

The End

Numbers matter. I was on the 17th floor looking out the window of my apartment. Clouds were beginning to cluster around the skyscrapers in the distance. Then I realized that they weren't clouds, but smoke. And then, not smoke, but tongues of fire rising from the skyscrapers. The rooftops were being lit one by one, like wicks on a candle.

I raced down to the 11th floor and knocked on your door. There was no answer. I knocked again. And again.

"Let me in!" I shouted.

But there was no reply.

You always kept your door locked, but I tried the handle anyway. To my surprise, it turned easily. The door opened.

I walked inside. You weren't in the living room, but in the bathroom, making up your face. I could see your reflection in the mirror.

"I knocked!" I cried. "Didn't you hear me?"

You smiled, not to me but to the mirror.

"Of course I heard you."

"Then why didn't you answer?"

"You are not important to me," you said.

"That's not the issue right now," I replied.

You laughed and turned to look at me, but only for a moment.

"I mean it," I said. "It's the end. It really is the end."

"Of course, it is," you replied. "That is why I'm leaving."

"You don't understand. You mustn't go."

"And why not?"

"I need you."

You laughed again. "It is not my purpose in life to fulfill your needs."

"Then where are you going?"

"I haven't the slightest idea."

"You have no destination?"

"Ha!" you exclaimed, not laughing this time. "How can you travel to a place you already are?"

"Then why must you leave?"

You did not answer. You got up, walked from the bathroom to the living room, fetched your coat from the hook, put it on, opened the door, and left, locking the door behind you.

I ran after you. When I turned the handle, the door would not open. There was no way to unlock it from the inside. I was imprisoned inside your room.

I raced to the window and looked out. The skyscrapers were in flames. Smoke was billowing from the windows. I realized then that it was only a matter of time. Numbers cease to exist if we stop thinking about them. How many numbers were left?

The end does not always come at the end. Sometimes it comes at the beginning and sometimes in the middle. Even when it comes at the end, where it's supposed to be, that doesn't mean it's the end. It may just as well be the beginning. We never know the end when it comes. Or, for that matter, what might happen after we have reached it.

I looked out the window one last time.

Why not here? Why not now?