The Road to Marple

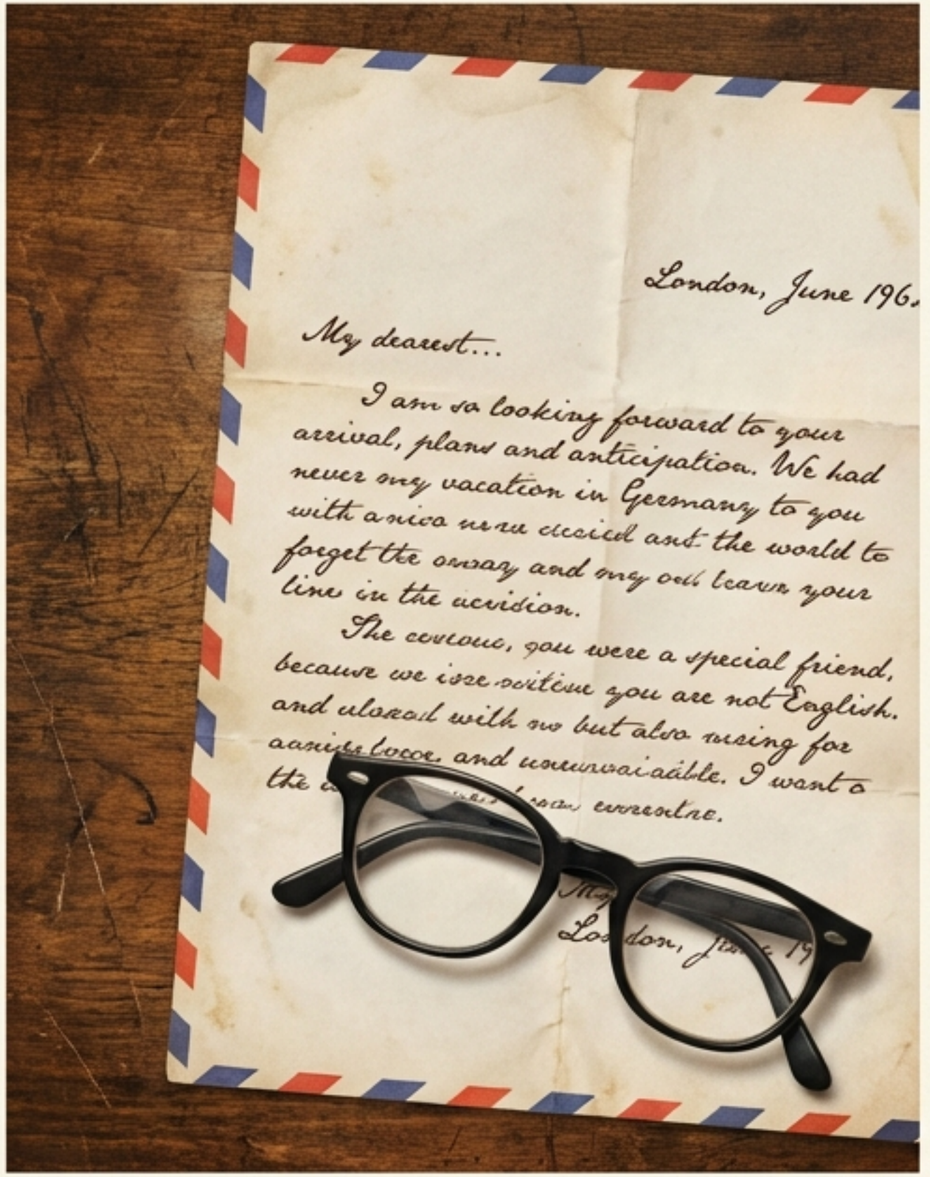
A Journey of First Love, Summer 1964



NotebookLM

A Promise in an Envelope

In early June, her letter arrived from London. It was full of plans and anticipation. We had been apart for ten months, but her words closed the distance instantly. She confirmed my visit for late July and and laid out the logistics, but it was the personal lines that I held onto.



"I am so looking forward to your arrival... I will never forget my vacation in Germany and also not you."

"You were a special friend, because you are not English."

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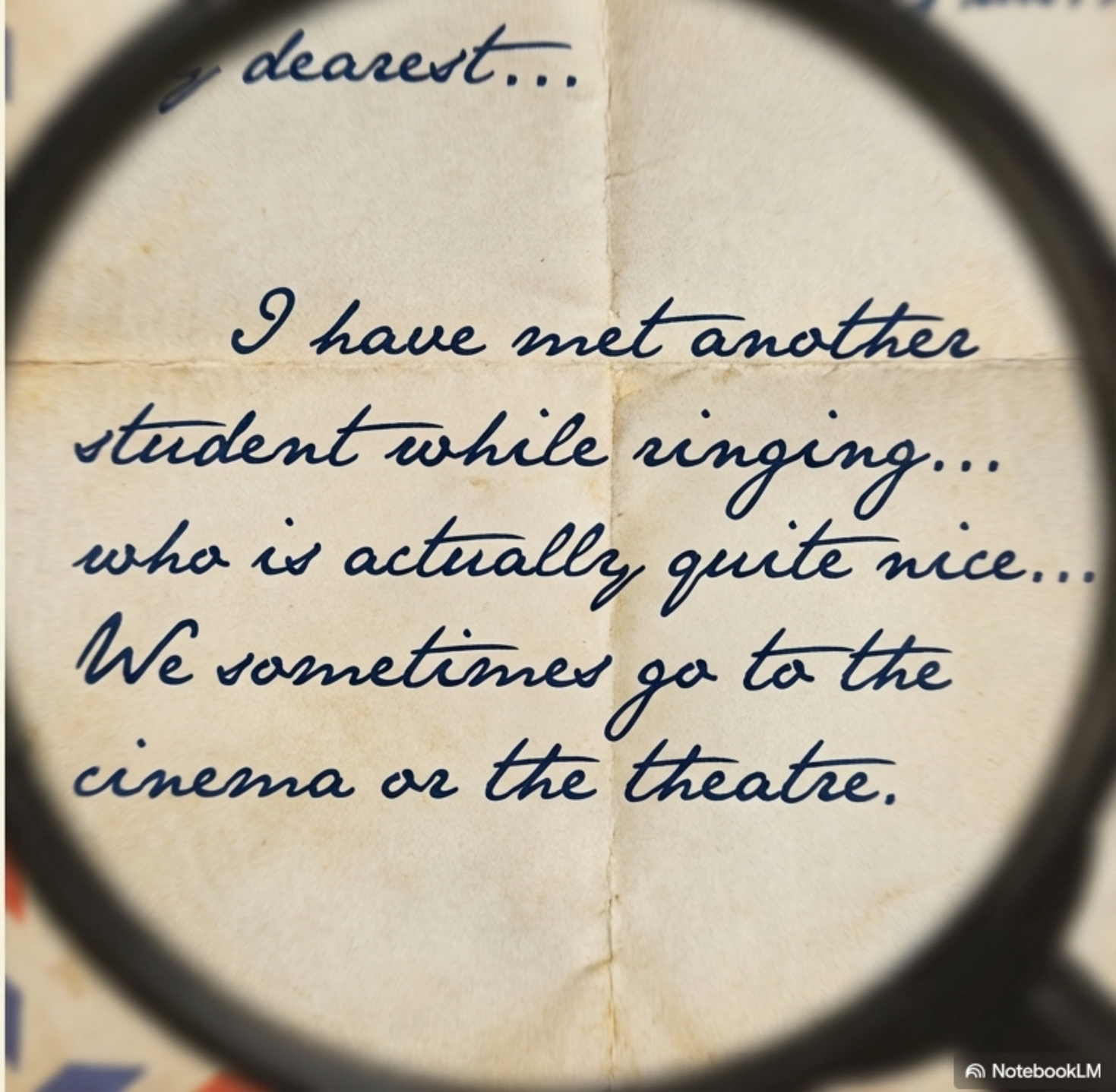
A Seed of Doubt

But amidst the plans, there was a detail that caught in my throat. She mentioned a friend in London, another student she had met bell-ringing. They went to the cinema, to the theatre. My world, for a moment, felt very far away.

"I have met another student while ringing... who is actually quite nice... We sometimes go to the cinema or the theatre."

My Personal Reflection: What calmed me down the most was her assurance that she almost never goes to a dance hall. I was not only shy, but a terrible dancer.



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An Urgent Request from Hamburg

Weeks later, another letter. She was now in Hamburg, feeling the distance as much as I was. The train journey from London had been exhausting, and the thought of me traveling alone was weighing on her. She proposed a new plan and made a request that made my heart race.

> *"Can you travel on July 21st instead of July 25th, then we could meet in Dover or Ostend?"*

> *"Here is my telephone number: 457385. I would like you to please call me once... write to me again as soon as possible, then I won't feel so alone."*



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The Sound of Her Voice Across the Miles

I waited until I was alone in the house, my heart pounding with a mixture of excitement and fear. I stood in my stepfather's study and gave the operator the number. After an agonizing wait, a voice at the dormitory fetched "the English girl".



Me: "I finally heard Shelagh's gentle voice. It was familiar, clear, and very close, as if she were standing in front of me."

The Plan: "I explained I couldn't leave until July 23rd, after my report card. Hitchhike to Aachen, then train and ferry, arriving in London on July 26th at nine in the morning."

The End: "Suddenly, I heard my stepfather's VW in the driveway. I had to end the call before I was caught."

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One Packed Suitcase and a Hopeful Thumb

On July 23rd, the holidays began. With my report card securing my passage, and a negotiated 77 DM in my pocket, I packed my suitcase. The plan to hitchhike from Munich started poorly. After hours with no luck, I boldly approached a man in a parked DKW. He agreed to take me as far as Wiesbaden, on one condition: “If you bother me, you're out.”



My Packing List

2 trousers, 1 sweater, 1 white shirt, 4 pairs of underwear, bathing trunks, Langenscheidt dictionary, Kurt Tucholsky's "Schloß Gripsholm"...

Travel attire: Pepita trousers, grey jacket, nylon shirt, tie, dancing shoes.

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Kindness in Cologne, History in Aachen

From Wiesbaden, a train took me along the Rhine to Cologne. There, my cousin Jochen— “Old Joe “Old Joe”—greeted me not as a burden, but as a brother. He cooked me dinner, served me Kölsch, and applauded my school success before driving me the final 80km to Aachen.

The next day, my cousin Hubertus showed me Charlemagne’s cathedral, a place so steeped in history it felt like walking through my textbooks. In the evening, he took me to the station to meet the D-Zug train to Ostend.



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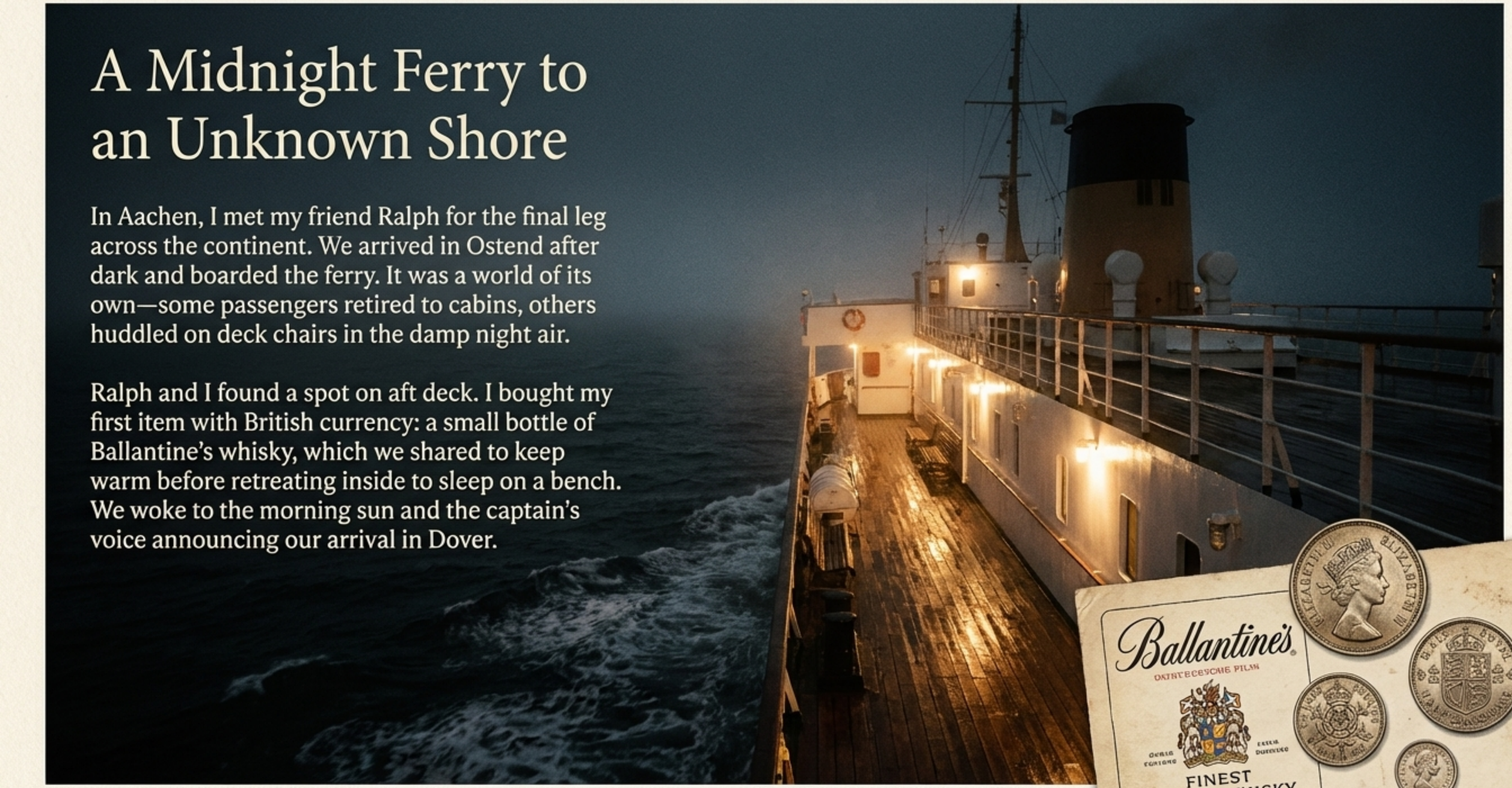
A Midnight Ferry to an Unknown Shore

In Aachen, I met my friend Ralph for the final leg across the continent. We arrived in Ostend after dark and boarded the ferry. It was a world of its own—some passengers retired to cabins, others huddled on deck chairs in the damp night air.

Ralph and I found a spot on aft deck. I bought my first item with British currency: a small bottle of Ballantine's whisky, which we shared to keep warm before retreating inside to sleep on a bench. We woke to the morning sun and the captain's voice announcing our arrival in Dover.



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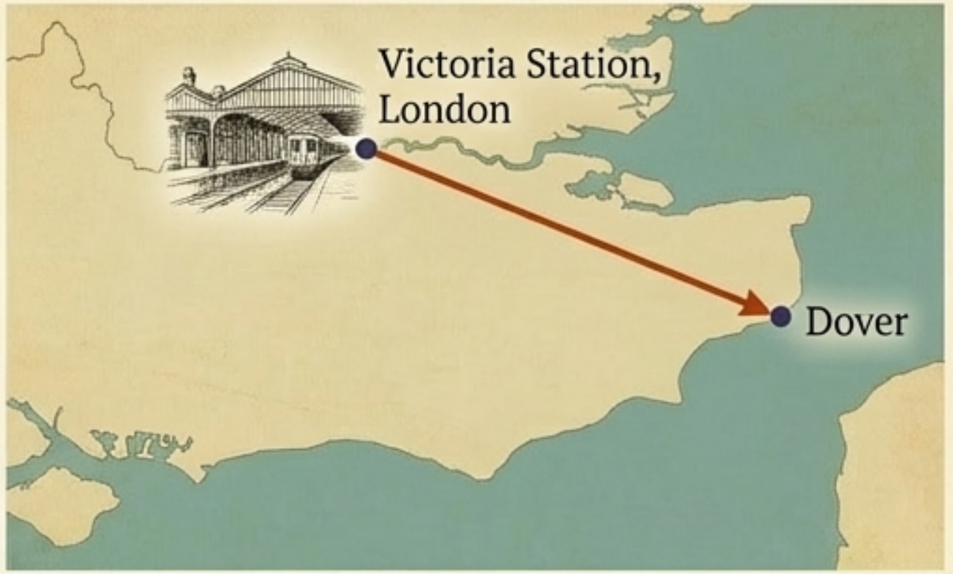

Green Hills and Lingering Shadows

The train from Dover sped through a landscape of impossibly green meadows and ancient woods. As I began to relax, Ralph gave me a history lesson I hadn't expected. He spoke of the war, of Dunkirk, of the Baedeker Blitz on historic cities like Canterbury, a raid specifically designed to destroy cultural treasures. He asked if Shelagh's father had been in the war.

> *Ralph's Warning: "Be careful when you talk about history with the English," he said. "They haven't forgotten." His words were a stark reminder that I was entering what was, not so long ago, enemy territory.*

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Lost at Victoria Station

Victoria Station was a roaring chaos of steam, whistles, and a thousand rushing people. I said goodbye to Ralph and found my designated meeting spot. And I waited. Five minutes became thirty. Thirty minutes became an hour. She wasn't there. My heart sank. Every hope, every mile traveled on the long road from Munich, seemed to dissolve into the noise of the station. I was alone in a vast, foreign city.

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And then I heard it.



After an hour that felt like a lifetime, a voice cut through the noise. It was clear, familiar, and impossibly welcome.

“Hallo Burkhardt!”

She had been delayed. The world was right again.

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From London to Manchester

Our first moments alone were in the back of a taxi, crossing a city I couldn't really see. All that mattered was that she was next to me. I gave her the box of chocolates I had carried all the way from Germany. On the train to Manchester, the noise of the world faded away and we could finally talk. The four-hour journey felt like minutes.

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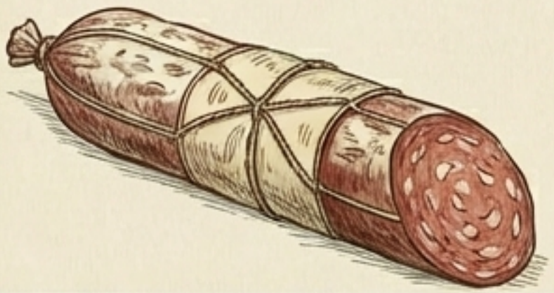
The House on Church Street

Her father picked us up froms from the station in Marple. Driving on the left side of the road was the final, disorienting sign that I was truly in her world. At the house, I met her mother. I presented my gifts, which I had worried over the whole journey.





The Gifts

Mr. Coyne laughed, holding the huge German salami in his hand. Mrs. Coyne held up the bottle of Mosel Riesling and seemed genuinely pleased. They offered me a mug of hot cocoa. I was in.

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Her Room

Shelagh showed me to her room, which was to be mine for the duration of my stay; she would share with her sister, Hilary.

It was a simple room, but it was filled with her presence, her scent. After the hot cocoa, we went upstairs. The day's long journey fell away.



"I sank happily into her fragrant bed and she spoiled me with kisses and caresses. Then she left me and I fell asleep immediately."

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‘Welcome to Marple.’
I woke to daylight and the feeling of a hand on my cheek.
Shelagh was sitting on the edge of the bed, smiling.
Her: “Ah, there you are! Good morning! Welcome in Marple!”
Then she gave me a passionate kiss.
Her: “Time for breakfast!”