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There come a time, by and by, when I feared we was not going to get to London at all.

The going had been slow all the way along. On our best day, we made five miles by the drudge's reckoning. And that wasn't five miles straight. It was five miles of trudging this way and that, stopping whenever the sun come out or even threatened to. Five miles of ducking for cover if something moved, watching where our feet come down in case of mole snakes or melt-bugs, and not ever saying a word in case the sound brung something up out of the ground or down out of the sky to pick us off. It was not easy on the nerves, and on a long march your nerves work as hard as your feet do. Harder, even.

We had some supplies with us – biscuit and oat mash and jerky – but mostly we et what we caught. With Winter coming on, there was some days when that was nothing at all.

There was three of us, or else there was four, depending how you counted. Five, at the most.

There was me, Koli Faceless. I put myself first on account of it's me that's writing this, not for no vaunting reason for there is not much I got to vaunt. My name tells you what my fortunes

was at that time: cast out of my village, which was Mythen Rood in the Calder Valley, with my name stripped off of me and nothing left to do now but walk the world until the world swallowed me down and et me.

Then there was Ursala-from-Elsewhere, who you might call a healer except that healing was the smallest part of what she did. In the world that was lost, she would of been called a scientist. She used to live in a place called Duglas, where there was lots of people like her that was keeping safe the knowledge of the before-times. But by and by they was attacked by some terrible enemy, and Ursala believed she was the onliest one from Duglas that was left.

And there was Cup, a girl we rescued from the shunned men of Calder Valley. Well, rescued or caught, according to which eye you shut when you looked at it. She was not that happy to be with us anyway, though we did not mean no harm by taking her. I guess we never do though, when harm is what we're working.

I'm putting the three of us together because we're what you would of seen if you was looking at us, say from the top of a hill or from the broke-off stump of some building somewhere, as we made our way along. Also you would of seen another thing walking alongside of us – a big lump of shiny metal that went on four legs and looked kind of like a horse with no head on its shoulders. And like a horse it did the carrying for us, being roped about so high and so heavy with sacks and packs and baggages that the big gun builded into its back could hardly be seen from some directions. This was the drudge, and it was not alive. It was tech of the old times, belonging to Ursala and doing only and always what Ursala said it had got to do.

And then there was one more of us, who you would not of seen at all. Nobody got to see Monono Aware, excepting me, though she was as alive as any of us. As real as any of us. Monono was tech too, like the drudge, but also she was a person. She was like a person living inside a piece of tech called the

DreamSleeve, which played music and could sometimes make big, loud bells go off inside your ears. It's hard to explain and I do not mean to try – or at least not right here and now. You will just have to bear with me a while if you want to make any sense out of it.