

As if to touch the swallow's tail

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I'm high.

Not *that* way.

I don't need any artificial high, here, where everything is hyper-real.

London. Londinium. Lunden.

Same place, different names Take your pick.

Literally high.

Fresh winds in the hair, or rather, slipstreaming around my helmet. Higher than a kite. My ceiling the sky, two thousand feet above the teeming metropolis. If I could I'd fly into the darkness of space. No other wings around save the birds soaring above the squares, circles, spires, terraces, offices, domes, streets, avenues, parks, commons, and canals. Over every recognisable inch of tarmac and grass.

London belongs to me.

Wise Greeks knew that "once you have tasted flight, you will forever walk the earth with your eyes turned skyward." Well, who am I to argue with ancient wisdom? In my tiny airborne craft, I transcend all limits imposed by my earthly body which on any other day might be plodding, step by heavy step along grey London pavements. Population fifteen million, give or take a few on holiday and the gawking visitors. Far below, threading between the opulent green fields, the muddy Thames winds its way through the grey sentinels to the open sea. For nigh on two thousand years this settlement has grown from tiny grasping, hungry desperate roots. A melting pot of three hundred languages. (Yes, even the cliches soar). Three hundred and one in that vocal soup if, as some Londoners assert, Cockney is another language altogether. Home to four World Heritage sites. Most places would be happy, proud, and boastful

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of just one. The cradle of Time for the world as every traveller knows. The prime meridian defines zero degrees and Greenwich Mean time. GMT plus two for Corfu. GMT plus eleven for Brisbane. GMT plus zero for Cape Town. Wherever you travel, thoughts turn to London, somehow.

From up here I truly see my London. Once upon a time, children flew kites high above London parklands while parents fed the pigeons, just tuppence a bag. No kites visible today beneath my microlite weaving in the air. Around me just my feathered friends and an occasional aeroplane. A thousand flights a day come and go each day into Heathrow, just a few fields away in the west.

Who claimed the skies above London first? Was it Archaeopteryx? Was it the maniraptoran theropod dinosaurs? Was it the birds? No matter. It was creatures with the ability to fly, as today I can fly, though creatures with some kind of wings still rule the roost. (I warned about cliches.) The opportunistic and famous London pigeons are ever watchful for the many raptors who greedily prey upon them. Hot air balloons appeared above Cheapside three centuries ago. For two shillings and sixpence the astounded populace could watch the balloons being filled. The simple things in life entertain us the most.

I have time to think up here. One year after the balloon the first man took to the air. Pickings were rich at St Paul's Cathedral that day, increasing its entry price for spectators clamouring for a rooftop view. Woo hoo! You can't keep a good capitalist down, or on the ground. All too soon the friendly sky became the deadly sky as The Military discovered flight. Bombers, raining liquid fire, brought screaming death on wings of wanton destruction. Yet again, old London rose from the ashes as new London, resilient people crawling from the wreckage of their lives.

Below me, swirling into view as I scribe a figure of eight in the blue, reconstructed London enthralled. Buckingham Palace, London Eye, Piccadilly Circus, St Paul's

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Cathedral, Tower Bridge, Trafalgar Square, the Museums, the theatres, the libraries, greyhound tracks, St Pancras, Wembley and Wimbledon. Each one a worshipful cathedral dedicated to the pleasure of the common person. I twirl. Can I imagine the remains of a Bronze Age bridge over the prehistoric River Effra which flows underground into the Thames? A section of the third-century wall survives behind Tower Hill. Not even the all-conquering Romans settling here in AD47 could build something which could sustain against the fire and fury of Boudicca's Iceni. They mercilessly turned it all to ash. Simpler times of only 60,000 Londoners, never yielding to the yoke, then or now.

Just me and the clouds.

One anonymous soul, lost in the cerulean haze, far above the money and the angst of a city built on money. A simple soul living a finite life, who wants to live for another hundred years, a thousand years, flying until machine and man fall from the sky.

Today is my wedding day.

If I were on the ground.

In three hours, I will be only half of a new reality. Worried about the physicality of marriage, I visited my doctor. He seemed amused by my concern. At three score years and ten was it so strange that I had tired of always being alone? He laughed. "You fly the microlite to be alone," he replied. 'Ah yes,' said I. 'I like to be alone up there, but not down here.' He looked shocked by my logic, then laughed. I laughed too, all the way to St James' Park to watch the swans and ponder my future. Despite my misgivings a day was set.

Only today, at the eleventh hour, was I having doubts and took to the air. Was I being fair to Dorothy who had confessed their loneliness to me, hoping I would respond for her? Thinking space. I bank my craft into sworls of winds, calculating my impact on the ground. A way out, no decision needed. All over in a flash.

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I would make such a tiny scar on the land, yet how could I think to inflict more pain and damage. How could I think so cruelly of Dorothy?

London, as dear as a lover to me.

Dorothy, the real deal.

Twin loves, neither of which I can hurt.

London in my blood. Dorothy in my heart.

Two loves for the price of one.