

BRIGHTON was the first real journey I undertook in my aunt's company and proved a bizarre foretaste of much that was to follow.

We arrived in the early evening, for we had decided to spend the night. I was surprised by the smallness of her luggage which consisted only of a little white leather cosmetics case which she called her *baise en ville*. I find it difficult myself to go away for a night without a rather heavy suitcase, for I am uneasy if I have not at least one change of suit and that entails also a change of shoes. A change of shirt, a change of underclothes and of socks are almost an essential to me, and taking into consideration the vagaries of the English climate I like to take some woollens just in case. My aunt looked askance at my suitcase and said, 'We must take a cab. I had hoped we could walk.'

I had booked our rooms at the Royal Albion because my aunt wished to be near the Palace Pier and the Old Steine. She told me, incorrectly I think, that this was named after the wicked marquess of *Vanity Fair*. 'I like to be at the centre of all the devilry,' she said, 'with the buses going off to all those places.' She spoke as though their destinations were Sodom and Gomorrah rather than Lewes and Patcham and Littlehampton and Shoreham. Apparently she had come first to Brighton when she was quite a young woman, full of expectations which I am afraid were partly fulfilled.

I thought I would have a bath and a glass of sherry, a quiet dinner in the grill, and an early bedtime, so that we would both be rested for a strenuous morning on the front and in the Lanes, but my aunt disagreed. 'We don't want dinner for another two hours,' she said, 'and first I want you to meet Hatty if Hatty's still alive.'

'Who is Hatty?'

'We worked together once with a gentleman called Mr Curran.'

'How long ago was that?'

'Forty years or more.'

'Then it seems unlikely ...'

'I am here,' Aunt Augusta said firmly, 'and I got a card from her the Christmas before last.'

It was a grey leaden evening with an east wind blowing on our backs from Kemp Town. The sea was rising and the pebbles turned and ground under the receding waves. Ex-President Nkrumah looked out at us from the window of the waxworks, wearing a grey suit with a Chinese collar. My aunt paused and regarded him, I thought, a little sadly. 'I wonder where Wordsworth is now,' she said.

'I expect you'll hear from him soon.'

'I very much doubt it,' she said. 'My dear Henry,' she added, 'at my age one has ceased to expect a relationship to last.'

Graham Greene, *Travels With My Aunt*, 1969