

The Woman Who Went to London

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a young woman in possession of an open-minded attitude coming to London, must be in want of compelling company. If only ever Jane Austen's opening line of *Pride and Prejudice* was adapted to this, one could surely expect a great story. The bad news is that without Mr. Darcy's creation, he would have been missed as the favourite fictional character for many. So let us leave things as they are and instead introduce you to the story of a young woman who went to London.

There once was a woman who grew up in a mid-size town in northern Germany. This town was calm and mundane: the perfect image of serenity. Repetitive processes of everyday life, predictability of social events, and the homogeneity of the people instilled a longing for that which is mysterious and exciting: the big city. So this woman decided it is time to go. But where to? As one can never be educated enough, this woman went to a school fair. Wandering around the loveless conference room one stand caught her eye: Bayes Business School (which was then still named Cass). It was there that she found her path, lighting up brightly and clearly: A Master's degree in Marketing Strategy & Innovation in London. London, the city of endless inspiration for authors and poets alike, Victorian buildings, international cuisines, and British humour: what's not to love. The woman applied to this school and this one school only. What might seem like foolish behaviour turned out favourably for her: soon she was accepted.

But there can be no hero's journey without trouble and so the COVID pandemic rolled over the world and the woman's life causing her to postpone the plan for a year. Back on track, the first day of school approached quickly and amidst busy offices, skyscrapers, and what seemed like a concerning amount of Pret-a-manger shops, the woman sat in the classroom in the heart of cloudy London. Gathered in this big lecture room she let her eyes wander and even though the faces were half-covered by masks it was clear that everyone's minds were filled with the same thoughts. The kind of thoughts that occupy an individual's mind as they enter a large group. Anxious questions regarding acceptance, being hyper-aware of one's appearance and behaviour and, on the other hand, the tension of knowing something big is about to happen. Of course, the woman was not spared from this and she, too, was nervous about her suitability in this group and curiosity about the new people she was surrounded by. Calm nerves were further hindered by the lack of contact with strangers throughout the whole pandemic. It was exhilarating to finally be surrounded by people face-to-face. In her course, there were people from India, China, USA, France, Greece, Dominican Republic, Saudi

Arabia, Hungary, Thailand, Vietnam and so the list goes on and on. The woman talked to people who were expected to return home after the degree and take on the responsibility of a family business. People who had gone to boarding schools the majority of their life. People who had come to this degree from various different backgrounds, such as biology or acting. They all had one thing in common: the group was so diverse that each and every background was unique.

Throughout the year, the woman went to Bollywood dance parties, learned traditional Greek dances, celebrated the Chinese new year, learned about Korean music and food, sang at karaoke night, went to several pub nights, and much, much more. She learned about marketing from course lecturers from Romania, Turkey, Albania, Germany, and China - everyone bringing a piece of their background and influences into their content.

The woman had a revelation: what seemed multicultural previously was just a cohabitation of the same space. Different cultural groups, who lived next to each other but barely engaged with their neighbours. What she experienced in London and at Bayes was, in her opinion, true embracement of different cultures. Bringing an open mind and willingness to learn, and accepting differences without judgement: that is a truly diverse celebration of culture and allows for an immersive experience. Listening and learning about another person's truth because there can never be the same context twice, everyone is doing their best.

It is a heartwarming feeling to know that you are accepted as you are without pretence. This is the advantage of a diverse group: everyone is so different that there is no one overarching dictated way to be. The beauty of growing up lies in gaining more confidence, developing an empathetic approach, and perceiving people with kinder eyes than previously. The experience at Bayes proved one thing: there is truly no need for anyone to deny their personal truth, context, culture, or anything at all about themselves. There is enough space and everyone can be as they are.

Now, the woman can return home or go anywhere in the world with the knowledge that she would be enough wherever. Just like Darcy, she found happiness in the end.