

SAME OLD TRAIN

I've been doing this same journey day after day, week after week, for the last three years.

06:30 Watford Junction to Euston. Walk to Kings Cross, invariably in the rain.

07:42 Platform 7, Kings Cross to Cambridge. Arrive Cambridge 08:30. Short walk, invariably in the rain, to Chancellor's Office for day ahead.

I could do this trip blindfolded.

'Good morning Mr Anderson. Morning paper Mr Anderson. Cappuccino with soya milk Mr Anderson, after all normal milk is not good for you.'

So, why, today, Tuesday, is this train not pulling out on time? Wrong snow, dry leaves on the line? Ah, wait, cancel that retort. Train moving. All's well in carriage 4, except for her again and that blinking tinny tin-tin sound coming from her headphones. Ignore her, Anderson. Read the letters page!

Made Stevenage. All on track. Ha ha! Just my little joke. Good, pop music Mary is getting off. I think I will lie my head back for a few moments and collect my thoughts before seeing how England batted yesterday at Lords. The Chancellor has called an urgent meeting with me this morning. He has some news about future operations at the College. Train pulling out. All on time still. Oh lord, another interruption – tea trolley Tim! I doubt that's his real name, but let's just call him Tim. Normally it's Peter. I guess Peter must be on holiday, presumably taking advantage of his National Rail pass and cheap tickets to the seaside somewhere.

'Good morning Sir. Any refreshments for you?'

'No thank you'

'I recommend the croissants, they are fresh this morning.'

'No! thank you.'

'Fair enough. Oh, by the way Sir, we are going to be delayed getting into Peterborough this morning. Incident at Huntingdon. No need to alight though Sir, we're have you in Peterborough in no time.'

'Peterborough!?'

'Yes, Sir. But don't worry. The line should be clear by the time we reach that area. Enjoy your journey.'

'But... but, this is the Cambridge train! Platform 7. Always Platform 7.'

'Ah, no Sir. The Cambridge train was Platform 4 this morning on account of that train being delayed coming into Kings Cross you see.'

'I have to get off! Where's the next stop?'

'Huntingdon, Sir. Are you sure you won't have that croissant now?'

Tea Trolley Tim was of no use. And I have failed. My whole day is a mess. What will the Chancellor say?

I loosened my tie, gazed out over the Cambridgeshire countryside and reluctantly accepted my defeat. No meeting with the Chancellor now. I wonder what he was going to tell me?

'Wake up, Sir. Wake up!'

'Oh, oh, it's you. Tea Trolley T..., oh, never mind. Where are we?'

'Huntingdon, Sir.'

'What time is it?'

'Nine, Sir.'

'Hang on, my phone is ringing. It's the Chancellor.'

'David, where the hell are you?'

'Err, Huntingdon, Chancellor. You were going to tell me something important this morning?'

'Yes. I'm sorry to have to say this over the phone, but...'

'Chancellor? Hello? Damn, lost the signal!'