumps down from the trolley and fires more. Joe watches, bemused.

Jamini talks aggressively in his mother tongue to imaginary people on the ground. He shouts, now, and kicks at them, hitting them with his gun. Now he takes aim.

Joe hurries over to him. Jamini turns suddenly at the sound, glaring down the barrel.

Joe freezes, speechless.

Jamini's trance breaks. He's a child again.

He drops the gun like it's hot, ashamed. Joe twitches; a little rub at the seams of his clothes.

Avoiding Joe's eye Jamini gestures at the trolley. It's the old soldier's turn.