

Destinations

“Where to, Sir?”

“Clifton Hill, please.”

“Right you are.” He’s disappointed. The destination presents no challenge to his knowledge of the city. He hasn’t been caught out on an address for ages. Even the tiny cul-de-sacs, he knows them all.

He swings the cab into Clifton Hill. Sheila, the controller, comes through on the radio: “Sorry George, but you’re going to have to do a Gatwick for me; I’ve no one else. Pick up at Southdown Avenue, number twenty-three.”

He hates the airport jobs. Feels like pleading sickness and going home. But he calls back and says he’ll do it. She wouldn’t have asked unless she had to. Bit of give and take.

When he gets to the pick-up they come piling out of the door, two girls with cases, jackets, shoulder bags, all sorts of bits and pieces, everything colourful and glittery.

Once it’s all stowed in the cab he heads for the London Road, the passengers chattering away in the back. The young ones don’t really want to talk to the driver, but he does ask where they’re flying to; feels that’s expected.

“Marrakesh,” they answer together.

At Gatwick they flutter into the terminal like a pair of butterflies, laughing as bits of luggage keep slipping from their trolley. He watches, transfixed, as they disappear, young limbs moving in all directions. “Marrakesh!”

He’s back on the A23, alone again, doing a steady fifty-five on the inside lane. He can still hear their voices and their laughter; their perfume lingers in the cab. Soon they’ll be airborne, spreading their wings.

He’s heading back to the world he knows, the destinations he gets asked for: the Pier and the Pavilion; the theatre he’s never been inside; all the streets and squares. The ache that comes with an airport job begins to ease. Past the floral ‘Welcome’ on the London Road is the comforting green spread of Preston Park.

Then it’s left at Stanford Avenue, cut along Rugby Road to the Ditchling Road, then down through Hollingdean to the Lewes Road. Into Southover and park the cab - no more for today. That was always his way. Soon as ever he could – back home with Mum and Dad; leave the world outside. Still the same house, but just him now. He slumps into Dad’s armchair. Always safe at home.

Nice bit of liver with bacon this evening, just like Mum used to do it. She loved to cook his favourites. ‘We don’t need anyone else,’ she used to say. He picks up the atlas that Dad kept handy for the crossword. He won’t start the liver for another half-hour or so.

“Marrakesh!”