

Days - London

February the Twenty-Second

Well, at the beginning, as long as I was in my room, taking a shower and dressing, and suchlike, it all seemed to be very normal. Even as I entered the breakfast lounge. But then everything changed. I just grabbed my tea and orange juice at the buffet, my piece of fruit, a yogurt, and cereals, as I heard it on the TV: The Royal Baby had been born! Meghan, Duchess of Sussex, had given birth to Archie Harrison Mountbatten-Windsor, 7lbs 3oz - Archie? Like the guy from the comics? No, but the baby was the first multiracial baby in the recent British monarchy! But not automatically a prince? Because of being a multiracial baby? Interracial in the States. Okay, this was too much for me now. Happy that Germany was no longer a monarchy - okay, with a little fascist detour - I ate my breakfast a bit more hurried today. And hey, I had something to do today, a mission. I had to buy myself a train ticket for the trip to Dover tomorrow. So I tried my best to shorten up my breakfast routine to get rid of this royal shit. Back in my room, my backpack, last check of the little piece of heaven - clouds but also blue sky. It seemed as if the usual daily rain would set in later today. I left the hotel. Victoria Station would be my aim.

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Well, maybe it was difficult to believe, but I had done some research - a look at Google Earth. It would be easy to reach Victoria Station. Just to the corner with the arch I had to walk, my nearly daily way. Okay, then not down Constitution Hill, but straight down the other street. There, where the street would merge with another street, on the other side of this street, there would be Victoria Station - it would be easy as that. And it was not a long way, a mile or so. Thus, I did not have to hurry. I would have the whole day to get the ticket. Yeah, this would be an easy task, and what to do with the rest of the day? I had a certain idea. So I left the hotel to walk through Hyde Park, to cross it, to reach Wellington Arch. And yeah, it was easy to find the right street, Grosvenor Place, also downhill like Constitution Hill. In a way, not very surprising. Constitution Hill marked one side of the park of Buckingham Palace, alongside the road to reach the palace, Victoria's statue. Grosvenor Place marked another side of the park, parallel to the palace - something like that. Whatever, I reached the arch, I reached Grosvenor Place. And I decided to use the right side of the street, not along the wall of the park of the palace.

The not-so-nice aspect of doing so was that I had to walk under a scaffolding for some time that was along the first housing block. But okay, there were interesting posters hung up in the passage under the scaffolding. The Peninsula was under reconstruction. "The Peninsula" was a hotel, and the posters unfolded that the house had a very long history. A history in London, where all buildings had their history? But the history of The Peninsula obviously stretched way over London.

Most of the posters told stories about the original, the first The Peninsula. And this - obviously still the most glamorous house of the whole The Peninsula group - was located in Hong Kong. Opened in 1928 - yeah, the British Empire and Hong Kong. The Peninsula in Hong Kong was proud of their fleet of green Rolls-Royce cars, the Peninsula's signature green! On one poster, one could see happy employees, happy to be allowed to serve the super-rich colonialists. Okay, this was London. Snobbery defined your status, and I had definitively no high status! I headed on.

The next block had a very impressive front, the typical London architecture - at least what I would define as such. The next one was simpler, and the next but one even more so. A more structural architecture. And this continued, as on the other side of the street the wall of the park of Buckingham Palace ended with a building. At least for this part of London, that seemed to be just a little short of modern. I reached a larger crossroad.

Lower Grosvenor Place crossed Grosvenor Place here. Lower Grosvenor Place would lead you, obviously, to Buckingham Palace. But this wasn't my aim now. My aim would be Victoria Station. So, I stayed on my side of the road, Grosvenor Place, and on my side of the crossroad was a green area now. But this was no surprise at all. The two triangular green areas I had already seen on Google Earth. The first would be on my side of the road. The second, so to speak, attaching on the

other side of the road - Victoria Station was near! After the second green area, the one on the other side of the road, Grosvenor Place would hit another street. There, a bit off-center, on the other side of the street I would hit, a bit down a road there, there would be Victoria Station. I passed the second green area on the other side of Grosvenor Place and hit the traversing street - and I had a bit of a problem finding out the name of that street. But I discovered that Grosvenor Place was now named Grosvenor Gardens. And finally, the traversing street was Buckingham Palace Road. Whatever, I had nearly reached my aim.

I simply had to cross Buckingham Palace Road, a short distance to the left, to the next side street. A short distance down there would be the entrance to Victoria Station. And it was that easy to do. Only that I had some issues at first seeing a train station there! Okay, there was a normal house front - apartments in the upper part, shops in the lower part, all as normal. And in front, a large cast iron roofing with large letters on it: London Victoria Station. So, I was at the right place, obviously. Only I could not see a train station, no entrance to one. Maybe I should come nearer?

I really stood for a time in front of the block - and it was a housing block with shops in the lower part in front of me - under the large cast iron roofing. Well, this was London, and I had normal train stations in mind. But Paddington Station also did not really appear like a normal train station. Obviously two small entrances, to my left and right, and I entered the left one, which would be obviously unimportant - left or right. In fact, I had to walk through a longer but narrow passage, a passage under the housing block. The station as such was just behind the housing block. I had never seen anything like that so far. But then I entered the train station, whereby "train station" seemed not to be the correct description.

It was a hall, an enormous hall, obviously - where could I buy a ticket? A café to my left, an escalator to a higher floor in the middle, and many destination boards in the background - this appeared more like an airport to me than a train station. Paddington Station seemed to be much smaller. A beautiful cast iron roof structure with many top light windows and a larger direction sign in front of me. Taxis and station reception were to my straight left. Cash machines were somewhat to my left. Left luggage and lost property, as well as platforms 1 to 8, were straight to my left again. Shopping and eating - Victoria Place - would be straight on. Toilets - wow, the British were able to say "toilets" to toilets, apart from the Americans - tickets and platforms 15 to 19 somewhat to my right. Platforms 9 to 14 were again straight ahead. Wow, this was no easy station. But I had my direction now. I should find the ticket sales somewhat to my right.

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Somewhat to my right - well, it was just directly beside me! Even a large sign "Tickets" to my side, overhead. But it was a separated area, a huge area, and you had to enter it. All seemed to be big at Victoria Station. When you had entered it, you had two possibilities.

A semicircular row of ticket machines formed one side, the side toward the platforms. Well, there were at least twenty or so, and not all the same. But they did not find my interest. It would be better for me to use the second option. There was a row of ticket counters as well, towards the housing block, eight, and even some additional ones - obviously only for people with Gatwick Airport as their aim. At least it seemed so, red-marked. And with the information above: your fast and direct way to Gatwick Airport. The others were blue. So, a blue counter should be my aim, and I started to walk towards the fenced-off area in front of the ticket counters - fenced off like the ones known from airports. But I should not reach a ticket counter.

A woman addressed me. Well, I had not noticed her in the pass between the ticket machines and the ticket counters. She wore a uniform and told me that I should use the ticket machines. Well, not many people bought a ticket currently, neither at the ticket machines nor at the ticket counters, so I made my way towards the counters. I gave her a smile and a nod with my head and said something about that I would have a question, to show her that I had noticed her, but that I would prefer a counter. But this was a mistake.

Wow, she looked daggers at me and followed me with her eyes on my way through the fencing to a

counter where only one person stood. Was this Great Britain? There where all the people were so polite? Okay, the States, in any case, at airports, in any case, where they always had this completely unnecessary hecticness. But at a train station in Great Britain? However, this seemed to be quite deliberate. I had to wait for a moment and saw that a couple that wanted to use the counter as well was directed to the ticket machines. They showed the woman a piece of paper and said that they would have a question - it did not help. Also at the ticket machine, one could get information, was the answer! Wow, had I been the lucky guy? The irony was now, at the ticket machines, many more people stood and had to queue than at the ticket counters. Even though only four of the eight counters were open. But also not all ticket machines seemed to be in service, and some, the larger ones at the beginning, seemed only for special services. This all confused me somewhat. I had started to sweat almost a longer time ago, as the person in front of me got his ticket and it was my turn.

I feared that it all would turn into a mess - the simple matter of buying a ticket. Then I looked at the woman on the other side of the glass - a younger woman of color, smiling, and with a soft voice asking what she could do for me. I started to relax a bit. She seemed to be a much more pleasant-natured woman than "her" with her uniform. A return ticket to Dover was my wish, and we talked about when I wanted to travel and when I wanted to return to London. And what to say, a few minutes later I had my tickets - one for each direction - and printouts about the departure times of the trains and their itinerary. I felt better now and thanked the woman behind the counter very warmly. But as I left the ticket area again, I passed the other woman once more, with my tickets and printouts in hand. I looked at her and could not suppress a shrug with my shoulders - it all could be so easy! Back in the massive hall again.

I thought that it would be good to take a look at where I could find my platform for tomorrow - it was not difficult to find due to the good signage. But it enhanced only the feeling of the size of this station. Well, I could have done it tomorrow as well. I would be here very early, long before my train would depart, just because I was always very early at a place. But it gave me a feeling of security to know it just right now. And now?

As said, I had done some research on Google Earth and had looked at the way to Victoria Station. And there I had noticed that I could cross the River Thames here to walk back to Westminster on the other side of the River Thames. It would be around the same distance as the way from the hotel to Victoria Station, a bit more, maybe. This was my idea to continue the day.

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But I bought myself a coffee first, still in the station. Then I left the station - the way to the bridge? Well, it should be easy. Somewhat to my right should be a larger street that would lead directly to the bridge - what more did you have to know? It may have sounded a bit stupid, but I liked strolling around unknown cities. Without having a street map with me, not to mention a tourist's guide. The negative was that you sometimes missed something or that you needed a longer time to find something. But there were enormous chances of winning! To find something unpredicted, to find something charming, astonishing, or simply not meant for tourists - like Skid Row in Los Angeles. Los Angeles, the first time I was there, I missed Little Venice. Not even knowing that there was something like Little Venice. I was there again, a year later, visited Little Venice, and got the insight that this place was simply a boring tourist's nonsense. It had been no disadvantage that I had missed the place the first year, and that I was there in the second year had been no win. As said, I knew the direction in principle.

So I started to orient myself in front of the station - I had to walk to my right, along the bus terminal. In this direction I should find a larger street to the bridge. But the first thing I saw was a nice-looking white building in the background - it looked a bit misplaced. The city had changed, and especially in this direction, one saw some very high and very modern-looking buildings, glass mountains. The white building was smaller but much nicer, nearly delicate, with columns and a lantern as well as a louver on top. I headed to this building.

I reached a kind of plaza on my way, with two larger streets there, a charming and interesting-looking clock, and many very modern and ugly buildings - and the delightful white one. It was crazy. All this modern architecture appeared to be cold, repelling, and simply ugly. But the white building invited you, had pleasant proportions - a pub was there: The Duke of York. The building as such? Hamilton - Victoria Palace? Could it be a theater? Movies or a stage? A cocktail bar as well. Nice, but the street in front of it could not be the street I was looking for. Why? Well, I had done some research, and the street I was searching for would spread parallel to Victoria Station. Thus, it had to be the other, larger street.

The other, larger street? It was easy in Paddington. At every corner were street signs on the house walls. But here I found nothing about the street's names - what was not relevant in the end, the direction fitted. But then I found something interesting. I was not certain about whether it was because of the bus stops on both sides of the road. Although on the road, two lanes, there was lettering. On the side where I came from, from the station, VICT STN. Obviously, Victoria Station. What simply would fit, even if this was not the station as such. And on the other side of the road: VAUXHALL BRIDGE. Okay, so the bridge I wanted to cross the River Thames was obviously the Vauxhall Bridge. So far, so good. Should I be puzzled about the fact that the street seemed to be a one-way street with two lanes? Okay, whatever, "Vauxhall Bridge" should lead me to Vauxhall Bridge. Anything else would be silly. So I crossed the street to start to walk on the "Vauxhall Bridge" side towards the bridge - obviously.

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Then I started to understand some matters - it seemed so. For instance, a bus stop sign told me: Vauxhall Bridge Road. So, I was on my way to Vauxhall Bridge on the Vauxhall Bridge Road. But what about VICT STN? Okay, Vauxhall Bridge Road was a one-way street with two lanes, towards the bridge. I could see that, somewhat ahead, the two lanes seemed to divide. The one with VICT STN seemed to turn left, towards Victoria Station. This seemed to make sense. The other lane, VAUXHALL BRIDGE, seemed to continue straight on. So, this puzzle seemed to be solved. Therefore, there was no reason left not to start to walk towards the bridge, Vauxhall Bridge - Vauxhall, the British Opel? More likely the family name of a famous or important person, I thought, finally starting my way to Vauxhall Bridge.

But first, a last view back, a last glance at the nice white building and the abysmally ugly red glass something that nearly seemed to crush the nice white beauty. And looking ahead, down the street, Vauxhall Bridge Road. Well, two-part, like the road with its two lanes. The right side, towards Victoria Station, with modern - ugly - buildings. The left side, where I walked along, had buildings made of bricks, with small shops on street level. My side definitely seemed to be the nicer one. But this did not last long because as I reached the point where the two traffic lanes split, in fact, on my side also, there were nothing but ugly, boring modern buildings. Okay, Vauxhall Bridge Road was now a one-lane, one-way street, and I hoped that not for the rest of the way these boring, modern, but monotonous buildings would surround me on both sides. On the other side, it should not be such a long way to reach the river and the bridge. I headed on.

And? Well, the first thing that I had to notice, as I had passed a little plaza with some trees formed by the splitting lane to Victoria Station, was that Vauxhall Bridge Road was thereafter, after the small plaza with some trees, no one-way street at all. The street was a normal road with two lanes from now on! And the lane with the cars coming from the bridge also turned to Victoria Station and formed another side of the small plaza with trees. My summary? I would freak out if I had to drive in London. I would be overchallenged past all hope! But for my deliverance, I always used my feet or public transport. And?

The road, now, as said, a very normal road, appeared partially like a crude mixture now. Large, very modern buildings near much smaller, definitely much older buildings. Even some with nice facades. But it seemed that there was no distinct plan for this street. As if one could do whatever he wanted. However, the longer I walked, the more the older buildings started to dominate, and the street began

to appear much nicer. Apart from that, it was a housing area now, with not many and mostly uninteresting shops, doctors, and maybe a pub. But for a longer part now there were pleasant trees on one side of the road, and now only these typical houses made of bricks were to be seen. I started to have the feeling that this could be, in fact, a charming area to live in. At least for London. And most likely not a very cheap one. I continued on my way - it was a longer way to the bridge than I had thought.

Some not-so-pleasant housing blocks followed. The street seemed to enter cheaper areas, as the street got a median - concrete, no grass, no trees. On the other hand, more shops again, especially at the corners of crossroads, along the smaller crossing streets - Vauxhall Bridge Road had four lanes meanwhile. But I hoped that I would reach the bridge to cross the river. After all, I aimed not to walk along this street for such a long time. I aimed to walk back to Westminster, on the other side of the River Thames - had I made a mistake, a miscalculation?

The next that I reached was a green area, fenced but with an open gate. A street sign on the fence, one of these typical street signs that I had missed so far, told me: Bessborough Gardens, SW1, City of Westminster - this was already, or still, the City of Westminster? And the street, no longer the Vauxhall Bridge Road? A large white U-shaped building edged the green on three sides - the road was the fourth side. A direction sign on my side: Millbank Junction, was ahead. Following the street straight on would lead you to: The City, Peckham, and the Ring Road - and the bridge? I started to become nervous but headed on.

Not long, and I reached a large crossroads, obviously Millbank Junction. And obviously, the street's name was Bessborough Gardens now. Again, these typical signs with the street names everywhere. And my bridge? Well, the bridge was on the other side of the junction. I had reached the bridge. I could see it, Vauxhall Bridge, even when the street was Bessborough Gardens now. And yeah, I could already see some buildings on the other side of the river, even if I could not see the river as such. And these buildings augured nothing good.

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Millbank Junction behind me, I started to cross Vauxhall Bridge. Well, the bridge as such was not interesting, but the houses on the other side were. To the right was a large housing complex. In terraces arranged, white and turquoise, white walls and turquoise glass. It appeared to me as a nightmare of a dystopian science fiction. I would run crazy if I lived there. Next to this absurdity, two much taller glass towers - this area was not worth being noticed any longer. Especially also because of the building on the left.

James Bond - or. The same colors as on the other side, white walls and turquoise glass. But it was clearly obvious that this was no housing block - and even also no beauty. But it appeared at least more captivating. The composition appeared much more fascinating - but was this in fact where the British Secret Service was located? Would M sit in the round element and have her argue with James?

Well, old enough for Sean Connery - nearly - I had never been interested in the Bond movies. This was especially because of the ridiculous acting of Roger Moore, the silly stories, and the boring Bond girls. But I had to confess that Daniel Craig had changed my opinion.

I had read all the novels by Hammett, Chandler, and Spillane, but none by Ian Fleming. Although seeing Daniel Craig for the first time, I then had the impression: Yes, yes, this is the real James Bond. Well, the story's still a bit "sketchy", Daniel Craig seemed like he was made to be Bond. Bond better than Marlowe? As if one had to answer such a stupid question!

Nevertheless, I would like to walk along the River Thames just in front of this building. However, if - if - this was, in fact, the building of the British Secret Service, would this be possible? Okay, I just had to cross the bridge - I was halfway through - then I would see if it would be possible to walk along the river there. But as I came nearer to the end of the bridge, the ugly white and turquoise building to my right and the mysterious white and turquoise building to my left, I had a look down the river. I could see now more of the bend the River Thames made here. And what I saw pinned me

down!

Pink Floyd! Where was the pig? It astonished me. I have had absolutely no idea that this building would be there! Yeah, sure, reading tourist guides or so? But what a wonderful moment it was to "discover" this building right now - it was nearly a shock!

The album cover, this iconic album cover, like the cow. I was puzzled at first, as I saw it for the first time - it was a painting, or. Such a building had to be pure imagination. Who would build such a building with these four white, surreal chimneys? It was a George Orwell building, and I looked at it, and it was real.

I tried to remember if I knew something about this building, but there was nothing. Sure, the music - Pigs on the Wing Part 1, Dogs, Pigs (Three Different Ones), Sheep, and Pigs on the Wing Part 2. And yes, the dystopian album cover, and now I saw the building in real life. I stood there for a while, on the bridge, and looked down the river to the building. But I had, strangely, not the impulse to walk there. It would be quite a distance, roughly the same as back to the London Eye, that I could see up the river. But it was such an unpredicted surprise to see this building now, a gift bestowed upon me. I had tears in my eyes, seeing a young man. Well, the first time I heard Pink Floyd was when my sister bought their album Ummagumma.

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Yeah, Ummagumma, also an iconic album cover. Pink Floyd and Deep Purple had been the two bands of my youth, and from there I went on to classical music - Jon Lord - blues, jazz, and tango. Not so much later, it started with movies that I watched secretly at night while I had my sleeping room on the first floor, next to the living room with the only TV. My parents slept upstairs, and I turned the volume down. Movies from all the well-known directors. Literature and paintings came a bit later.

Later I had asked myself, raised in an environment with no relation to art, what would have happened to me if there had been a relation to art at home or if I had met somebody with relations to art? Someone who would have introduced me to art and helped me to understand it? Who would have taken me to concerts and the theater? Why not ballet? So it became a long and complicated process in a time with no internet or suchlike. I later stopped asking this question because it hadn't been so, and it was not very productive to ask unnecessary questions.

I was always fascinated by nature, especially the stars, and in art, all kinds of art. Well, I had problems feeling an attraction to other people, but art attracted me. I found a deepness there that I missed in the daily chatter around me. The people seemed shallow, the arts deep like an abyss. And yes, watching movies like Zardos, to name one, also attracted me sexually - Dominique Sanda, not only in 1900. The most beautiful woman, to my knowledge. I named her so not only once, closely followed by Geraldine Chaplin. Ana Y Los Lobos and La Femme d'à côté. Yeah, also this.

But I understood that there was more, even if I did not understand all the movies as such. Like Ana Y Los Lobos. The movies of Akira Kurosawa, Orson Welles, Martin Scorsese, or Sam Peckinpah were disturbing, fascinating, alluring.....all at once. Like art later, by Max Ernst, René Magritte, or Giorgio de Chirico. American postmodern literature and the classic American crime stories. I also learned that not the most popular names were the most meaningful, like Salvador Dalí. Spielberg movies all shit, as well as the sing-song of Madonna. That sometimes the not very loud spectacular was the most interesting. I fell in love with the diction of Theodor Fontane - I mean, why should I be interested in the Mark Brandenburg? But listening to him was wonderful. The same with Theodor Storm - but what an ado about the boring Goethe? He was for me like Spielberg, simply for all who were not interested in developing their own mindset.

I sometimes felt like I would stumble around in the world of art. There was so endlessly much to discover, to try to understand, in a time a library was something special. As in the second half of the nineties, the internet became available in Germany, and much changed - well, not at the beginning. With a modem, expensive, for fifteen minutes a day or so.

Pink Floyd, even when later various songstresses should become essential, especially two,

especially one, stayed Pink Floyd all the time. Okay, later it was no longer Pink Floyd for me, and the story of Syd Barrett? But this single clear high-pitched tone of Echos, or Nick Mason playing the drums in Pompeii - I always had the feeling that Nick Mason and Rick Wright were the heart and soul of Pink Floyd. And now I looked at this building down the river - I should do some research about it later, when sitting in a café or back in the hotel.

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Okay, the first now was to find out if I could find a way from the bridge to the river. So to walk along the river in front of the Secret Service building. And to my very surprise, there was a staircase at the end of the bridge that led directly down to the riverside. A nice boardwalk with trees was there - really? Okay, a low fence separated the building from the way along the river, and the facade looked relatively solid, but with windows? I could not believe that this was, in fact, the building of the British Secret Service - MI6. Bodie and Doyle? Whatever, most likely a building of an authority, but not the Secret Service. Anyway, I had already to do some research about one building. Why not about two? So I started my way back to Westminster, the bridge, and the parliament.

At first not much happened, boring high buildings on my right side, but at least the river to my left. Then I reached a green area after a shorter way, benches to sit down and enjoy the river, and a statue. A bust of a man on a pedestal - definitely not a British man. What the inscription also showed you: Baveshwara 1134-1168 / unveiled by Shri Narendra Modi / PM of India / Work is worship. The statue of an ancient Indian man unveiled by the PM of India - did I know the name? The Upanishads came to my mind, and Siddhartha by Hermann Hesse. A third matter good for some research? I headed on.

The impression of the way changed somewhat after the green area. It was more of a sidewalk now. But broad with nice trees, and always the river - well, as much as the river was there - at one side. I started truly to enjoy my way back, as I reached a freaky vessel painted in yellow. Funnily, not in the water, as said, not much water in the riverbed, but "stranded" on a sandbar. Many beer barrels were on board, most likely for a kind of pub. Obviously a bit more rustic than the Tattershall Castle. But I could not find out details, and it was obviously closed, most likely too early in the day. So I continued on my way, not for long, and the next interesting object appeared.

An "object", a building, in the water, the rest of the water - why was there always so little water there when I was at the river? The river was always well filled when pictured, but I always saw only this low tide River Thames? Thus, it puzzled me a bit. A structure made of stone outreached into the riverbed, then a high fence and a gate. A white gangway to the structure followed behind the gate. Above the gate, an inscription: Lambeth River Fire Station - really? By high tide, maybe, but by low tide? Or was this only a place for coordination? But okay, apart from problems with the tidal range, it was most likely much easier to reach some parts of the city by using the river instead of the often narrow and blocked roads. The next matter for some research? I reached the next bridge.

A charming bridge, in fact. An iron bridge, and stone, nice colors, nice lamps - and the tower of Westminster nicely in the background. Shouldn't I be also able to see Big Ben then? Well, obviously not. But I had to confess that at that moment I enjoyed London, now that most of the ugly glass buildings were way behind me, only visible in the far background. All turned more lovable again, older, even if here were not only ancient buildings.

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I underpassed the beautiful bridge - it seemed the most beautiful bridge that I had seen in London so far. And right after, on the other side, the next interesting point - Lambeth Pier. Different activities were possible here, like cruises on the River Thames. But I was more interested in the offer of coffee and sandwiches. Okay, it would have also been possible to sit down. Now Big Ben also was visible, and one could eat simple dishes. But I did not want to stop - to keep on walking. Around a mile was the distance so far, from Victoria Station up to here. And to the hotel, more or less the

same distance again. I wanted to reach at least Westminster Bridge before sitting down to eat something hot. So, a coffee to go and a snack should be enough for now, the last stage of my walk along this side of the River Thames. And it became a nice walk, even if along a wall on my left side now. But the buildings behind the - mostly - not high wall turned beautiful again. And Westminster, on the other side of the river, also looked not that bad. Did I start to unfold feelings for this city? Well, why not?

It was the architecture, the architecture of a bygone London, a London I wouldn't have liked to live in. Like London today. It was a bit strange, but I had the feeling that it wouldn't be enjoyable to live here, in London. Okay, I was not attracted to large cities as such - Los Angeles, not to talk about the Los Angeles metropolitan area, by far the largest metropolitan area of the United States? But I was never attracted to living in Berlin, for instance. I had been to Paris once, for the music, Lollapalooza. Okay, I had not seen much of the city but had been awake a whole night, sitting in cafés and walking around. But the city did not attract me much. I liked it more humane, liked having the oversight, to be able to grasp the place in its completeness. And why then Los Angeles? This seemed to be a different story as I reached Westminster Bridge. A nice little park was there, with a fountain in the middle and a memorial, of course, or rather a statue. An older-looking woman before a disk, which meaning I could not understand - the next topic for research? Then I saw the inscription: Mary Seacole / Nurse of the Crimean War / 1805-1881. Okay, I had a name now, a profession, and the birth-and-death dates. But I had no idea about why this statue of her was placed here - okay, some more research later. So I started to get interested in all the stalls here, where one could buy various beverages, food, and more. And even though I had not so long ago had a coffee and a snack, I felt thirsty and hungry. I had had the idea to eat and drink something on the Tattershall Castle again - but why not here? The sun shone - in a way it was really hot here for the moment, until the next rain would start - and there were enough benches to sit down. Well, I decided on a coffee, a nice-looking pastry filled with beef, and two cookies for dessert. And I truly enjoyed sitting here, here in London.

February The Twenty-Third

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The way to Victoria Station was no secret anymore. And of course, I walked. Why? Well, I always walked, and I had plenty of time. I always planned suchlike with enough buffer time for the possibility that something developed in an unplanned way. I would be early at the station, I would be early in Bristol, I would be early at the location - I hated it having to rush around. Honestly, it was often enough more or less stressful to do something, so I wanted to do it at least without any lack in time. This gave me a feeling of tranquility.

So, as said, the way as such was easy at the second time, and it was not relevant if I sweated now because of walking to the station. I would arrive in the afternoon, the concert was in the evening at 7 p.m. The train station, the hotel, and the venue were not in large distance to each other. I would have enough time in the hotel to take a shower and to change clothes, even for a rest. And of course, I had not all my luggage with me. Only the backpack and a light bag with clothes for the evening and some other things. It was only for a night, it would have been stupid to take everything to Bristol for just one night. So I paid for two hotel rooms on that day, one in London and one in Bristol. But this seemed much more meaningful.

Yes, all was planned in a way so that nothing should get wrong, or that I would have at least enough time to search for an alternative if something went wrong. A delay of the train, for instance, or that I would have made a whatever mistake. So I felt comfortable on my way to Victoria Station in the

morning - and it did not rain, a for London nice-looking sky. I reached Victoria Station again.

The Victoria Station, a real big train station in fact, a terminal station like Paddington Station, like many train stations in large cities. I had over an hour time until my train would depart. So I started to walk around in the hall.

I liked the atmosphere, like always being at train stations, airports or harbors. The coming and going of the trains, airplanes, and ships - and of course of the passengers. Especially when the places was larger, like this place here, a very busy atmosphere. I should have another coffee and a should eat a snack, even if it wasn't that long ago that I had had breakfast. It would take

From Cozy Days In London:

The day began like every day, an expanded breakfast. As mostly, I was the first in the breakfast-room. And if you maybe could say, at the normal days, that this was not necessarily necessary during a vacation, today my aim was Dover, Dover for only one day, Dover with a special program. I would have to walk some miles, several places waited, a very special place waited - Dover Castle! Scrambled eggs as always, plain, toast, double portion this morning, marmalade, yogurt, fresh fruit, nearly I forgot to mention the cereal..... - of course tea! I felt good as I took my backpack to step out on the street, prepared for every weather.

The train started to move, soon I would see the power station again. Of course, I had done some research on the Internet, had read about the colorful past and all the plans that never became realized. But also about the present use and why there were this huge cranes - should I try to spend some time there tomorrow, when back in London? I was not sure, for me this was the building on an album cover, an album made by a very special band, one of two special bands in my youth. I had all their records, later all their CDs, the first time I saw "Live At Pompeii" was a shock for me. It was fascinating to see them playing, decades away from my first time on a concert - Waters / Gilmour? No, Nick Mason and Richard Wright fascinated me the most - they appeared like the heart of Pink Floyd.

The train left the huge hall of the train station, the rail bent, thereafter would be the river, the bridge, the power station, in seconds I would see the fascinating building, would pass it. And there the power station was, the train entered the bridge and I saw the huge housing blocks to the left side and to the right side of the rails on the other side of the river. The train would have its way throughout them, I would see the power station only for some seconds, not I would pass the power station, I would pass this fucking huge housing block between me and the power station - no, I had not used Google Earth! I leant back, enjoyed the briefly glimpse of the power station and closed my eyes, hearing this single, crystal clear and transcendent tone.

*And no one sings me lullabies
And no one makes me close my eyes
So I throw the windows wide
And call to you across the sky*

As I opened my eyes again, we were still in London, at least I thought so, the typical rows of houses from the suburban areas? Not quite two hours the train would need to Dover, we had not stopped so far, but now the train get slower, Bromley South was our first stop, obviously no longer in London, a quarter of an hour was gone. From now on we had stops quite often, all few minutes, mostly small train stations, at least one time I saw no town at all, only the possibilities to leave the train on both sides of the rails. The landscape was flat, different in a way to that on my last trip to Bristol - Kent, I knew that I would be in Kent today. Famous for its landscape - or? A typical English landscape I thought, nice, in a way boring, but beautiful and calming. Everything was small, nearly to say

"cute", compared to the US, where everything had to be big, hectic and loud. The Great Plains maybe, maybe The Great Plains, but to compare the size of the Great Plains with England, the UK even? No, I liked it, that everything was so small here - two hours from London to Dover, not two hours from the suburb to your workplace, one-way of course!

I looked out of the window and the landscape and the towns or smaller cities passed by, I paid no heed to where I was exactly, but the time passed by and I got the feeling that Dover should be near. Wow, ten minutes, and we should be there, we stopped in Shepherds Well. Also obviously a small town, we departed again and entered a tunnel, would this tunnel led to Dover? No, the tunnel was not that long, and only a few minutes later we stopped in Kearsney. Five minutes, and we should be in Dover; and I had to say, that the British Rail was always good in time. So I waited till the train started to get in motion again, would I see the famous cliffs now? No, the railroad line, houses, and another tunnel, a very short one, but then, immediately as we left the tunnel, we were there - Dover Priory, my aim. I was somewhat surprised, it happened at the end very fast, I left the train, the train station, looked around. No cliffs, no castle, the train station? Okay, this was not Bristol, but.....it looked not so beautiful. I tried to orientate - of course I had no map! But it was not that difficult, it was obvious in which direction I would find the Channel, more was not necessary. I started to follow the street uphill, it should be a short way to the water. Dover was no big city at all, more a small village, a nice neighborhood, used to American cities.

I walked around a bend, hit a larger road, walked a few yards and saw Dover Castle. The castle would be my main aim in Dover, but not my first. So I followed the street till a traffic circle, turned right and followed this street, till I hit the next street. My street ended here, the new street expanded to the left and right, and it needed not much idea, that this was the street along the Channel. Why I described it that way? Well, even it was obvious for many reasons that the water was very near now, I could not see it, I saw only blocks of houses. But I followed the new street some yards to my left and the houses opened up and I could see the water. I crossed the street, a few yards more and I had reached the Channel, the promenade. Very easy this time - or?

There I was now, the water opened up, but it was the Channel, not a sea or even an ocean. I could not see France, but from the castle it should be no problem to see the other side of the Channel, not that much impressive. And yet, I liked it immediately to be here, the harbor to my left, the cliff also. The cliff looked not exactly like on the well-known pictures, obviously I could see the real white cliffs of Dover not from this point.

The harbor basin, it was cloudy and cold, a cold wind, but in fact I saw a few people swimming in the harbor basin - well, Brits? A feeling of comfort captured me, not that impressive, this water, but water, enough water. Sometimes people swam from one side of the Channel to the other side, would I start to swim, I would have no interested in, ever to reach the other side - why? Sooner or later water would be the place of my last rest, why not this water, but not today. I had to pull myself together, I had some things to do. I looked up, Dover Castle, my first aim. But it would be a longer way, but this was good so. It gave me time for the upcoming, I started to walk towards the harbor, towards the cliff, towards Dover Castle.

I walked between the harbor basin and a long block of houses towards the harbor, one of this housing project obviously, on one side with a fantastic Channel view.

The harbor, obviously I would not reach it, my way would be a different one, but not so much a problem. On one hand, I would have a fantastic view on the harbor from above later, if I wished it, on the other hand, I would have no longer the chance to see them. In my youth I would have had the possibility, to see this enormous hovercrafts that crossed the Channel at this time. I knew them only from pictures or from TV - very loud, but fascinating, simply breathtaking. But this time was long gone, very long - or? I reached the end of the housing block.

The housing block ended in an "elegant" curve, I had the opportunity now, to walk again towards Dover city, a street between the housing block and a hotel. Very near to the beginning of the cliffs now, not able to see the castle above, and again the four way street in front of me, that I had

crossed before. I had to find a crosswalk to reach Dover city again.

But I had only to walk a few yards and I could cross the street, the next hotel on the left side - well, Dover was a tourist's hot spot. I would have to follow this road obviously, my aim at my right side now, a small side road headed more or less in the right direction, "The White House" became visible. Too early for a pub, but maybe later, now I had to follow the small way, that brought me, via some steps, fast to a somewhat larger road, the road I had looked for, the road to the castle - presumably, because the road headed uphill and my aim was uphill.

It was hot now, hot for England, the sun shined, my jacket in the backpack, but somewhat out of shape. I feared that it would become a somewhat longer way, I followed the pedestrian way now, but very fast I found a sign that told me, to be on the right way! Maybe one could say, a taxi would have been no bad idea? But this was not my style, walking without a distinct knowledge about the way was mine, sometimes somewhat exhausting, but always also interesting.

The scenery was a nice one, a lot of deep green bushes and trees, very different to the vegetation at home. And in a way the green created a nice atmosphere, no longer that much I had to sweat, looking at the information board. It told you everything you needed to know from the castle, for instance the opening times. So, I simply had to follow my way, that I had found, and I would be there - so far the theory! Well, it became a nice narrow way, surrounded by shade-giving green, but the way transformed into a long row of steep steps! Obviously this would quicken the things up very much, but I had to confess, that I was not only somewhat out of shape. As I reached the end of the stairs I had reached my aim, the castle in front of me, the way to the entrance to my right - but a small box office to my left, somewhat down the street? I sweated now and was somewhat puzzled. Should I walk down the street now, to buy me a ticket, or could I simply walk the rest to the castle? I took a deep breath, tried to stop the sweating somewhat, and decided that it would be better to clarify, whether I had to buy a ticket there - and I had, of course!

So, now that I had everything, I started to manage the last yards, entered the gate, found no place or someone who was interested in, whether I had a ticket or not! Okay, meant this that you.....no, it was absolutely okay to pay for visiting a place like this. The next what I had to realize was, that the "castle" was in fact a very extensive place. Without any doubt, one could spend a pretty long time, days, here and would have not seen all - but I had a very distinct aim, the castle as such, the central building, on top, there was my aim.

Well, maybe I should say something about the area, I was now. Of course, here, high above the city, there was Dover Castle, one of the oldest castles in England, and for an American that meant unbelievably old. But there was also a much older Roman lighthouse, a very old church, The Church of St Mary in Castro, and more. But especially this area was a military installation build, better expanded, during WWII. The English feared, that the Nazis and Hitler would try to invade England, and Dover would have been the best point for them to do so. But all this military installations one could not see, some cannons or so, but the military complex was belowground. I passed a belowground hospital for instance, one could visit it, but not now, maybe later. I thought that they did this, because thus the Nazi air recon could see not much of the facility. But all this, the military complex, the old church, the much older Roman Lighthouse, even not the Secret Wartime Tunnels - I had seen a sign - could find my interest at the moment, at the moment I had only one interest, the castle as such, the central building, its top.

I had to walk some distance to reach the entrance to the castle. The sun shined, I sweated, it was no flat way. The whole area was not flat, but finally I had reached the entrance to the castle. As said, the castle was very old, a high wall, very massive, and a central building, this was more or less the castle. The entrance was very small, compared with the height and thickness of the wall, but after you had passed it, you saw, that at the inner side of the wall there were some more buildings - today a museum, a café, restrooms and more. In earlier times presumably used for storage, as houses for the ordinary people maybe? I spent some time in the museum, but then I entered the central building.

I was interesting to start with a visit in the bottom floor, the storage cellar and the kitchen were

there. One floor above, the floor you entered from outside, were a hall, most interesting the upper floors, the private rooms of the king and his wife, their sleeping room and banqueting hall. All the time I thought, well in a way nice, maybe even luxurious in a way, but even as a king in this time, it was no easy life. I would have liked it to try the bed, maybe it was not that bad at all, but it appeared not that cozy in the end. It was interesting for me, undecided about, if it had been nice to live in these rooms, or very hard in the end. Of course, no air condition, but.....I stayed undecided. After I had walked around the rooms, had found interesting sights and views, I entered the roof.

It was a good time, some school classes here above the city, but they sat outside the wall in the grass and had lunch. Not much people at this time here with me on the top - I enjoyed it, I enjoyed the view on Dover. In fact, Dover was small, two main streets, the harbor of course, but it was a small town. I would have a walk through Dover later, I would have an aim, but now I had to do something. I waited till I was alone, leant out of between the crenelations, looked straight down to the ground, way under me, leant out somewhat more, looked straight down to the ground, way under me, somewhat more till a frisson of excitement and pleasure ran through me. At a certain point I would fall, I would fall deep, most probably I would be dead, it was arousing to do so. Not to commit suicide, to find the point of no return, but without to exceed it. My brain started to whirl and my heart beat in a very special way, I felt happy! I had to stop it, as long as I could stop it - I stepped back. "

I was back in the city, had used the stairs back downhill, but had followed the street then, which leaded to the castle, not passed "The White House" again, I had a special aim. A friend, who was in this city decades ago, as a young man, had eaten a very delicious meal in a very interesting "restaurant". Should it still exist, I should eat there something. He still knew, that I had to walk down one of the two main roads of Dover, the one not near the castle, I had to walk away from the beach, the restaurant would be on the left side. What he not could remind of, was the name of the restaurant, but that they had a fantastic dish - Dover Pot: Rabbit in a delicious sauce, with croutons on it. He also had eaten a fantastic steak with vegetables, but if possible I should choose the Dover Pot. The interesting point was, that the restaurant was one of this typical English flats, downstairs. It was a former living room, now redesigned to a small restaurant with a few tables, very cozy! A young couple had started their own business - well, not that young any more obviously today, as my friend.

I had reached a traffic-calmed area, obviously the heart of Dover and very nice. But I had to go on, but decided spontaneously to sit down for a moment to have a coffee, to rest for a moment. "The Eight Bells" was the place I sat down, on the other side of the road an old church. And with this I meant, old for England, incredibly old for an American. At least it seemed so, while I drank my coffee, faster as thought, a new impulse to enter the church. It was impressive in it, and I was by no way religious, but I had to confess, that such places had a very special mood. Some parts of the church were not that old in the end, for European standards, some very old - I had read a folder. But then I decided to move on.

No long way and I hit the street that I should walk down, every moment you saw something interesting, sad that I had not time, only all the interesting buildings! But I moved on, and the character of the city changed. Now the street I walked along was a busy street, a lot of traffic - okay, I stood there and smiled. Two narrow lanes, that was all, it appeared to me like a small side road, but not as one of the two main axis of a city. But for the narrowness not few cars, and especially buses, tried to find their way. At the sides many small businesses and shops, but everything appeared somewhat cheap, very provincial, not only compared to London, maybe also especially compared to Bristol. This was Dover, this was "the" Dover? I continued my way, and started to doubt about the description of my friend. I should find residential houses, this typical English houses, where you could go down a stair, to enter the flats downstairs, but I saw none of them.

I had continued my way, again the city changed, on my side were flats now, but not with stairs, you

could go down. On the other side of the street still small shops, cheap restaurants, everything appeared somewhat dismally now. This should not sound arrogant, but I had the feeling, that this area had seen better times without any doubts, the times my friend had visited the city? I doubted that I would find the restaurant, thought about to walk back, back to the nice downtown - I had seen some nice restaurants there. But then I saw it, that it had to be the place.

This was the block, I had looked for - or? You could go stairs down, you could enter flats downstairs, but no sign of a restaurant. Everything appeared very.....well, old? Yes, this had to be the place, I felt empty. What happened with the young couple, now an old couple? What happened with their restaurant, no Dover Pot today. I wiped away my tears and thought to walk back, but then I thought, maybe it would help to use the other main street of Dover, the one which was nearer to the castle, to walk back. I followed my road for a moment longer, then I reached a crossing street that would lead me to the other main street. I passed an "ALDI" supermarket, and suddenly, right before I reached the other street, I saw a narrow way, only for pedestrians and bicycles, in my direction, towards the beach again, I entered it and discovered, that every city had its special, magic places.

In the first moment the way was not so interesting, apart that it seemed to be a good alternative to walk back towards the beach, not using the main street. But then a small stream joined the way, a very nice one. Very shallow, a lot of green in it, I saw no fish, but enough possibilities to hide for them. Sometimes some waste in it, not that nice, but not much. Trees and shade, for a moment I lost the stream, but then I found it again and the stream led me back - a nice little park, the church from the other side, now I knew again, where I was. It was very nice and relaxing to walk along the stream, to hear the whispering of the water, interesting graffiti one could discover. Birds in the trees, dragonflies in the air, what a beautiful way traversed this city, but now I was back again.

As I had started to search for the restaurant, before I had the rest at "The Eight Bells", had visited the church, I had passed some restaurants, one seemed especially interesting, but of course, I had thought, that maybe my meal would be a Dover Pot. But now I needed an alternative, and this special restaurant had looked nice and had a nice name - "Chaplins". Only a few yards, and I was there and stood in front of closed doors - but it was not that late? Closed during the afternoon? I looked at the menu outside and saw, that the opening hours were from 8am till 2:30pm - now it was shortly before 3pm! I was disappointed, the menu was very interesting, and as I had passed the restaurant before, it had been full of customers. Well, this was Dover, enough other restaurants would be there, I could eat something at "The Eight Bells", but I was unsure what to do. I touched the front pocket of my backpack, felt my purse, my phone. I decided to drive back, back to London, I could buy me something to eat at the station here in Dover, or back in London.

I sat in the train again, in around one and a half hour I would be back in London, but I would have to walk back the way from Victoria Station. I had bought me a sandwich and a coffee, looked out of the window. I closed my eyes and walked along a small stream, looked down from above, saw the water of the Channel. From above, I had seen France, these were the coasts, where they had landed - or? The military complex down the ground, hospitals and tunnels, these times were over - or? The British would leave the EU, they thought it would be better without, alone. The Americans and their president, I opened my eyes and saw the nice British landscape. This was Kent, or? What should I do, back in London, I looked at my clock - oh, soon I would arrive. The power station again, for the short moment on the bridge? I felt somewhat confused and tired.

Later, after I had gone back from Victoria Station, had had a long shower, had sat in the "java u" near the hotel, I decided to go bed early, no pub today. I dreamt a lot in this night, I always dreamt a lot, I walked through empty streets and searched for something but not found it. It simply was not there, at least not longer, and I was sad about it. Things disappeared, I would disappear, - why I was here?

<< climax of flashbacks, day twenty-three, the second breaking point
<< riding to Dover, last time Dover-London-Dover with the luggage

<< remembering that travel, how long, how many detail?
<< the Bed & Brekfast, the landlady, sugar, the other side, Dover sole, the houses up the hill.....?

<< Walking through the city, looking for the restaurant (Dover Pot), melancholy

<< Day twenty-three, the second breaking point.

On top of the tower of Dover Castle, the memory, the eighteen-year-old boy, the discovery of the arousal when thinking of falling down and dying. The arousal to see the ocean and seeing the waves.

February The Twenty-Fourth

I stood up, took a shower, dressed, a pair of trousers, a shirt. Then I walked to the breakfast lounge. The first as always, eggs as always, TV. Back to room, packing the backpack, stepping out.

<< Election in South Africa, May 8th, 2019 – a day completely today

<< I'm at Trafalgar Square for no reason, especially not to enter the National Gallery

<< I see a long queue of people, a system like on airports, they wait in a long warmed line

<< I try to find the beginning, it starts in a street, Duncannon Street, down along a building, Trafalgar Square, and around the corner, Strand

<< there the long queue enters the building, what happens here

<< I try to find out and understand, this is the South African Embassy, could it be, elections?

<< maybe I should try out to find out later, Internet?

<< I start to ponder, is it only white people standing here?, Nelson Mandela, the ANC, corruption, and more

<< was it better with apartheid, not really, or.....

<< the British colonies, Africans as niggers and slaves, in the US today?

<< Africa could do so much better with an African identity, not the European and especially British “education” and “knowledge”

<< I started to go my way, deep in pondering

<< later I found out that, in fact, elections in South Africa

February The Twenty-Fifth

<< Kew Gardens; fair – not with eighteen! – a day completely today

From Cozy Days In London:

As usual, I was the first in the small breakfast room, and as usual, eggs only, toast, marmalade, yogurt, tea.....for the second last time, tomorrow would be the last time. The TV on the wall, news about the Brexit and the royal baby, that was still not born - what was more important? It seemed as the royal baby would be more important, I finished my breakfast, returned to the room, had a shower and packed my backpack. And as usual, even if the sun shined at the moment, I also packed

in my small umbrella as well as a jacket, entered the street.

I looked forward to the upcoming, but first I had to manage it, to figure out the right Green Line, to find the platform, at least I knew today, how to buy the ticket - again I would buy me a daily ticket. Kew Gardens, so far I had only saw pictures, but even they were wonderful, the reality should be even more beautiful. I crossed Sussex Gardens, London Street, around the corner Praed Street, I had reached the entrance to Paddington Station. First buying the ticket, or looking for the platform and the right green line? Logic would be, to buy the ticket and then maybe asking the public servant, who would be most probably there, to answer questions from tourists - I entered the station to buy me a ticket.

In the end it was not that complicated - more or less! To buy me a ticket was easy, the same as yesterday, only for more zones, and of course I had to pay for four! But the right line at the right platform? Some signs helped me, but especially a friendly public servant - and I discovered the complexity of Paddington Station. Of course different levels, narrow connecting tunnels, but especially two very different entrances that leaded to different parts of the station, connected by one of the narrow tunnels! And, the other entrance was a very modern one, leading to a large hall, that leaded, via one other narrow tunnel to another large hall, and from there to other platforms, not only to a small "room", like the entrance at Praed Street. And then the nice information: Do you think that this is a complex underground station? We have underground stations in London, which are by far more complex and confusing than Paddington Station! Well, if this was the case.....? So, I reached "my" platform and had simply to wait till the next tube would arrive. This time the opposite direction, this time a by far longer ride, parts of London I had not seen so far, a wonderful aim awaited me - my tube arrived.

For the first part of the journey we were underground, but as normally, the line ran overground after leaving the main part of the city, by reaching the suburban areas, so also here. High Street Kensington was the station where we saw the natural sunlight again, but only for a short moment after leaving the station again - the same at Earl's Court! But from West Kensington on we were overground for the rest of the trip.

It was more or less the same view as while riding to Bristol, the typical British suburban architecture. And to be honest, I was not much interested in, I was interested in to arrive at my aim, Kew Gardens Station. Around half an hour would be the travel time, I was on the rail for somewhat longer than twenty minutes, my aim came nearer, and as we crossed River Thames after leaving Gunnersbury Station I knew, my trip would come to an end, the next station would be Kew Gardens Station, we arrived!

I left the tube with the knowledge, that I had no distinct idea about, which way I had to take to Kew Gardens, from the station somewhat to the left was Kew Gardens, I had saw on a map, no long way, should be not that difficult to find! And in fact, it was very easy to find the right way, one had only to follow the signs!

But then there was a difficulty, in front of the station, the plaza in front of the station, was a.....market? Or was a festivity? Live music, many booths, with nice pastry and cakes and other things to eat.....but of course also a lot of other stuff. I thought about to spend some time here, but I had another aim? I bought me two pastries and hoped that it would be not over, when I would come back - but it was in the morning, live music, it seemed as this was not only meant as a simple market at market day.....

In fact, it was very easy to find the entrance to Kew Gardens, at the end of the festivity I had to follow a straight road, that it was - more or less! It was early morning? A long queue awaited me - really? Okay, this was the UK, queuing was a kind of popular sport here - and hey, it was early morning, I had two fine pastries, and the queue was still acceptable - how long was this queue at a summer day, vacation time? Better not to think about it!

Well, I looked at my watch, ten minutes I waited now, was I impatient? Yes, but this was not the

problem, the problem was, that the queue had not really moved in this ten minutes - it had become only longer? Half an hour later I had come nearer to the entrance, well, the gap in the high wall beside me, the gap, that marked the entry area to Kew Gardens. Soon I would have reached this magic place, and it happened!

I entered the place and had to realize, that it was like at an airport, barrier tape, in the end the queue inside was at least as long as outside, only three of the box offices sold tickets? Well, I had two fine pastries.....and after a longer time even a ticket, I finally entered Kew Gardens!

Now I was there, did I know where I had to go? Of course not, I knew that here this wonderful Victorian glasshouse, that I knew from pictures and that looked outstanding beautiful, was to find. And to be honest, I had not to search, only a few steps, and between the trees I could see it, at least I saw a glasshouse, but a few more steps and it was obvious, yes, this was the glasshouse I looked for - it was so wonderful to see!

I walked down the way, a very nice lake to the right, nicely arranged flowerbeds to the left, but behind them the majestic dome of the glasshouse - I had tears in my eyes as I came nearer, happy to be here. I stopped to enjoy the moment, closed my eyes and waited.

The palm house, the largest Victorian conservatory in the world, what a wonderful and magic sight as I took the steps and the last yards to the door. The roundings, the height, the structure, I grabbed the door handle and opened the heavy door, made of steel and glass like the rest of the majestic construction, entered the inside, left the cold spring air behind me and entered the warm exotic air, the extreme humidity of the air, instantly I started to sweat! I unshouldered my backpack and stowed my jacket in it, I pulled up the sleeves of my sweater, it helped somewhat, but it was extreme anyway, but looking at the palm trees it all was forgotten immediately.

A few steps to stand in the center of the breathtaking glasshouse, better in front of the huge palm trees which marked the center of the impressive structure, the highest trees under the highest point of the structure, it was wonderful to look up to the glassy cupola, how high it was - but then I saw! One could go up steep flights of winding stairs, obviously halfway there was a gallery - I was thrilled and looked forward to climbing the steep staircase as my phone gave a signal: This is the wrong greenhouse, I wait for you in the larger one!

I was confused, another greenhouse? Okay, obviously this park was a larger park, it could be, that there would be another greenhouse - a larger one, maybe a more modern one? I thought to write back, something like: If you wanna meet me, then you have to come to me. Maybe your greenhouse is larger, but mine is the largest Victorian glasshouse in the world, and I think also the most beautiful in the world! In the end I wrote nothing, I decided to ignore the SMS, I started to climb the stairs.

It was outstanding to stand at the balustrade, face to face with the tops of the huge palm trees, under the impressive central cupola. It was hotter here, the humidity extreme, the smell in the air wonderful - I started to walk around the palm trees. Well, some rust, some flaking paint, the structure was not new, but in any way impressive. Impressive was the possibility to see the structure of the glass house better now, for example the mechanisms to ventilate the impressive structure - the palm trees? I could not decide, what I should expect as more impressive, the palm trees or this architectural masterpiece, both spellbound me.

I had finished my round, had enjoyed also the view towards the side wings, I decided to walk down again. Yes, this huge palm trees were fascinating, also looking upwards, the highest point of the dome still far away. But I should have also a look at the smaller palm trees and whatever would be to discover there down under.

I was on normal ground again, walked around, looked at the smaller palm trees, all the other trees, huge and beautiful ferns, but also at not so prominent but also beautiful mosses. It was also interesting to examine the structure of the structure more precisely - I spent quite a time in it. But

then I decided, to see what all more would be to discover in the obviously huge park - maybe back to have a look at the plan at the entrance? This was the UK, and I was I, so I thought that this would be unsportsmanlike.

I had seen, while heading to the wonderful glasshouse, that behind it there was also a garden, obviously a rose garden, and obviously in this season without rose buds. Nevertheless, I decided to leave the glasshouse through the back door, and in fact a rose garden, of course only the green rose bushes in this season. Nevertheless, it was nice, like at Regent's Park, but of course in summer.....several pathways diverted from the rose garden, which one I should use? I decided to follow the most left one, the glasshouse in my back. It seemed as this pathway would run parallel to the wall, where I had stood to wait till I could enter the park. In fact, it was no pathway in that sense, it was more a swath, grass but no trees, far away one could see a kind of tower, in fact, a huge park! I decided to use this "way" because other people did so, obviously it was allowed to walk around there also, not only on the tarred ways - I started to head towards the tower. How far away the tower would be? I had no distinct idea, but some hundred yards in any case, five hundred maybe, maybe even more? Whatever, I had time, it did not even rain, therefore.....

As I had walked around a hundred yards, as my way over the grass hit a tarred way, I looked back - yes! The conservatory, with its roundings, looked like a surfaced submarine in a garden ocean, it was simply moving to see it, it looked somewhat mysterious. It looked, like one could only see a small part of it, like in the case of a submarine or an iceberg. Therefore, it would not surprise me, would someone tell me that one could find a secret stairway inside, but not up to the gallery, but down to the true structure because the true structure was hidden, hidden under the garden ocean. It would be maybe a nice idea for a story, the hidden secret under the palm house, the true palm house or whatever one would find thereunder. But at the moment my aim was the "tower", which made now the impression of a Japanese style tower, a pagoda. So much I knew, in Europe, a hundred years ago or so, they had a favor for all from Asia, especially China and Japan. As far as I knew one could find pagodas in many parks in Europe. So, would this one, it would be not very surprising.

I continued with my way, as I could see that there was another building to my right, ahead, behind the trees. As I continued my way, the building appeared larger with every step, more glass, till I was near and the row of trees opened up, only a small, a much younger tree now between me and the.....glasshouse? It was huge, different as the wonderful palm house I had left recently, but definitively a glasshouse? I headed on till I hit the next tarred way, till I stood in front of it. It was huge, colossal, much larger than the palm house. A huge central building, on both sides a kind of pavilion and again on both sides another building, all was one connected glasshouse, but not really, something disturbed me. Not so much the large portico, but the basis was brick-built? Was this the place where the idiot waited? I looked at it, the largest Victorian conservatory.....what was this, this much larger structure? It was by far not so elegant, not rounded, edged, looked more like a palace. Obviously, it should look like one, one of the queen's successors, I was not good in it? Georgian, Edwardian, or.....? It was more "modern", larger, but for me by far not as elegant as the palm house, it appeared not palatial to me, but only "snobbish"? Well, one could say that therewith it fitted perfectly to London. For a moment I pondered about, if it was necessary to enter this "palace". But then I decided to do so, the tower, but it would have been a shame wouldn't I had done it!

I stepped through the door, traversed the entrance area, alone a stunning sight, to enter the hall and was shocked by its beauty - an enormous cathedral made from glass and steel. I shivered, the plants appeared nearly small under the huge dome, all looked brand new, like yesterday built, totally different as the wonderful palm house.

The palm house looked old, was old, was endearing as it was. It was filled with palms, literally, not one palm more was thinkable, not one could be pictured in one's mind larger - and it was wonderful

in this way. But here, the plants looked like children, everything was so clean and bright, flooded by light, I was confused. This could be a brand-new building, but no one would build such a wonderful building today, but in its.....sober.....beauty it looked wrong. The palm house looked right, but this place with plants that looked like planted yesterday?

I looked around, what an impressive structure this was. I would have to climb the staircases, I had to see this magnificent hall from the balustrade, my heart beat faster as I only thought about it, the view from above - the other parts of the building, the other smaller structures to the left and right? I turned left, no short way, I had to cross another door, now I understood, different climates, this was a temperature house. I knew this from a wonderful zoo with a wonderful long greenhouse, divided in many climatic zones. On the other side the other parts of the structure? I would need a longer time to see all, but now I should get an overview first, I should climb the staircases to reach the balustrade. I walked back.

I entered the great hall again, looked forward standing on the balustrade, to have a breathtaking view on this wonderful building, as my phone announced that it had received another SMS - I had no idea why I took the phone: What about a little chase? I see you, do you see me?

I reacted impulsive, I did not think about it, but suddenly I had the feeling that I should be not here, that I was tired of all this. I headed to the beautiful entrance, but this time I looked not at it as I left the impressive building. I started to walk in the direction of the entrance of Kew Gardens, cross-country, the overall direction was obvious. I did not look back, I was not interested in what would be behind me, not long, and I had reached the entrance, also this entrance I left behind. Back the street I reached the market again, now even better attended as I arrived. For a short second I felt the impulse to look at the stalls, maybe even to halt at one or the other, but I headed on and reached the small plaza at the station again. A band played, many listened to the music, no bad music, suddenly I felt hungry. Had music played as I had arrived? I thought that it had. Had I bought me some of the wonderful pasty, offered opposite to the band? I thought that I had. I hastened, but then I bought me three different ones. The first one I ate while walking to the platform from where I could drive back. Just as I reached the platform a tube arrived, it would bring me back to the city, I entered, no one who not had been on the platform already entered the tube, the doors closed, the tube started to move.

The Victoria - Hello, Darling - ESB - I was in the mood to get drunk. Well, wouldn't be that difficult, still had enough time, one more pint, maybe two, and it would have been done - this was my first pint! I had not eaten much over the day, even less I had drunk. I asked myself why I had reacted in this way, why I had not faced the confrontation, why I had run away, hightailed, behaved like a little insecure boy.

The next EBS, a smile while she tapped the beer and gave it to me, she knew how to sell. Your ESB, darling - your five pounds, was not in the mood for more. Not that I thought that she would be interested in more, at least not with an old guy like me, but some nice words would have been possible in any case. But I was not interested in.

Should I hope for a further message? Tomorrow I would leave London again, would leave Paddington again, would return to the States again. I had the feeling that I would get no further message, but maybe this wouldn't be important anyway. But why I had reacted in such an emotional way? I looked at my ESB, would I hurry I would be able to order a third one before the closing time - I hurried.

February The Twenty-Sixth

I stood up, took a shower, dressed, a pair of trousers, a shirt. Then I walked to the breakfast lounge. The first as always, eggs as always, TV. Back to room, packing the backpack, stepping out.

<< I stood at the lake, looking at the little park on the other side, called Rembrandt Gardens
<< he had not seen this place as a young man, staying in the city only, like Kew Gardens
<< what a wonderful little place in this, as such, boring city
<< maybe the city was boring, especially The City, the arrogant and hypocrite City
<< how many gems could the suburbs offer as yet, like the way to Kew Gardens?
<< the rest of the country, Wales, and Scotland?
<< the capitals, the big cities, the urban life
<< why interested in visiting palaces and such, while sitting at the water, a cup of tea, looking at the little garden?
<< soon on the way back, tomorrow, the last whole day, not much would keep him in this city, this nation as such
<< the British way, not his, British humor, yeah, British music, of course, literature, Tristram Shandy, Adams or Carroll, and so much more, painting and architecture, maybe, maybe it was the wrong way to view, to see The City, and to judge?
<< tomorrow would be his last whole day

February The Twenty-Seventh

I stood up, took a shower, dressed, a pair of trousers, a shirt. Then I walked to the breakfast lounge. The first as always, eggs as always, TV. Back to room, packing the backpack, stepping out.

<< I stood at the lake, looking at the gracile black swans, the young man, discovered them at this place, in this city, so long ago
<< on a few more occasions, he saw them again – driving to the barracks in Tauberbischoffsheim, the zoo in Augsburg, river Jagst at the barrage while riding a bike, (SF?)
<< two flew on his back, forever they would accompany him now
<< wonderful images, metaphors of desire, seeing them swinging together and in pairs
<< constant fidelity a life long
<< he would fly back home tomorrow, not much he would miss, but the black swan he would miss
<< standing at this lake and watching them, like as young man
<< and yet, in his memory, this place looked very different, a street nearby
<< a much smaller place, a much smaller lake, was there another lake with black swans in this city?
<< he was not aware of it, it was St James' Park, the lake there, famous for black swans
<< memories, sometimes so misleading
<< or was there some truth in it, he could not see?
<< tomorrow, he would leave

February The Twenty-Eighth

It was very early as I stood up - well, as always, as always I was the first in the small breakfast room. Early in the sense that it had been late yesterday, that it had been at least a pint too much, I had had three. It had been not that easy to walk the short way back to the hotel, not that easy to stand up this morning, but I had had no motivation to lay longer in the bed - strangely my eyes had been open very early.

A long and very hot shower had helped, not really a headache, but a very heavy head, had not the feeling to be astute this morning - now I sat in the breakfast room and had ordered the usual. Also in TV the usual, the Brexit madness, Theresa May talked like a boring politician, maybe because she was a boring politician? But then came the message a whole nation had waited for, the whole world had waited for this message, this exceptional moment, the royal baby had been born - hallelujah!

I tried to appear at least somewhat enthusiastic, I was no longer alone, and of course also the staff, but in fact I was not really interested in it - well, they had their royals, we Kim Kardashian. Now I had a problem.....

It was still early, I had plenty of time till I had to leave the hotel room, not to talk about by when I had to be at Paddington Station - my plane back to the States departed late afternoon. But this was good so, I had forgotten to buy something important.

Whenever I left a hotel after a stay, I left some cookies in my room with an envelope with some money in it, as a final goodbye. I had forgotten to buy the cookies! But it was a short walk down Sussex Gardens to Edgware Road, to the supermarket there. It was easy to find some nice cookies in a metal box, I decided to walk back via Praed Street for a last time, till I got round to the "java u" in Praed Street - well, I had had breakfast just half an hour ago? But why not for a last time, a flat white or a cup of tea would be always something nice. I entered the shop with my box of cookies.

The place was very crowded - well, breakfast time? I looked around, only a few seats not occupied? I was no fan of using a seat between unknown people. The other "java u" - Edgware Road - was much larger.....the stairs downwards? It was not the first time that I saw this staircase, but I had never used it, had always found a seat here. So, I decided to have a look downstairs first, walked down the staircase and called myself a dummy. Downstairs was a wonderful place, nicely separated parts, comfortable seats.....simply a nice place to sit down, a whole new world - I had missed this the entire time by always sitting above.....why I had never been curious? So, I walked upstairs again, ordered a flat white, and had my last coffee in London at this very nice and cozy place.....

I had been back in the hotel, now sitting Paddington Station, waiting till the train would depart, had left the cookies and the envelope with some pounds in it in the hotel room, was not in the best mood. As always, I was way too early at the station, but was not interested in to walk around, to look at the other people, coming and leaving, drinking a coffee or two, maybe a snack. I sat in the hall, looked at the large display board, looked at the clock, looked at the time moving forward. I felt empty.

London had been.....Bristol, I had missed a lot in Bristol, Dover had been strange, London? In a way London was a fucking snobby.....simply a fucking city. On the other hand I felt sad to leave, to fly back, would like to be at "The Regent's Park" again, so many places I had missed, the zoo. Maybe the airport would lift my spirits again, I liked it very much to be at airports. But now I had to enter the platform, to enter the train, the fast train, it would be no long travel to Heathrow. I looked around a last time, not the most beautiful train station I ever had saw, but nevertheless, I felt sad, I felt alone, not even the phone was any longer interested in me.....

Heathrow, the story came to its end. I loved it to be at airports, but this was not the whole story. I loved it to fly, I loved aviation, I loved to be at an airport, waiting for boarding, to fly away. I loved it not that much to be at the airport again to fly back home, in fact, it always depressed me.

It was not different this time, had checked in, my luggage was on its way to the plane, I had still time till I had to board, I walked around and looked at the people. Happy those who headed towards a new destination, I would have been happy to stay.

Would I arrive at this place once again? I had missed so much, especially in Bristol, had to hear the three wonderful voices again. It was early 2019, should have a look at their tour plan, should stay in touch with future concerts, maybe at the end of the year or in the first half of 2020?

There would be so many aims worth to arrive, a whole world would wait to get discovered, so many wonderful voices that could be heard. Why flying back, why not further on, why not never back, but only ahead? It was not me, I had been always the guy who gazed after the ships, smaller and smaller they got at the horizon, but on the ships others fulfilled their duty.

A stewardess passed by, a beautiful stewardess in her nice uniform. Men liked stewardesses in their

nice uniforms, sexually charged, but also a metaphor for having itchy feet. But hey, I was the young men, standing at the docks, watching the ships passing by.....