

THE STREETS OF LONDON

by

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Inspired by the song "Streets of London" by Ralph McTell

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FADE IN:

INT. LONDON SUBWAY TUNNEL

Darkness presses in. Light is seeping around a bend, dimly illuminating the dusty black cables along the walls and reflecting off the worn tops of the rails. A growing glow, announces a SUBWAY TRAIN rushing towards us from around the bend, wheels hissing and ringing. It thunders past us.

INT. LONDON SUBWAY CAR LATE AFTERNOON

The SUBWAY CAR is half empty, the commuters in their own worlds at the end of another long day. The air is full of the hiss of metal wheels ringing against the rails, and the underlying rumble. Outside is the flowing black of the London Underground. The PASSENGERS sway in unison with the motion of the car.

KAREN (O.S.)
(Tired)

If it was meant to be, it will be.

We focus on a young couple obviously on their way home after work. KAREN is a young professional worker. She looks tired and has her face in her hands. Her BACK PACK is beside her feet. Nearby NATHAN is standing, holding onto the HANDRAIL STRAPS, BACK PACK slung over one shoulder. He is also a young professional, and is looking relaxed, but thoughtful.

NATHAN

Don't be like that.

Nathan holds tight to his hand strap as the car lurches around a bend, wheels squealing.

NATHAN

You'll find another. There's
several billion more out there.

KAREN

That just makes it harder! How am I
ever going to find the one among
several billion?
And there's my job too.

NATHAN

The job....
The timing on that couldn't have
been worse
... and they treated you pretty
unfairly too.

KAREN

(Looks up at Nathan. She is despairing, almost in tears.)

Here I am on the scrap heap.
There's nothing I can do. There's
no way up.
Only down.

NATHAN

Well what would you like to do?

KAREN

I don't know.
(slumps into her seat.)

NATHAN

No up? Only down?
You have sideways. Look at it this
way, you're free. No ties. You can
do anything you like.

Karen continues to stare despondantly at the floor.

NATHAN

Do you like being here?

Nathan waits a beat, but Karen does not respond.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

From what I understand, you only
came here because Keith got a job
here.

Karen nods very slightly, still looking at floor.

NATHAN

See. You have an opportunity to
reinvent yourself. Start afresh
somewhere else. Go somewhere you
would like. You never know, you
might meet someone else out there
too ... possibly ... I think there
are a few people who live outside
of London.

Nathan grins.

NATHAN

Beyond Chelmsford even!

Chin in hand Karen rolls a sideways glance Nathan's way. She has a slight smirk on her lips.

KAREN

You can be such a noodle sometimes.

NATHAN

I'm sorry.

(looks sheepish)

You're not in as bad a position as
you think is all I'm saying.

Karen straightens and looks at Nathan.

KAREN

Easy for you to say. You have a
job at least.

NATHAN

Sure. But I know I have good
skills I can take with me to other
jobs if I decide that my boss is
treating me like shit. And you
have the same skills.
We studied together didn't we?
Didn't you beat me on exam results
every single time?

Karen looks away with a slight nod.

NATHAN

Yeah you always made sure I knew
too.

The car lurches and Nathan clings to the strap.

NATHAN

Your boss was a complete asshole.
A bully. You're better off out of
there.
Every time I saw you I could see
the stress it was causing you. Not
all jobs are like that.
You'll find yourself a good one but
take time for yourself. Have a
think about what you'd like.

Karen starts looking downcast again, a gloom gathering over
her.

KAREN

I don't know.

Nathan looked at Karen's downcast head, with a concerned
look softening his eyes. The train begins to slow and
suddenly the car is much lighter as they pull into a
BRIGHTLY LIT STATION.

NATHAN

I have an idea.

Nathan ducks down so he can see through the smeared window.

NATHAN
Kentish Town. We'll jump out at
the next stop, yeah?

KAREN
But...

NATHAN
(chiding)
Uh ahh! You're coming with me.

KAREN
I just want to go home and be
miserable listening to sad songs
from my phone.

NATHAN
(as if Karen hadn't
spoken)
And I'm going to show you things
that will make you change your
mind.

As the flowing darkness engulfs them once again, they travel in silence; Karen in her own lonely universe, Nathan an enigmatic smile on his lips as he gazes at the cable ways and openings that flashed past on the other side of their reflection.

BEGIN MONTAGE:

INT. LONDON SUBWAY TUNNEL

The train rushes towards us out of the darkness, and passes us by with a steely hiss, and ringing of wheels.

INT. LONDON SUBWAY CAR LATE AFTERNOON

We look down the length of the car at the passengers swaying with the motion of the train. Everybody in their own world.

Nathan hanging onto the hand strap, and gazing into nothing.

INT. CAMPDEN TOWN SUBWAY STATION

The train slows, entering the station. There are a moderate number of people waiting to get on.

END MONTAGE:

INT. LONDON SUBWAY CAR LATE AFTERNOON

Nathan glances out of the window.

NATHAN
Here we go. Camden Town.

Nathan reaches down and draws Karen reluctantly to her feet.

NATHAN
Got your stuff?

Karen nods imperceptibly, and shrugs her pack straps into a more comfortable position.

INT. CAMPDEN TOWN SUBWAY STATION

Nathan and Karen step off the train into the brightly lit CAMPDEN TOWN SUBWAY STATION. Karen in tow, they ascend to the colours of a late afternoon and the lingering smell of Indian spices and over-ripe fruit. The sudden chill catches them off guard after the cloying warmth of the Underground.

EXT. CAMPDEN HIGH STREET

The sidewalk is busy, but not overcrowded. The lights from the surrounding TAKEAWAYS and shops cast an inviting warmth to the surrounds as the shadows lengthen.

NATHAN
Have you eaten?

KAREN
No I was just going to have a sandwich or something when I got home.

NATHAN
Great! Let's grab something here?

Nathan studies the range of takeaways rubbing shoulders with tattoo parlours, second hand bookshops and clothing stores. His practiced eye picks out a promising looking KEBAB STALL.

NATHAN
Kebab? My shout.

INT. CAMPDEN TOWN KEBAB STALL

The kebab stall is small, but tidy. There is a rotisserie and hot plate sizzling with some onions and garlic. Over the counter is an illuminated MENU DISPLAY of the meals on offer. The KEBAB CHEF is parked against the bench browsing his SMARTPHONE.

The Kebab chef looks up from his smartphone as Nathan and Karen enter, their entry announced by the jingle of a BELL.

KEBAB CHEF
Evening boss. What'll it be?

NATHAN
The CHICKEN DONER looks pretty good to me thanks.

Nathan turns to Karen who is studying the MENU BOARD.

KAREN

Oh. Ahhh... An ADANA ISKENDER for me please.

KEBAB CHEF

Is that to have here or take away?

NATHAN

Takeaway thanks.

The kebab chef corrals the two meals together with practiced ease. While he is doing this, Nathan chats with Karen.

NATHAN

We'll take them over to the market.
It should be easy to find somewhere
near the lock to sit.

BEGIN MONTAGE:

INT. CAMPDEN TOWN KEBAB STALL

The kebab chef hands the two meals to Nathan and Karen. They smile and say thanks, before heading for the door.

EXT. CAMPDEN HIGH STREET

Karen and Nathan make their way towards the CAMPDEN MARKET carrying their meals.

END MONTAGE:

EXT. CAMPDEN MARKET SEATING NEAR CANAL

The Market is empty. Where the day had been full of movement, colour, and enticing smells of ethnic food stalls, now the stalls were packed away, leaving a dreary dullness in its place. The only movement is a slight breeze toying with rubbish and faded banners, and an OLD MAN in a shabby coat kicking at the papers as they blow past him. From their seat at a PICNIC TABLE nearby, Nathan and Karen watch the old man as he slowly ambles away, eyes downcast, and the remains of a crumpled newspaper in his hands.

NATHAN

I think you have a wee way to go
yet

KAREN

To?
(puzzled)

NATHAN

Before you end up like him.
Directionless. Lost. Alone.

KAREN

I guess.

NATHAN
You've got friends for a start,
yeah?

KAREN
Only a couple though.

Karen puts down her PLASTIC FORK and pushes the unfinished meal towards Nathan.

KAREN
That was a big Iskender. Do you
have any space left?

NATHAN
You know me. Of course I do. I'll
borrow your fork though.

Nathan starts into the remains of Karen's meal with evident enjoyment.

NATHAN
Mmmm good choice.

Overhead an early evening BRITISH RAIL TRAIN bound for Richmond clatters and clangs past. Nathan waits for the noise to recede.

NATHAN
They say that when a woman settles
down with a man, the man gains a
best friend, and the woman loses
all hers. It's a bit harsh, but
there is some truth in it. Now
that you are single and free, you
can gather up a new group of good
friends.

KAREN
How do I do that? I don't know
anybody.

NATHAN
(enigmatic smile returns)
We'll see.

CUT TO:

EXT: REGENT'S CANAL TOWPATH

Karen and Nathan are walking along REGENTS CANAL TOWPATH. They are ambling, in no particular hurry. Karen seems to have forgotten her woes for now.

They pass by a BUSKER playing RALPH McTELL'S "STREETS OF LONDON" on a guitar. They stop to listen for a moment, before continuing, after Nathan gives the busker a generous donation.

The shadows are lengthening and the canal water is becoming the colour of lead.

KAREN

Thanks for the takeaways. It was much better than what I had planned.

NATHAN

That's quite alright. I was pleased for the company.

EXT. OVAL ROAD - A QUIET EARLY EVENING

Turning into OVAL ROAD, Nathan is forced to side step to avoid being run down by an OLD WOMAN dressed in rags pushing a decrepit SHOPPING TROLLEY loaded with a random assortment of goods. She mutters and mumbles to herself lost in her own internal version of London. A GOLF CLUB clangs to the ground at Karen's feet.

Nathan sweeps the club up and hands it back to the old woman.

NATHAN

Here. You may want this back.

The old woman snatches it from him and clutches it close, glaring at him. Nathan shrugs and they continue down the street. All about are brick terraced houses. A smartly dressed YOUNG MAN ON A SKATEBOARD cruises past while engaged in something on his smart phone. Nathan watches him go, smiles and nods.

NATHAN

Contrasts. I see the old woman we encountered most times I come this way. I have no clue where she is from. Where does she go each night?

KAREN

And I don't know where I'm going this night either.
(frowns at Nathan)
Do you want to tell me?

NATHAN

You'll see. We'll go through the park. Where we're going's just on the other side.

KAREN

Okay? That doesn't really answer my question though.

NATHAN

You'll see.

CUT TO:

EXT. REGENT'S PARK - EARLY EVENING

Dusk was approaching as they enter Regent's Park, the trees casting long shadows across the path. There are still a few people about, although most are heading for the gate as they enter.

KAREN

The parks closing soon. Will we get across before they close it?

NATHAN

Sure.

Nathan waves a hand taking in the joggers, the mothers with their all-terrain buggies, and the executives on park benches tapping away at laptops.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

It'll take them a while to clear us all out.

On autopilot, they walk in silence, the wide pale tree lined strip of the BROAD WALK guiding them.

NATHAN

(breaking out of his thoughts)

So what happened between you and Keith?

KAREN

I don't want to talk about it.

NATHAN

OK. I won't press.

They have just passed a person taking in the sign for the café when Karen says,

KAREN

The relationship was very one way with Keith. He was nothing but take take take. I gave him everything but never got anything back.

Nathan remains quiet, letting Karen Speak

KAREN (CONT'D)

He had been acting strangely for a while and began drinking more heavily. I was feeling totally ignored and ... even, used. I finally asked him for a bit more in our relationship. I just wanted to
(MORE)

KAREN (CONT'D) (cont'd)
something to let me know that he
still loved me. He got angry.
Called me all sorts of horrible
names.

(turning to face Nathan)
Was I wrong to want more?

NATHAN
No. Of course not. Any good
relationship is an equal, sharing
thing. You had every right to want
that.

KAREN
After that he kicked me out. All I
had with me was a bag of clothing,
my blue-tooth speaker, and my smart
phone. I barely had any money
either. All the bank accounts were
in his name. Getting my flat set
up swallowed most of that.

NATHAN
Ouch!

KAREN
The worst thing is that my boss and
Keith are best mates. Keith made
up some lies about me having an
affair and my boss sacked me!

NATHAN
Holy crap!
(clenches fists - Nathan
is furious)
What an arsehole!

KAREN
"All because I asked for more in my
relationship.

NATHAN
You deserve better than that prick.
What he did was immoral and what
your boss did was illegal.
Something sounds suspicious here.
Is it possible Keith was having an
affair?

KAREN
I don't know. He spent a lot of
his time in the office or out
playing golf. I never noticed
anything to make me think so.

Nathan walks in thought for a while.

NATHAN

You may not think it now, but you are far better off with him out of your life. I think getting anything out of him will be next to impossible and would be extremely painful. Starting over completely will mean you can build something that is entirely your own. Gather some new friends to help you. You'll see. You're smart. You can make it work. I can help.

Karen has been on the verge of tears telling Nathan this. She sniffs and nods.

KAREN

Thank you. I guess you're right.

Chester street is quiet. There are still a few other people around heading in the direction of the gates. Amongst the beautifully manicured lawns and regimented flower gardens, Nathan suddenly stops short. He walks over to a PARK BENCH, and picks up a ZIPLOCK BAG CONTAINING A PAPERBACK NOVEL.

NATHAN

"Ah! Wintersmith"

He turns the packaged book over and reads a small TAG which says, "A 'Bookcrossing' liberated book."

NATHAN

Cool! I've been meaning to read this. I'll have to think of somewhere to release it again when I'm done.

Nathan drops the ziplocked book into his PACK.

NATHAN

This reminds me, have you heard of the 'Twelve Bonk Rule'?

KAREN

No.

NATHAN

I read about it in another BookCrossing book several months ago. It was called "Mathematics and Sex". Apparently, the optimum strategy for finding an ideal partner is that you sleep with twelve people, not all at the same time of course, and you settled down with the next one who is better than all them. This should net you someone in the top twenty
(MORE)

NATHAN (cont'd)
five percent of your selection
criteria.

KAREN
You are such a nerd!

NATHAN
Wait 'til I get going.

They wander along in silence for a little while. Karen's dark clouds lifting with the chilly air. There were fewer people around now and the sky is beginning to glow red. They are ambling across an open field towards a stand of trees and a vague worn path. A simple ROPE SWING hangs from one of the branches.

NATHAN
I bet that's not official
(nods to the rope swing)
C'mon!

While Nathan tests his weight on the rope, Karen asks,

KAREN
So this 'Twelve Bonk Rule' ...
You've practiced this rule?

NATHAN
Er ... well ... no.

KAREN
So you're all talk then.

NATHAN
It's a theory yeah? And besides
I'm not that brave. What about
Nude Speed Dating? Have you heard
of that?

KAREN
Now you're making it up.

NATHAN
No I'm not. There's a dating
service here in London that does
it. Apparently it gets all that
side of things out of the way
quickly.

KAREN
...and you've done this then?

The rope CREAKS alarmingly. Nathan stops swinging on it.

NATHAN
No. I'm definitely not that brave
and not brave enough to try this
(MORE)

NATHAN (cont'd)
swing either. Anyway, I'm a
scrawny weedy nerd as you say,
and would probably embarrass myself
walking around with a huge hard-on.

Karen smirks.

PARK WARDEN (O.S.)
'Ere! You two love birds! Out!
The park's closed.

The park warden is approaching like a storm out of a blue sky.

KAREN
Love birds!
(snorts)
With him. He's a complete twerp.

NATHAN
I think we'd better go.

EXT. REGENT'S PARK EXIT - OUTER CIRCLE SOUTH END - EVENING

As the GATE CLANGS closed behind them, Nathan turns to Karen, his eyes alight with glee.

NATHAN
We got told off! I feel like a
five year old.

KAREN
We're so naughty.
(laughs)
So where to now?

NATHAN
Okay. We're just about there

KAREN
Where are we going?

NATHAN
Have you ever done Ceroc?

KAREN
No. What is it?

NATHAN
It's a type of dancing. It's lots
of fun. I think you'll like it.

KAREN
I didn't know you danced?

NATHAN
I've done it for a little while but
still have plenty to learn.

KAREN
So what's it like?

NATHAN
Maybe a bit like Rock and Roll, and
a bit like Latin, and all done to
modern club music. Are you keen to
give it a go?

KAREN
Can I just watch?

NATHAN
No. It's easy. You'll be fine
and there will be other beginners
there too.

Karen draws a deep breath and squares her shoulders.

KAREN
Okay. Let's do this.

INT: CEROC DANCE CLASS

The dance studio has wooden floors and seating all around the perimeter of the floor. The instructors are confident and sure of themselves. The DANCE CLASS is made up of about thirty couples half of whom are experienced dancers, dancing down the grades. The class is made up of people of all ages and levels of fitness.

MONTAGE BEGIN:

Nathan and Karen first steps: Karen is nervous and awkward.

Karen is dancing with other men in the class. She is starting to smile a bit and look less nervous. Her moves are more confident.

Karen and Nathan dancing together, and they're having a great time. They look natural and move well together.

MONTAGE END:

The class ended and the members mill about chatting and getting their stuff together, preparing to leave. Karen comes over to join Nathan sitting on one of the seats. She collapses into the seat beside him.

KAREN
I had a great time.

NATHAN
"...and you met a few people?

KAREN
I danced with some really nice
guys. You're a great dancer too.

NATHAN

If you want it, I've the music collection they use here on a USB Stick. You're welcome to borrow it if you want to practice the moves.

KAREN

It would be hard to practice them on my own though. What say you bring it around to my flat on Friday and we can practice together?

NATHAN

(smiles, reaches out to squeeze her hand)

I'd like that.

Karen leans close and kisses him on the cheek.

KAREN

Nathan, I've had a wonderful evening. I feel the sun beginning to shine again. Thank you.

FADE TO BLACK