

Unbound

How would life in London be? Would it change? Would I change? Would I like the change? What if I detest it all? It wasn't one question or two that filled my mind before I moved to this city of dreams, but a million. Every day I tried to picture what my days would be like once I moved. This made-up story was probably always the same. I remember it clearly because it was the same story I had envisioned since I was 12. It is the setting that always changed but everything else remained the same. You might probably have read it in a YA novel too. It is the story of a girl who stands out in an imperfectly perfect way, meets the love of her life, and succeeds in her career. The most generic story ever, with no details whatsoever. But I pictured it for years with a lot of hope even though I had never witnessed it. But London was the most drastic change that I had ever made. So I hoped this time, my story, my dream, would finally come true. But yeah, you guessed it. It did not come true, and I am glad it never did.

8th September 2021. That was the day I moved out of my hometown, and life has never been the same since then. What were my first impressions of London? A gorgeous big city that screamed history, diversity, art, culture, and a million other things? Not really. Since I arrived here, I threw myself out of my comfort zone, spoke to several people, and walked long distances trying to be dumbfounded by its beauty. But nothing about London excited me. Neither the bridges across the river nor the people who paced across them without seeming to care about anyone or anything. Not the art, fashion, diversity or history. Not even the breathtaking sunrises or sunsets that I would have otherwise been mesmerised by. The city was too big and gloomy for me to take it all in. Every single day I wondered what my future here would look like if I stuck around, and every single day I fell asleep not knowing what the answer was. It felt like my ability to imagine, hope and dream about my future were all lost, like they never existed.

But do you know what the best part about going through an existential crisis is? You almost always find a new and a better way of looking at life. You just need to keep going forward, asking questions and finding answers. At least that is what always helped me, just like it did this time. Every day I failed to find the answer, I looked further and farther until I found 'something'. This time the 'something' that I found was the faulty lens that I was peeping through which apparently made me incapable of noticing the beautiful anecdotes laid out right in front of my eyes.

Let me explain with some context. Being an introvert always made me incapable of making a conversation with more than 3 people at a time. However, my move to London gave me the chance to reinvent myself and bury my introvert tropes deep down the dungeons. Spoiler alert: The plan backfired big time. I tried to go out of my way and made awkward conversations with everyone I came across. Studying in a top business school located in the heart of London allowed me to meet people from across the world, and I wanted to make the most of it. The diversity bug had bitten me, and I was down with the fever of networking, a skill I was never really equipped with. I constantly prioritised quantity over quality which never is a great choice.

Burying my introvert traits came with the disadvantage of losing all the strengths associated with it. To be able to listen with intent is a power that I held all my life and almost lost because of my preconceived notions that this fast-paced world would reject me. This was just one of the zillion thoughts that bound me within a prison. But one day, as I sat in the classroom with people from different countries across the globe, this view shifted. During a discussion held in class, I started focusing on how each person's stories and experiences differed. Understanding how every person's experiences of their worlds shaped them and their lives turned all the discussions from intimidating public speaking situations to story recitals. This got me thinking. Isn't this where diversity comes in?

I realised that being a part of a diverse setting isn't about how many people of different nationalities I meet. It is about how many stories I have heard, how inspiring they are, and what I can learn or unlearn from them. We all know that everyone has a story to tell. However, we only understand the value of such narratives when we hear the details from people who have experienced them. Imagine knowing how someone lived through a storm or how someone was a part of a rescue operation during a crisis? Aren't these lessons on humanity, empathy, courage and survival enough to keep all of us moving forward?

Of all the lessons that these stories have taught me, the most important lesson was the realisation of how bound I was. Bound by superficial, restrictive and limited views of the world and myself. Every day that I spend getting to know people I met merely a few months ago, I realise how diversely inspiring the world around me is. My dream of standing out in the crowd was so unsubstantial that it sounds funny now. Working with these talented and driven individuals made me understand how everyone in this world is special, and standing out is nothing but an absurd thought. Today, I believe that life is not about reaching these unsubstantial goals but the journey itself. I have always heard about the journey being more important but never have I come this close to experiencing it. The journey of working with people, solving conflicts, experiencing strange situations, having clear goals, working hard to achieve them, exploring unfamiliar places and walking along familiar paths, and most importantly, remembering to be present and living through it all. Now I know that this would make me feel the most alive.

This is what living in London has been for me. It has been about learning to live without boundaries. It has also been about living to learn more about who I am and what makes me tick. Despite this, I am still unsure if I am cut out for this city of dreams. But I do know one thing. My time in London will help me mould myself into a person who would know how to be an authentic human. By the end of this journey, I would know how to live, love, survive, hustle, achieve, and fly unbound, and well, that is all that matters in life, isn't it? So here's and cheers to the first chapter of this book that we all know nothing about, but are here to figure out. But until we do, I hope we all tackle this experience, one story at a time.