



The London Heartbeat

By EnricaDD



Jasper stood under the flickering glow of a streetlamp, his collar turned up against the biting London chill. A light drizzle turned the pavement into a mirror, reflecting the red and gold lights of the city. In his pocket, his hand gripped a small, hand-painted card, his heart thumping a nervous rhythm against his ribs.





"Jasper! Over here!" A voice broke through the hum of the evening traffic. Imogen hurried toward him, her colorful scarf trailing behind her like a banner. She looked breathless and bright, a stark contrast to the gray mist of the February evening. Jasper tried to find his words, but they seemed to have dissolved in the rain.





Before the silence could become awkward, a low, melodic rumble echoed down the street. A classic black taxi, polished to a high shine despite the weather, glided to a halt beside them. This was Barnaby, the legendary British Cab who seemed to know the city's secrets better than any map. He gave a cheerful double-honk, his brass horn sounding like a friendly greeting.





Imogen stepped closer, her eyes wide with wonder. She reached out to touch the cool, rain-slicked fender of the car. "He's beautiful," she whispered. Barnaby seemed to puff out his chest—or perhaps it was just the way his suspension settled—as he unlocked his heavy doors with a welcoming click.





They climbed into the back, settling onto the deep, plush leather seats that smelled of old books and peppermint. The interior was a world away from the cold street, warm and hushed. Jasper and Imogen sat a careful distance apart, watching the blur of London through the window as Barnaby pulled away from the curb.





Barnaby didn't take the direct route. He hummed a low, mechanical tune as he wound through the narrow, cobblestone alleys of Covent Garden. He knew exactly where the prettiest lights were and which turns would make the city look like a fairytale. His wipers moved in a steady, hypnotic beat, clearing the way for the magic of the night.





Inside the cab, the tension began to melt away. Barnaby's radio crackled to life, playing a soft, acoustic melody that seemed to fill the gaps between their words. Imogen started to laugh as she told a story about her day, and Jasper found himself laughing too, his nervousness replaced by a comfortable warmth.



Barnaby came to a gentle stop at a high point overlooking the River Thames. The rain had paused, leaving the air crisp and clear. Jasper stepped out first, holding the door open for Imogen as the city lights twinkled across the dark water like fallen stars. Barnaby stayed nearby, his engine ticking quietly as he watched over them.





Barnaby gave a soft, satisfied flash of his indicators, the amber light blinking in the darkness. He had seen many Valentine's Days, but this one felt special. As the two teenagers turned back toward the cab, hand in hand, the old British Cab knew he had the best job in the world: helping hearts find their way home.

