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NATIONAL BESTSELLER

NEIL GAIMAN

Author of the *New York Times* Bestseller *American Gods*

A Novel

Neverwhere

"Delightful... Inventively horrific... [It] draws equally from George Lucas, *Moby-Dick*, *Doctor Who*, and John Milton... The chimerical stuff of nightmare and daydream." —*USA Today*
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I have never been to St. John's Wood. I dare not. I should be afraid of the innumerable night of fir trees, afraid to come upon a blood red cup and the bearing of the wings of the Eagle.

—The Napoleon of Netting Hill, G. K. Chesterton

If ever thou gavest hosen or shoon
Then every night and all
Sit thou down and put them on
And Christ receive thy soul

This aye night, this aye night
Every night and all
Fire and fleet and
candlelight
And Christ receive they soul

If ever thou gavest meat or drink
Then every night and all
The fire shall never make thee shrink
And Christ receive thy soul

—The Lyke Wake Dirge (traditional)

PROLOGUE

The night before he went to London, Richard Mayhew was not enjoying himself.

He had begun the evening by enjoying himself: he had enjoyed reading the good-bye cards, and receiving the hugs from several not entirely unattractive young ladies of his acquaintance; he had enjoyed the warnings about the evils and dangers of London, and the gift of the white umbrella with the map of the London Underground on it that his friends had chipped in money to buy; he had enjoyed the first few pints of ale; but then, with each successive pint he found that he was enjoying himself significantly less; until now he was sitting and shivering on the sidewalk outside the pub in a small Scottish town, weighing the relative merits of being sick and not being sick, and not enjoying himself at all.

Inside the pub, Richard's friends continued to celebrate his forthcoming departure with an enthusiasm that, to Richard, was beginning to border on the sinister. He sat on the sidewalk and held on tightly to the rolled-up umbrella, and wondered whether going south to London was really a good idea.

"You want to keep a eye out," said a cracked old voice. "They'll be moving you on before you can say Jack Robinson. Or taking you in,

I wouldn't be surprised." Two sharp eyes stared out from a beaky, grimy face. "You all right?"

"Yes, thank you," said Richard. He was a fresh-faced, boyish young man, with dark, slightly curly hair and large hazel eyes; he had a ruffled, just-woken-up look to him, which made him more attractive to the opposite sex than he would ever understand or believe.

The grimy face softened. "Here, poor thing," she said, and pushed a fifty-pence piece into Richard's hand. "Ow long you been on the streets, then?"

"I'm not homeless," explained Richard, embarrassed, attempting to give the old woman her coin back. "Please—take your money. I'm fine. I just came out here to get some air. I go to London tomorrow," he added.

She peered down at him suspiciously, then took back her fifty pence and made it vanish beneath the layers of coats and shawls in which she was enveloped. "I've been to London," she confided. "I was married in London. But he was a bad lot. Me mam told me not to go marrying outside, but I was young and beautiful, although you'd never credit it today, and I followed my heart."

"I'm sure you did," said Richard. The conviction that he was about to be sick was starting, slowly, to fade.

"Fat lot of good it done me. I been homeless, so I know what it's like," said the old woman. "That's why I thought you was. What you going to London for?"

"I've got a job," he told her proudly.

"Doing what?" she asked.

"Um, Securities," said Richard.

"I was a dancer," said the old woman, and she tottered awkwardly around the sidewalk, humming tunelessly to herself. Then she teetered from side to side like a spinning top coming to rest, and finally she stopped, facing Richard. "Hold out your hand," she told him, "and I'll tell yer fortune." He did as he was told. She put her old hand into his, and held it tightly, and then she blinked a few times, like an owl who had swallowed a mouse that was beginning to disagree with it. "You got a long way to go . . ." she said, puzzled.

"London," Richard told her.

“Not just London . . . ” The old woman paused. “Not any London I know.” It started to rain then, softly. “I’m sorry,” she said. “It starts with doors.”

“Doors?”

She nodded. The rain fell harder, pattering on the roofs and on the asphalt of the road. “I’d watch out for doors if I were you.”

Richard stood up, a little unsteadily. “All right,” he said, a little unsure of how he ought to treat information of this nature. “I will. Thanks.”

The pub door was opened, and light and noise spilled out into the street. “Richard? You all right?”

“Yeah, I’m fine. I’ll be back in a second.” The old lady was already wobbling down the street, into the pelting rain, getting wet. Richard felt he had to do something for her: he couldn’t give her money, though. He hurried after her, down the narrow street, the cold rain drenching his face and hair. “Here,” said Richard. He fumbled with the handle of the umbrella, trying to find the button that opened it. Then a click, and it blossomed into a huge white map of the London Underground network, each line drawn in a different color, every station marked and named.

The old woman took the umbrella, gratefully, and smiled her thanks. “You’ve a good heart,” she told him. “Sometimes that’s enough to see. you safe wherever you go.” Then she shook her head. “But mostly, it’s not.” She clutched the umbrella tightly as a gust of wind threatened to tug it away from her or pull it inside out. She wrapped her arms around it and bent almost double against the rain and the wind. Then she walked away into the rain and the night, a round white shape covered with the names of London Tube stations—Earl’s Court, Marble Arch, Blackfriars, White City, Victoria, Angel, Oxford Circus . . .

Richard found himself pondering, drunkenly, whether there really was a circus at Oxford Circus: a real circus with clowns, beautiful women, and dangerous beasts. The pub door opened once more: a blast of sound, as if the pub’s volume control had just been turned up high. “Richard, you idiot, it’s your bloody party, and you’re missing all the fun.” He walked back in the pub, the urge to be sick lost in all the oddness.

“You look like a drowned rat,” said someone.

“You’ve never seen a drowned rat,” said Richard.

Someone else handed him a large whisky. “Here, get that down you. That’ll warm you up. You know, you won’t be able to get real Scotch in London.”

“I’m sure I will,” sighed Richard. Water was dripping from his hair into his drink. “They have everything in London.” And he downed the Scotch, and after that someone bought him another, and then the evening blurred and broke up into fragments: afterward he remembered only the feeling that he was about to leave somewhere small and rational—a place that made sense—for somewhere huge and old that didn’t; and vomiting interminably into a gutter flowing with rainwater, somewhere in the small hours of the morning; and a white shape marked with strange-colored symbols, like a little round beetle, walking away from him in the rain.

The next morning he boarded the train for the six-hour journey south that would bring him to the strange gothic spires and arches of St. Pancras Station. His mother gave him a small walnut cake that she had made for the journey and a thermos filled with tea; and Richard Mayhew went to London feeling like hell.

Neverwhere

ONE

She had been running for four days now, a harum-scarum tumbling flight through passages and tunnels. She was hungry, and exhausted, and more tired than a body could stand, and each successive door was proving harder to open. After four days of flight, she had found a hiding place, a tiny stone burrow, under the world, where she would be safe, or so she prayed, and at last she slept.

Mr. Croup had hired Ross at the last Floating Market, which had been held in Westminster Abbey. “Think of him,” he told Mr. Vandemar, “as a canary.”

“Sings?” asked Mr. Vandemar.

“I doubt it; I sincerely and utterly doubt it.” Mr. Croup ran a hand through his lank orange hair. “No, my fine friend, I was thinking metaphorically—more along the lines of the birds they take down mines.” Mr. Vandemar nodded, comprehension dawning slowly: yes, a canary. Mr. Ross had no other resemblance to a canary. He was huge—almost as big as Mr. Vandemar—and extremely grubby, and quite hairless, and he said very little, although he had made a point of telling each of them that he liked to kill things, and he was good at it; and this amused Mr. Croup and Mr. Vandemar. But he was a canary, and he never knew it. So Mr. Ross went first, in his filthy T-shirt and his crusted blue-jeans, and Croup and Vandemar walked behind him, in their elegant black suits.

There are four simple ways for the observant to tell Mr. Croup and Mr. Vandemar apart: first, Mr. Vandemar is two and a half heads taller than Mr. Croup; second, Mr. Croup has eyes of a faded china blue, while Mr. Vandemar’s eyes are brown; third, while Mr. Vandemar fashioned the rings he wears on his right hand out of the skulls of four ravens, Mr. Croup has no obvious jewelery; fourth, Mr. Croup likes words, while Mr. Vandemar is always hungry. Also, they look nothing at all alike.

A rustle in the tunnel darkness; Mr. Vandemar's knife was in his hand, and then it was no longer in his hand, and it was quivering gently almost thirty feet away. He walked over to his knife and picked it up by the hilt. There was a gray rat impaled on the blade, its mouth opening and closing impotently as the life fled. He crushed its skull between finger and thumb.

"Now, there's one rat that won't be telling any more tales," said Mr. Croup. He chuckled at his own joke. Mr. Vandemar did not respond. "Rat. Tales. Get it?"

Mr. Vandemar pulled the rat from the blade and began to munch on it, thoughtfully, head first. Mr. Croup slapped it out of his hands. "Stop that," he said. Mr. Vandemar put his knife away, a little sullenly. "Buck up," hissed Mr. Croup, encouragingly. "There will always be another rat. Now: onward. Things to do. People to damage."

Three years in London had not changed Richard, although it had changed the way he perceived the city. Richard had originally imagined London as a gray city, even a black city, from pictures he had seen, and he was surprised to find it filled with color. It was a city of red brick and white stone, red buses and large black taxis, bright red mailboxes and green grassy parks and cemeteries.

It was a city in which the very old and the awkwardly new jostled each other, not uncomfortably, but without respect; a city of shops and offices and restaurants and homes, of parks and churches, of ignored monuments and remarkably unpalatial palaces; a city of hundreds of districts with strange names—Crouch End, Chalk Farm, Earl's Court, Marble Arch—and oddly distinct identities; a noisy, dirty, cheerful, troubled city, which fed on tourists, needed them as it despised them, in which the average speed of transportation through the city had not increased in three hundred years, following five hundred years of fitful road-widening and unskillful compromises between the needs of traffic, whether horse-drawn, or, more recently, motorized, and the needs of pedestrians; a city inhabited by and teeming with people of every color and manner and kind.

When he had first arrived, he had found London huge, odd, fundamentally incomprehensible, with only the Tube map, that elegant multicolored topographical display of underground railway lines and

stations, giving it any semblance of order. Gradually he realized that the Tube map was a handy fiction that made life easier but bore no resemblance to the reality of the shape of the city above. It was like belonging to a political party, he thought once, proudly, and then, having tried to explain the resemblance between the Tube map and politics, at a party, to a cluster of bewildered strangers, he had decided in the future to leave political comment to others.

He continued, slowly, by a process of osmosis and white knowledge (which is like white noise, only more useful), to comprehend the city, a process that accelerated when he realized that the actual City of London itself was no bigger than a square mile, stretching from Aldgate in the east to Fleet Street and the law courts of the Old Bailey in the west, a tiny municipality, now home to London's financial institutions, and that that was where it had all begun.

Two thousand years before, London had been a little Celtic village on the north shore of the Thames, which the Romans had encountered, then settled in. London had grown, slowly, until, roughly a thousand years later, it met the tiny Royal City of Westminster immediately to the west, and, once London Bridge had been built, London touched the town of Southwark directly across the river; and it continued to grow, fields and woods and marshland slowly vanishing beneath the flourishing town, and it continued to expand, encountering other little villages and hamlets as it grew, like Whitechapel and Deptford to the east, Hammersmith and Shepherd's Bush to the west, Camden and Islington in the north, Battersea and Lambeth across the Thames to the south, absorbing all of them, just as a pool of mercury encounters and incorporates smaller beads of mercury, leaving only their names behind.

London grew into something huge and contradictory. It was a good place, and a fine city, but there is a price to be paid for all good places, and a price that all good places have to pay.

After a while, Richard found himself taking London for granted; in time, he began to pride himself on having visited none of the sights of London (except for the Tower of London, when his Aunt Maude came down to the city for a weekend, and Richard found himself her reluctant escort).

But Jessica changed all that. Richard found himself, on otherwise sensible weekends, accompanying her to places like the National Gallery and the Tate Gallery, where he learned that walking around museums too long hurts your feet, that the great art treasures of the world all blur into each other after a while, and that it is almost beyond the human capacity for belief to accept how much museum cafeterias will brazenly charge for a slice of cake and a cup of tea.

“Here’s your tea and your éclair,” he told her. “It would have cost less to buy one of those Tintoretos.”

“Don’t exaggerate,” said Jessica cheerfully. “Anyway, there aren’t any Tintoretos at the Tate.”

“I should have had that cherry cake,” said Richard. “Then they would have been able to afford another Van Gogh.”

Richard had met Jessica in France, on a weekend trip to Paris two years earlier; had in fact discovered her in the Louvre, trying to find the group of his office friends who had organized the trip. Staring up at an immense sculpture, he had stepped backwards into Jessica, who was admiring an extremely large and historically important diamond. He tried to apologize to her in French, which he did not speak, gave up, and began to apologize in English, then tried to apologize in French for having to apologize in English, until he noticed that Jessica was about as English as it was possible for any one person to be. By this time she decided he should buy her an expensive French sandwich and some overpriced carbonated apple juice, by way of apology, and, well, that was the start of it all, really. He had never been able to convince Jessica that he wasn’t the kind of person who went to art galleries after that.

On weekends when they did not go to art galleries or to museums, Richard would trail behind Jessica as she went shopping, which she did, on the whole, in affluent Knightsbridge, a short walk and an even shorter taxi ride from her apartment in a Kensington mews. Richard would accompany Jessica on her tours of such huge and intimidating emporia as Harrods and Harvey Nichols, stores where Jessica was able to purchase anything, from jewelry, to books, to the week’s groceries.

Richard had been awed by Jessica, who was beautiful, and often quite funny, and was certainly going somewhere. And Jessica saw in Richard an enormous amount of potential, which, properly harnessed