

NIEMANDSLAND

no. I



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Selfpublished

Responsive

Jonas von der Beutelratte was thrown onto this planet in the late nineties. Since then, he has been writing about night shifts, isolation an people slowly slipping out of reality. He avoids fixed structures and prefers underpasses, smoke-filled bars and half-empty train stations.



Portrait of the Author

Erfurt

2026



Dedicated to those whose disappearance went unnoticed.
For the night shift.

»How much can a person endure before they go under?«

-Dockworker

These are people who dwell between extremes. People who don't fit into society. The dock worker who sets out at night. The cleaning woman who tidies the office in the early morning. The single mother who brings her children to school and then goes about a regular working life. They are unseen guests in the lives of others. Their work is sabotaged, unpaid, or discarded. The lives of these outsiders play out in pubs, old factories, or prefab apartment blocks.

Precisely where cigarettes smoke lurks, where old masonry offers shelter and refuge, and empty train stations swallow individuals whole – that is where the true life of ordinary people waits. Niemandsland isn't a place where one lingers. It resembles the condition of a generation that doesn't sleep, doesn't eat, and merely vegetates.

In this first issue we focus on people at the margins, social invisibility, restlessness, and isolation within industrial emptiness. The figures drift through cities, sit in pubs, work themselves hollow, lose themselves in routines, and are slowly overlooked.

The magazine moves between industrial zones, train stations, smoke-filled rooms, empty streets, and dreary flats. Workers, junkies, the failed, the sleepless, and outsiders appear again and again – less as heroes than as people who somehow keep on existing. Thematically the magazine circles around alienation, societal erosion, inner exhaustion, and the feeling of never truly arriving anywhere. As a result many of the texts read like fragments, observations, interior monologues, or dispatches from Niemandsland.

NIEMANDSLAND no. I is a literary archive of fragments about people who live in the shadow of the city and slowly disappear from social perception.





THE GLOOMY DOCKWORKER

Life played out in the pub around the corner; there he lingered, drank his beer, and chatted with the barmaid who had given him a lift home just the previous evening in her grey estate car, parking him in front of his front door — because after the end of her shift he had already been so completely cheered by the great quantity of beer he had ordered over the hours and tipped down his parched throat that he could barely keep himself on his feet inside her car, where he had been sick, and so that evening she preferred not to let him wander through the streets alone as she usually did, staggering through the city centre back to his apartment, bellowing and hollering loudly in his stupor so that he must have felt like the king of all no man's land.

And now there he sat again in front of her at the bar, already with his fourth beer before him, and still in no mood to talk to her. He preferred to stare deep into his half-empty glass and say nothing.

Even his colleague, who had come into the pub late in the evening to unwind from the hard day at the docks with one or two beers after work, could not lift his mood that night — which was why the colleague moved on to the other lads, to let the evening fade out cheerfully at their table. He had no patience whatsoever for the sourpuss that evening. And so an hour later he was still sitting at the table with the others, enjoying himself in good company, playing a little with the cards one of them always carried, keeping a comfortable distance from the colleague at the bar. The barmaid had just refilled the glum-looking gentleman's sixth beer when the group at the back table got up and said their goodbyes, filing out of the pub to march off towards home.

In the end, that evening too, he sat alone at the bar, drained the last of his eighth beer, climbed down from the stool on which he had spent the remainder of the night, then walked out through the door and into the cold night, making his way completely alone through the foggy alleyways towards the city centre, taking the side street back to his tiny apartment, to spend the remaining hours until the start of his shift lying on his mattress, hoping his rotten mood would sort itself out for the better on its own. The following evening he was nowhere to be found at the pub; he didn't show his face there for several days after that either,

preferring instead to spend his time in front of the box, watching the repeat broadcasts of the last three international matches that were running in the evening schedule, and getting annoyed again and again about the penalty that one of the players had blazed wide in the very last minute. The other two matches hadn't gone in his favour either: the referee had blown a striker off the pitch just before half-time after the man had stamped viciously into an opponent's calf once again, after being provoked by him throughout the entire match, so that the team played the second half a man down and lost 1-3. In the last game the defender had received a red card, and when the referee disallowed the goal that could have brought his team the hoped-for equaliser, they too lost the match in the final third, conceding three further goals.

When he had taken his seat at the bar again and ordered a cold beer, the barmaid too seemed visibly relieved to see him well and in the pub around the corner, greeting him with a freshly poured pint that she drew at her own expense. His mood had visibly relaxed, and so that evening he chatted with her again, cheerful and noticeably brightened, told her about his day down at the docks, still grumbling about the last three lost matches he had watched — and that evening, too, after her shift ended she took him along in her grey estate car and parked him as she had done for weeks and months before, whenever he had no longer been master of all his senses, when he was so thoroughly drunk he could barely string together a coherent sentence, let alone stand on both feet — she parked him in front of his door, wished him a restful and peaceful night, and then drove down the driveway to pull out onto the main road and head for home.

Everyday life crept in through the back door .
The siren howled through the night .

THE SMOKER

It happened on a rainy day in August, when she accompanied the old man to the ambulance and wished him all the best in the entrance hall of the hospital. Just hours earlier he had been sitting in his flat, drawing on a cigarette; the coughing had been a nuisance to him for some time, yet he could not free himself from the tobacco. Back in his youth, when the lads had just reached the age at which they grow into young men, he had already been chewing on his old man's pipe tobacco — and since then the tobacco had never let him go. Even during his years of service under arms he smoked; back then more to calm his nerves, after standing in the field and having to watch as the bombs struck with full force alongside him, tearing his comrades apart in the air and severing all their limbs. Lord, those were times. Even then he could not renounce tobacco; the tin of cigarettes had been his faithful companion.

When he drew on a cigarette with the other men during breaks — after being deployed at the coal-fired power plant to strip the coal — he didn't think about when he could finally go home, where his wife was waiting with their little boy and had dinner ready. In those times the taste of tobacco and the cigarettes were everything that brought him pleasure.

Now he sat, aged by years, alone in the armchair in front of the television, puffing contentedly on his last smoke. On the television, as she did every day, the attractive weather presenter was talking to him; and when that wretched cough began again he could barely get any air, and so he could only free himself from the grip of the armchair with a forceful shove, reaching for the receiver to contact the emergency services. By the time someone finally answered, he was already lying on the floor, rattling hard for air.

When the ambulance service arrived at his front door they stormed the house, where the elderly gentleman lay on the floor and was no longer conscious. She laid his heavy head on her warm thighs, held him in her arms while she intubated him, until the defibrillator was done jolting his body with electric shocks. When his old heart began to beat again and he slowly regained consciousness, she spoke encouraging words to him, then hoisted him with her colleagues onto the stretcher to place him in the vehicle. He had lived a truly good life, he thought

to himself, as together they drove along the main road in the direction of the nearest hospital.



The city kept humming quietly to itself.

No one noticed her disappearance.
The night shift had already begun.

OUT OF ORDER

He too had been snapped at while standing in the hall. An hour ago he had still been at the machine, loading packages onto the pallets as fast as possible — a sheer mountain of packages. New ones rushed along the conveyor belt every day. Now the damned thing had gone silent. Didn't move an inch. No jolt. No forward. In the great hall a nervous bustle had broken out. The boss rose from his padded chair, stomped down the spiral staircase, and kept close to the shift supervisor. He didn't know either why the belt had stopped. Of all days — today. They were running behind. The thing had given out. With every passing minute it swallowed more money. He ran frantically to the Italian worker. Mumbled. The man didn't understand him. Shouted. Told him to stop working. The belt stood still. The man reached undeterred for the next package and hoisted it onto the pallet as he had the others. The boss rolled his eyes. Went over to the group of men who were waiting, wanting to carry on with the everyday madness that spread over their heads afresh each day. Then he shouted at him too. They accused everyone of having deliberately blocked the belt. The Portuguese worker wouldn't stand for that. He snapped back: he had nothing to do with it. The Polish colleague too rejected all blame. The boss turned to the two mechanics. Something had become wedged in the gearbox. The spool had worked loose from its mounting, bringing the entire belt to a standstill. The repair took the men only a few minutes. Once it was running, the everyday routine returned to the great hall. He stood at the machine again like all the others on his shift, hoisting packages onto pallets. The forklift took them to the packaging machine, where a colleague stood and wrapped the cardboard boxes in film. Then he brought them to the loading doors, where late in the evening the drivers waited with their vehicles, loading the heavy pallets up across the flatbed and into the cargo hold. Even now there were still two hours until the end of the shift. The boss didn't show his face. The belt was running again. So they ran again too.

The tiredness remained.



Literature doesn't have to comfort.

It's allowed to decay.

BOREDOM

He was bored, did nothing, for nothing could fight his boredom. Everything felt equally dull to him. He hated this sleepy backwater that called itself a city; he just wanted to get outside, far away. To forget everything and turn to new things. The lethargy was unbearable, and so he packed his things and left the flat in hurried steps. In company he felt like dying. Everything had lost its appeal; he felt bloated and sluggish. Nothing gave him pleasure anymore; on the verge of leaving everything behind, he got on a bus and left the city. It was a cold day in September when he decided to put the city behind him. But restless as he was, he only drifted through the city centre, searching for real life but not finding it. He drank himself cheerful, but even that didn't satisfy him. He had barely any possessions left, for everything seemed dreary and bleak. Even flagellating himself didn't make him look around for an exciting life. He could eat whatever he wanted — it didn't taste of anything; the beer was bitter; even the cigarette had lost its flavour. To exist in such wretchedness was punishment enough. He was missing something, but he didn't know what exactly. And so, for the thousandth time, he resolved to look elsewhere, to leave the country and start over somewhere. He hated his restlessness, to which he seemed bound. He despised the lethargy that wound itself around him. He was no part of the community — merely a good-for-nothing who had no real home. His homeland was a dreary place to which he felt no connection whatsoever. Money had become an end in itself, for love or a home full of goodwill and comfort was not something he could buy. Consuming hard drugs was all that still gave him pleasure, before he occupied himself otherwise out of sheer boredom. All contact with former colleagues or friends had long since gone cold. He had relinquished all expectations of himself, was thoroughly numbed and psychologically battered. Now, he thought, his life would have gone better if he had been dead. But life wouldn't let him go; instead it continued to gnaw at his gaunt thighs, bringing him nothing but pain and grief.

LIMESTONE

He loathed no man's land. How he loathed no man's land. He was wearing a large coat. When he broke through the door. Outside it was not raining. To his displeasure, it was not raining. Whenever he had his coat with him, it didn't rain. And when he forgot it, it rained. He was on his way to the library when the sun tore through the clouds. In the park, couples were strolling with dogs. They barked at the sight of him. He walked past figures made of stone. People walked along past them and they paid no attention. How he loathed these people. Thinking was difficult when the sun shone down on you. He walked on. Always one step after the next. A pigeon didn't look back. His shirt was sweating. He didn't let himself be stopped. Past the trees. He searched for shade. But found none. The sun was waiting everywhere. He ran. It was no use. His body trembled. He was falling apart. The ground was slippery. The shoes he had bought a year ago were getting wet. And the shirt stuck to him. How he loathed the sun. He reached the stop. There he boarded the train. And rode towards the city centre. There was no free seat. An elderly lady looked grimly. The elderly gentleman beside her was reading the newspaper. He walked through the carriage. Everywhere, creatures with monkey heads. Wherever he looked, their gaze pursued him in all directions. He collided with a woman. She turned around and bellowed: "Don't you have eyes in your head!" The apology didn't go down well with her. She swung around and grabbed her brat, vanishing from the train carriage cursing. He reached for the receiver. Nobody. An old woman bristled up. Whether he wasn't mistaken. He was never mistaken. He left the carriage. He loathed this carriage. His coat over his arm. The sun blazed through the corridors.

Monkey heads again, following him. He paid them no mind. The sweat ran out of his shirt. He walked on undeterred. But the more creatures surrounded him, the more their stares intimidated him. He ran and ran. The carriage grew larger. He lost himself among the apes. Something was blocked. Something was no longer there. Perhaps the limestone. No — it was in the coat pocket. The stone figures followed. They crept silently behind him. Steps grew dull. Voices quieter. Until it echoed across the entire corridor. They called him a traitor. His words

displeased them. He ran, leapt from the carriage. Words without addressees. In the darkness he dug his grave. Turned up the earth. Sat down and disappeared. Morning broke. Only the limestone remained. It glittered in the sunlight. Orange flashed through. In the field, poppies bloomed.




The pub around the corner stayed open longer than hope .

The smoke hung heavy beneath the ceiling .

No one asked where he came from .

FRAGMENT I

I write. Without pause. I am trapped within myself. No answer. No one speaks. Only the barking in the thicket. I destroy letters. The fragment catches fire. A firestorm sweeps across the desk. Holes. I leave the flat. A bridge to what once was. It vanishes. The letters dance around. I dissect their meaning. Take the pen and cross out. Stroke. Stroke. Stroke. I have never been so mistaken. The words make no sense. They fall apart. The arrangement is confused. Sometimes I think the dogs are waiting for me. They growl at the slightest movement. They follow me. Perhaps I'm only imagining that.



Too late. The cold is in the room. I look around. Outside the dogs are waiting. Their jowls tear at my conscience. I have never been mistaken. In the past I had to force myself to read. Today the wolf howls. I write. He howls. I smash sentences. He bares his teeth. Until nothing but fragments remain. From the fragments I form new sentences. Sentences without sense. Perhaps there was never a form to begin

with. I sit up. Watch the letters tumble. They fall out of the space I squeeze them into. Too heavy. Too much. Too extreme.

Some things one should not lay bare. Some things should remain locked away. I harbour the desire to hurl myself into the vortex. The wolves howl. I lose myself in thoughts. Thoughts that seem unspeakable to me. Perhaps there was never more. Never more in my head. Speaking of heads — overfull with thoughts. I look out the window. Another thought comes flying in. Emptiness in the stream of thought. Writing is an activity. Or perhaps not. Writing is a burden. Does that carry it better? He who writes remains. I do not write. I dismantle language. Cut words apart. Put them back together and thereby remain distant from myself. The wolves tear me apart. They tolerate no excuses.

Everything I have ever begun has been extinguished. Just as the words on the paper fade. Did I write that? I don't recall having set that down on paper. Everything I did dissolved. Just like the letters I tore out. I promised them another life. Nothing of that remains. Sometimes I stop and look more closely. Then I see the mistake. It lies buried deep within myself.

Some things one should not write down. The need is great. I rip the paper apart. The words fall onto the table. They have piled up. From the mountain of words I form new sentences. I write them down. Without fear. Perhaps this is where a new day begins. A different time. A different life. I remain faithful to the fragments. They reflect me. My innermost being in ruins. Not present. If I could, I would tear out my heart. The pain of my incapacity remains. Something is wearing away at me. Something refuses to stay hidden. It tears at me and wants me to stop. The voice loud. The will heavy. The writing a burden. I look up, tormented. It is already noon. I write. Still. The dogs chase me through the thicket. I doubt myself. The wolf howls. Again and again. If only the words weren't so unwieldy. The wolf growls. I run. Dogs behind me.

Once I asked myself what would become of me. The voice whispered: nothing. I remained a single piece. remember putting it onto the page. I tear the paper apart. The words fall onto the table. They pile up. From the mountain



The streetlights hummed softly to themselves.

The Loose Thoughts of a Day Labourer

The roaring heat was taking a real toll on him. Having spent the last hour scraping pigeon droppings off the street, sweat was now running down him in streams. The sun at this hour was once again merciless, beating down on him with full force. Not only did it stink of excrement — he also knew that in half an hour his shift supervisor would drive him to the next stop in that stuffy Audi A1 of his, sitting in which the air conditioning didn't work and whose passenger door was stuck, and then, after a brief briefing, standing in front of the next stop, scraping the already pitilessly encrusted pigeon droppings from the pavement. And this was now to be his occupation for a full six hours, to be grateful that he had found any halfway decent job at all and was being paid at a perversely low rate.

While he scraped away and disposed of the whitish-blue filth into the rubbish bag beside him, the old man watched him at his work with a gloating grin, perched on the nearest park bench on the other side of the street, biting contentedly into his apple. That one had long since left all this misery behind him, the old sod, he thought to himself, and scraped on. The sweat ran from his brow, dripped slowly into his right eye so that it really stung when he blinked, while he tried with the excrement-reeking sleeve of his overalls to wipe away his tears, with the biting stench of pigeon droppings in his nostrils, sticking to his gloves as well — and every single time, he cursed himself for having, against all expectations, never managed to get himself properly trained.

The shift never truly ended.
Some people don't disappear.
They are simply overlooked.

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It belongs to no one.

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outside fixed structures

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