

Lost Family

Thirty long years ago Sean's father Joseph packed his suitcase and moved away to London. He wanted to find work and set up a new life. Thirty long years later he was still there with a whole new life and family.

For quite some time Sean had been contemplating a trip over to London to track him down and meet his three half-brothers and two half-sisters. Sean had been to prison and was also battling with addiction. For many years these proved to be a stumbling block because Sean knew that Joseph wouldn't want contact with him because of his addictions.

It wasn't a straight forward situation. Sean felt abandoned by Joseph and believed this contributed to his addictions. Also Joseph had similar addiction but was in denial. Sean had faced up to his even though each day was still a struggle. Sean was angry with Joseph but as time went on he just wanted to meet him and reconcile their differences.

One wet July morning Sean got up early. His suitcase had been packed for days. He had tried on several previous occasions to leave his flat but each time he failed. Today was different, and he was ready to catch the ferry to Holyhead and then a train to London.

On the ferry Sean felt excited and nervous at the same time. He went into the bar on-board the ferry with the intention of buying a vodka and coke. Instead, when the barman asked he what he wanted he ordered a coke with ice. Afterwards, he walked outside to the smoking area. It was still raining and people huddled together trying to light their cigarettes. Sean felt the cold wind on his face and could see Belfast fade into the distance.

On the train Sean developed the shakes. He gripped his hands together and felt paranoid. Was everyone looking at him? There was sweat on his forehead. Now he looked like someone with the DT's. The train was crowded which made Sean feel like he was taking a panic attack. To take his mind of this Sean began to think about what would happen when he finally got to Joseph's door. Would there be anyone home? Who would answer? His father who he hadn't seen in a long time? Maybe one of his long lost brothers, or sisters who he had never met? All this anticipation added to his anxiety but first he had to find out where he was going when he got off the train.

Sean had put the trip off for many years. His Mother wasn't happy when he asked questions about his Dad.

'Your Daddy's a waster, he doesn't want to know you. Why would you want to meet someone like that?' She said the same thing each time he asked.

Knowing that she certainly wouldn't be happy that her son had finally made the trip to London he kept it a secret. Did he not want to know him? There were so many questions that needed asked and Sean was determined to get the answers regardless of anybody else's opinion. Everything was planned in his mind and not even his best friend was aware that he was in London, a massive city all alone and which he knew nothing about. He didn't even have Joseph's address.

Sean went into a coffee shop. He bought a Latte and was feeling a little disheartened. Yes, London was a big place but why did he not realise that he would need an address? Then he remembered something. His father had a best friend in Belfast who sometimes stopped Sean and asked about how he was getting on. Once he gave Sean a mobile number in case he ever needed something. At the time, Sean just felt that his father's friend felt pity for him. Sean took out his mobile phone. If he called his Dad's friend he risked him also calling his dad to tell him that Sean was in London. But what had he to lose? Nothing!

'Hello, is this James?'

'Who wants to know?' A voice answered and laughed.

'This is Sean, Joseph's son.' Sean was nervous and his voice was shaking.

'Yes, how are you doing? Is everything ok?'

Sean took a deep breath.

'Look, I'm in London. I want to find my Da. Do you have a number or address? No one knows I'm here but I came to find him and I'm not going home until I do,' Sean felt more determined now that he had said this out loud.

'Ok, take it easy. So are you alone. Do you have any money?'

'I've been saving up for this trip for a few months. I got the ferry over then a train to here.'

'So where exactly are yee? Why haven't you told anyone where you were going?'

'They would've tried to talk me out of it the way they have for years, I had to do this and I will find him, but hopefully it with a little help from you I can get a hold of him quicker.'

'Ok kid, so do you want me to ring him or do you want his number? Where are you exactly?'

'In a coffee shop in Paddington Station, just send me his number if you can please. I'm tired and hungry so I'm just going to find a hotel and book in for the night, then I can ring him.'

'Sean, I'll forward his number in a text, are you sure you're going to be ok?'

'Oh aye, course I will, listen, thanks very much James, you're a legend.'

'No problem, you know where I am if you need anything else, hope it all goes well, best of luck to ya son.'

Feeling much happier now that he had his father's phone number, Sean used his mobile to search for a nearby hotel. He booked into his room and lay on top of the bed. Sean was tired but he couldn't sleep. He thought about contacting his family back in Belfast. Maybe they would try to talk him out of it but he was already in London and would rebel against their wishes if they didn't support him.

Sean sat up and reached for his phone. He tapped in the numbers that James had given him.

‘Hello,’ a voice answered.

‘This is Sean, is that Joseph?’

‘Sean who?’

‘Your son Sean.’

The line went quiet, nobody spoke. Sean didn’t know what to say.

‘How did you get this number? Has something happened?’

‘No, everything is ok. I’m in London. I want to see you.’

‘Where in London? And who are you with?’

‘In a hotel by myself. I’m here because I want to see you.’

‘The line when silent again.’

‘No one knows I made this trip,’ Sean said. ‘For better or for worse I need to see you.’

‘Ok. Which hotel? Whereabouts?’

Sean gave the details to his Dad.

‘Right. I finish work at seven o’clock. It will take me around an hour to get into the centre of London. I can be at the hotel by eight. See you then.’

‘Ok. Ring me back on this number when you’re close by,’ Sean said.

Sean lay down on the bed again and this time he slept. When he woke he grabbed his phone. It was ten to eight. His father was due in 10 minutes. He quickly washed his face and freshened up. He was drying his hands on a towel when his phone rang. Sean answered quickly expecting to hear his Father.

‘Where are you son?’ his Mother asked. ‘I haven’t heard from you all day.’

Sean didn’t know what to say. Should he tell her?

‘Something isn’t right Sean, I just know it. Where are you?’

‘I’m in London, Ma,’ Sean said and he cleared his throat.

‘What are you doing there?’

‘I’m meeting my Da.’

‘What! How did you even get there?’

‘That doesn’t matter, look Ma, I’ve planned this for months and he’s on his way. I have to go. I’ll ring you later.’

‘If that’s what you really want to do...you know I will always stand by you.’ His Mother said in a concerned voice.

Sean hung up the phone and it rang immediately.

‘I couldn’t get through there. Your phone was engaged. I’m downstairs...in the lobby. I’ll meet you in the bar.’

Sean took the lift downstairs and walked towards the busy bar to the right of the reception desk. He instantly recognised his Dad. He was leaning against the bar counter and Sean knew him before he even turned around. His Dad was talking to the barman and Sean watched for a few minutes. He was hoping he had done the right thing. This moment would change his life. Even if his Dad told him something that he was better not knowing, it would change how he looked at his life. Maybe there would be answers he didn’t want to hear?

Sean thought about his mother. About all the years that she was there for him. How easy it was now to meet this man when Sean was grown up and didn’t need looking after. His Dad should have made the trip to look for him.

Sean turned and left the bar. He went upstairs again to his room and picked up his unpacked suitcase. He returned to the hotel reception and as he handed the key card for his room to the receptionist he could see his Dad still at the bar talking to the barman.

Sean took a deep breath and walked out of the hotel and onto the busy London street.

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