

Chapter Seven

I'll tell you now about the strangest and oddest and best and worst night of my life: about the time I dropped five tabs of acid at a rave in an old church in London after me and Tim had been out boozing in Soho. I got them off some dreadlocked white crusty; he had them in his shoe. I think I paid him twelve pounds. I had wanted more but he assured me five would be plenty. I'd taken acid once or twice before but nothing had really happened. Well this time, it did.

First off, I freaked, and Tim had to lead me by the hand to lay me down by some wall where I watched my arm leave a trail of colours in the air and listened to him and his girlfriend talk in backwards echoes and say wonderful things about me. And then we went back to his, and I degenerated into being five years old, spitting biscuits all over him and following him into the toilet while he pissed to bump him and make him pee all over the floor, the seat, his shoes. Three thirty in the morning this was not the kind of thing he wanted to be dealing with. Him and his girlfriend went to bed and left me alone in the living room. And then I freaked again.

I felt so absolutely on my own. I got on the telephone and tried to call somebody. I tried to call Tim but he was engaged. I tried to call my girlfriend but I couldn't remember the number; the only person I could get hold of was some unfeeling woman who kept on saying, over and over, "please replace the handset and try again."

"I'm trying to call my friends!" I protested. But she wouldn't listen.

Eventually I did get through to someone: my buddy Brent's sleeping dad. He was no use either.

I thought I'd better go and look for somebody.

I jumped out of the window.

And running then, barefoot and only in my boxers through the pre-dawn streets of Wembley, flashing fire from the palms of my hands, tearing the paint from cars, smashing windows and gutting buildings with my newfound superpower. And in the distance: Wembley Stadium. And inside it: my beloved Everton. Kevin Ratcliffe and Doug Mountfield: they would make everything all right. I headed for it. I negotiated lava; a million biting spiders; a squadron of fiendish nuns. The sun came out and roasted my skin.

"It's too hot!" I cried. "Colder, colder!" And it began to fade and cool – "that's nice, that's nice" – only to keep growing colder and colder and colder, until it was snow and ice and the hairs on my arms froze solid and I was shivering to death.

"Too cold!" I screamed, and back again the heat comes – "that's nice, that's nice" – until that scorching, melting sun is frizzing my hair, my eyes two poached eggs, my flesh afire. "Too hot," I say, and on, and on, and on.

I make Wembley and suddenly it all becomes clear: I have created everything. All things, I see, are my doing, and I put myself there among them, and told myself to forget it, so I could have a look around and enjoy. I marvel: it's amazing! And all the languages in the world, and Tottenham Hotspur, and roses and cats and trees: I made them all. I'm so very clever, I think. I can't believe I've done it. But it all makes perfect sense.

Then I think I'll need to jump into Wembley, what with the doors being locked – and then I'm a thousand feet tall and the map of the country is spread out beneath me and I think, to hell with this, I'll just run to Leeds, my giant's legs taking enormous and glorious strides over the green, green hills. But then something happens and my mind starts to collapse in on itself, its million billion pieces becoming a billion, and then a million – or, more precisely, one million and forty-eight thousand, five hundred and seventy-six – and down and down like cells undividing until my mind is sixty-four, thirty-two...four, two, one.

I can't see anything. I've watched all this happen from the inside and now it's just a black void and a single solitary dot. And then the dot is gone and I am no more.

I wake up later in an ambulance, in the middle of an interrogation from a nurse: she wants to know my name, my address, my date of birth. I tell her I can't remember and every time I fail thorns sprout from her cracked face and she glares at me and I cower.

"Please," I beg, "I honestly can't remember. Just let me breathe out; I really want to breathe out." I haven't exhaled in hours.

They take me to the hospital – it's on a ship somewhere in the Caribbean floating gently upon the waves. I lie in my bed and sultry sexy funk music fills the room, ooze running down the walls, and the nuts and bolts on the bed and in the radiators turn in their sockets, making love, and oozing too. The whole room is swaying and rocking with the music, and everything is sex. Out in the corridors I hear my friends laughing about me and what a card I am. The doctors and the nurses are laughing too. They all think I'm amazing.

Later, they dress me in a shirt that smells of curry and a pair of trousers at least eight inches too big. They tie up the waist with a shoelace and send me on my way, barefoot. My friends aren't there in the corridor waiting for me. They've disappeared, it seems.

I walk then through the deserted Sunday morning hospital and in a room filled with empty chairs I pick up the phone.

Tim's girlfriend answers.

"Hello," I say, "it's Rory." I laugh and smile at the thought of myself, at my predicament, at the comic japes that are sure to have amused them.

"Rory?" she says, "what are you talking about? You're right here."

"What?"

"Your body's still here. You died last night. You're right here."

I drop the phone and look around me. The hospital is empty and it's true, I'm dead. I run and run and soon I'm outside and walking in the bright Caribbean sunshine. All around me, covering everything, a red and green net of dots joined together by thin lines. It's beautiful. I'm smiling. And even though I'm dead, everything's okay. I bounce along and the Jamaicans laugh and smile right there with me, and we're all dead together on this sunny North London morn.