

NIGHT TRAIN, 22 JUNE

23.10 Left on time, which surprised everyone in the corridor. The conductor has a moustache like a coat brush and calls every passenger "sir", including the six-year-old in the next compartment, who loves it.

23.48 The berth is exactly as long as I am, if I do not think about it. Somewhere under the floor a wheel knocks twice at every joint in the rail, and the whole carriage leans into the bends as if it were listening for something.

00.30 Couldn't sleep. Went to the dining car, which was closed, and stood at the window instead. Villages go by with a single light on, always one, as if each of them had appointed somebody to stay awake.

01.15 A woman in the corridor was reading a paperback with the cover torn off. I asked what it was. She said she didn't know; that was why she was enjoying it.

02.40 We stopped for twenty minutes at a station with no name on the platform. Nobody got on. Nobody got off. A cat walked the full length of the train, inspected us, and went home.

04.05 First grey light over flat country. Cows standing very still in the mist, all facing the same way, like a congregation.

05.30 Coffee. The conductor brought it himself and said, "Nearly there, sir," to me and to the six-year-old, who saluted.

I think I will remember this night longer than the city at the end of it.