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You'll Amount to Nothing in Life Son

by Stuart Carruthers

I landed in London on a wintry autumn evening, with eighteen years packed into a small holdall and an envelope full of names I didn't know.

Stepping off the bus into this new world, it instantly felt different.

Fear of the unknown mixed with excitement. I thought I was going to get sick.

Ear deafening sounds and exotic smells messed up my brain. I couldn't stop staring at the different types of faces that passed me by. I was for the first time surrounded by people who didn't speak my language or look like me. They spoke with words that excited me.

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"Those first few months were a blur."

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It was the evening rush hour.

Buildings of epic size and grandeur draped in the flags we had grown up to hate. It was too much to take in.

I had no idea of the time.

It didn't seem to matter what street or in what direction I was walking in. It was overwhelming. I remember everyone appeared to be in a hurry. No one said hello or excuse me as they jostled for space on the crowded pavements.

At one point I stood in an abandoned shop doorway and just watched this crazy scene flow past at breakneck speed. It wasn't what I expected.

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“Why do you want to know about my past?”

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Looking up to the sky I was amazed that I couldn't see the night sky. The bright lights of the city had placed a blanket under the stars. It was such a surreal thing to see for someone used to counting the stars every night.

I remember asking an old man in a velvet black coat and hat the directions towards your house, foolishly thinking everyone knew everyone, just like at home. He laughed. We both laughed.

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“The last time I saw him, he didn't look well, Violet said he'd been to see the doctor.”

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The underground.

The old man said it was the quickest way.

After I'd shown him the note within the envelope, he took a red pen from his inside coat pocket and scribbled a sketch at the bottom of the page.

I could sense they knew I was lost as soon as I walked into the carriage.

The rush of warm air was a welcome surprise. Part of me was terrified at being so deep underground. What if something happened? Who would tell her I was gone?

I'd never climbed or seen so many stairs.

Emerging onto a deserted street that I would soon call home, directly ahead the distant hum of laughter emerged from the Red Lion. It was exactly as she had described it.

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“If I knew then what I know now, do you think I would have taken that path?”