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The Beat Generation

Los Angeles – 2001

London * Paris * Algiers – 1954



Whatever happened to the romance of travel? In the old days, Subang Airport was an exciting gateway to exotic destinations, when just the trip to the airport alone was enough to set the pulse racing with anticipation. The new Mahathir airport is so far away that you have to break the journey in Ipoh just to get there. But back in the old days, I'd pack my Globetrotter suitcases and look

forward to First Class travel to London with the BOAC when First Class really meant something. By a strange coincidence, I never got to travel with The Wife because something would always seem to crop up at The Ministry at the last moment. Therefore, she would inevitably have to fly in Economy Class first and I would follow in the next flight where the only available seat would always seem to be First Class. In those days, I would have to go to London very often in order to attend conferences or to look into the purchase of new equipment—tedious things like paper clips, filing cabinets and ... I won't bore you with it now. But travel was bliss. Luxuriating in First Class, dining on venison and caviar, stopping at Muscat and Rome. Sadly my children hated flying and would be screaming and vomiting the entire flight. At least that's what The Wife told me because they would travel with her.

Recently, I flew again and this time I had to go Economy. It was excruciating. We were crammed into seats that even a cat would have found constricting, placed next to a drunken Scotsman who acted as if the existence of any alcohol that was not actually his was an offence to his pride.

“Would you like red or white wine, sir?” asked the stewardess.

“Both!” was his simple request.

Somewhere over Japan he glowered at me, “What are you looking at?!”

“I was looking at the dawn rays of sunlight glinting on Mount Fuji.”

“You're looking at my wasskey! See you ...”

And then he passed out. He was so sozzled that we could have used him for fuel. Looking in the other direction wasn't much better.