

The Outing

by [Paul Martin Freeman](#) (March 2022)



I

Miss Deidre Ealing of Tiny Tots School,
A woman who'd never be anyone's fool,
Observing her charges like little buds sprouting
Decided the next day they'd go on an outing.

Departure was posted that morning for nine;
No clouds could be seen and the outlook was fine.
Patricia was punctual with Patrick her brother,

Both dressed in their best by their pampering mother.

Aurora arrived with her mouth full of chocolate,
And Moses was there with his mouse in his pocket.
Felipe and Freddy as usual were fighting,
Which usually happened when things got exciting.

And then there was Sky in her new Sunday dress,
And Maisie as always her hair in a mess.
Hermione was present, and so too was Hetty
With Ben her admirer together with Betty.

Miss Ealing had hired a coach for the day;
The driver was Walter whose wits were astray.
But also the man was addicted to booze
And hid on his person some bottles to use.

And so they all boarded and got to a seat
With everyone clutching packed lunches to eat.
And as they sat ready that morning in May

It seemed they would have the most wonderful day.

For what can compare with the fun of an outing
With happy young children all screaming and shouting?
And what can compare with a coach trip together
With friends and admirers in wonderful weather?

Yet here must I crave my poor reader's indulgence
With what will to some seem fantastical nonsense.
But strange are the ways of an old spinster's heart
And Deidre's had longings that set it apart.

For now in her bosom there started to bubble
The thoughts that were destined to cause all the trouble.
Observing them all in her mind there began
The faintest first stir of a devilish plan.

But truth to tell Deidre Ealing for years
Had wept many lonely and miserable tears.
For love had been absent from Deidre's life,
This woman unwanted as anyone's wife.

No child had she ever had climb in her bed,
Nor ever had kissed any little one's head.
Her life had been empty—except of her sadness,
To which would the jury attribute her madness.

Her only delight were the children at school,
But these she kept distant as that was the rule.
Yet all though the years she'd remember their names
And watch them enchantedly lost in their games.

She'd see them arrive at the gates every morning—
If someone had looked they'd have seen there a warning—
She'd gaze at them all with a sorrowful eye,
Accompanied by an involuntary sigh.

And if they had looked at the end of the day,
Long after her charges had all gone away,
They'd also have noticed a faraway look
As Deidre tidied up every last book.

But no one took notice of Deidre Ealing,
And nobody understood what she was feeling.

When Deidre put those books back on the shelf
She'd muse how already she stood there herself.

Her place had been always some spot in the corner
Away from the children from where she'd keep order.
And always alone there she'd merely observe,
And always that distance she'd need to preserve.

But now they were ready to set off together,
Her party excited in glorious weather.
And thus they departed on time as they planned
With Walter a bottle of gin in his hand.

II

Miss Ealing had picked for today's destination
The castle at Windsor so loved by the nation.
The children would see there our history on show,
Their pride in which Englishmen never outgrow.

So driven by Walter, his hand round his bottle,
They roared down the highway, the coach at full throttle.
No words could their merriment ever convey
As onwards through Wandsworth they sped on their way.

But something now happened to Deidre inside her
That after would cause all the world to despise her.
Some powerful impulse beyond her control
Arose from the darkness and captured her soul.

Observing the scene there she'd suddenly grasped
That Providence here had provided unasked
A chance for relief and a salve for her pain
The like of which never would happen again.

But this now required she take charge of the moment
And conquer her weakness, her constant opponent.
So driving all fears for the future away
She summoned her courage and entered the fray.

She orders old Walter to make for the river

Instead of that crumbly old castle at Windsor.
Today not to history their time they'd devote,
But head for the water and hire a boat!

Now, Walter the Witless, for reasons we'll see,
Received these instructions with singular glee.
Though driving a coach was his means of employment,
Employment of drink was his means of enjoyment.

And as it was difficult driving at speed
While tending his own very personal need,
If ever between them permitted to choose
He'd give up the driving and go for the booze!

It seemed to him therefore before him there lay
His very ideal of a wonderful day.
Unbothered at all by his means of employment,
He'd focus his all on his means of enjoyment!

And as he now set off in search of the water,
A lifelong abstention appearing to falter,
No swifter conversion had ever there been

Than witnessed that day as they hurtled through Sheen.

Yet even as Walter was heading for heaven

(Via Mortlake and then past the A307)

Miss Deidre was bent on a journey as well,

But one that would take her directly to hell.

III

At length they arrive at their new destination,

Commencing events that would outrage the nation.

Her charges alight though their eyes all aglow,

For what was ahead of them no one could know.

Miss Deidre now calls to her Walter the driver

(Who's finished the gin and at work on the cider)

And tells him to find himself somewhere to park

And wait for her party there quietly till dark.

Then bracing herself she proceeds to the jetty

Where several large vessels are waiting and ready.

And choosing the finest, she hires it for cash
And has all the children embark in a flash.

The captain, a kindly old seafaring man,
Would after recall how the journey began.
The media and newspapers, full of his praises,
Would laud him in suitably colourful phrases.

Not so with Miss Deidre as shortly we'll learn;
Her place in disgrace in our history she'd earn.
She'd stand there forever reviled with the Ripper
For what was to happen that day on the river.

For now in her consciousness thoughts were appearing
At which would the gallery gasp at the hearing.
A plan was evolving in Deidre's mind
That many there Satan would say had designed.

Miss Deidre turns to the captain beside her,
Politely requesting he kindly advise her.
She wishes to treat all her charges to tea,
The news of which causes these innocents glee.

The captain appears lost in fog for a while,
But then reappears with a nautical smile.
Upriver he's heard of a five-star hotel
Whose cakes wield, it's said, a mysterious spell.

So Deidre now orders the captain to head there,
Insisting by three that her party should get there.
And thus with the children their joy unconfined
They sail up the Thames leaving London behind.

IV

Now, what can be said of those hours on the water
That wouldn't be detailed by every reporter?
And what were the feelings her charges now had
As Deidre sank to the bottom of bad?

In truth all the children appeared quite content
To gaze all around as upriver they went.
These infants who'd never before seen the Thames

Were utterly gripped by its eddies and bends.

Their parents, it seems, had been always too busy,
Or else after work were just simply too weary,
To show them the wonderful world where they lived
Whose loveliness is the divinity's gift.

And so when they saw all the trees and the flowers,
Whose scent is the breath of celestial powers,
Within every child by this loveliness spurred
A sense of their deepest humanity stirred.

And nothing was uttered as all of them stared,
The youngest among them a tiny bit scared.
They seemed to feel something transcendent of words
That sang in the breeze and the songs of the birds.

V

But now they've arrived at their day's destination,
As also have we at our tale's culmination.

With fairylike magic when rounding a corner
Appears a hotel that's exactly to order.

And here they debark and their host bids farewell;
He'll sail back to Kew with a story to tell.
He'll tell of the children entranced by the river,
Their silence unbroken by even a whisper.

So Deidre leads all her charges inside,
Demanding the very best cakes be supplied.
Meringues she insists on, and chocolate surprises;
Marshmallows, of course, and fruit salad and ices.

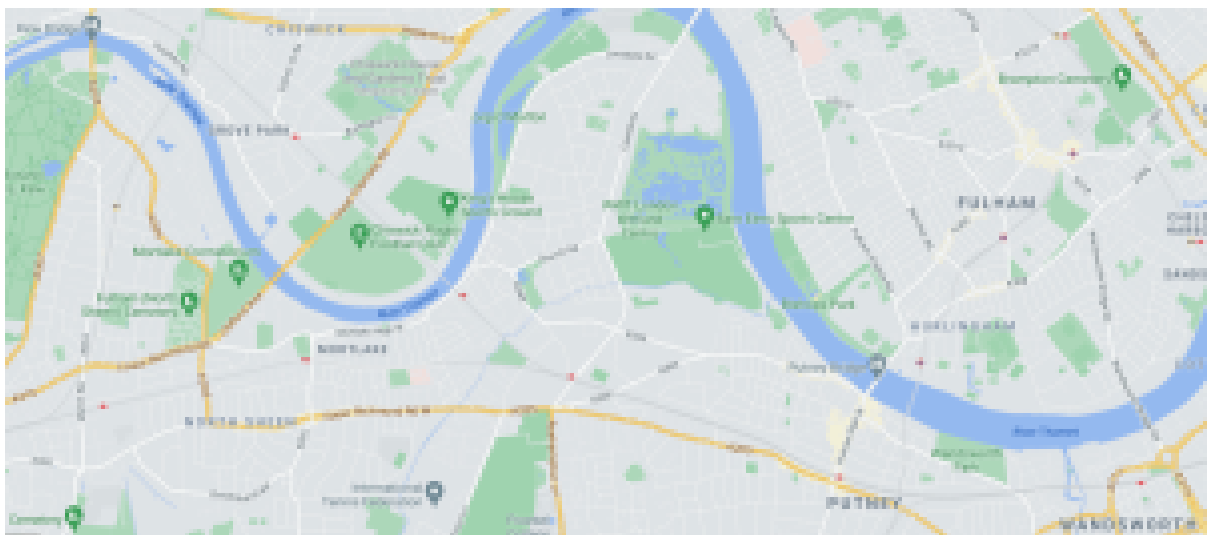
And when all the children have eaten their fill
And Deidre Ealing has settled the bill,
She pays for some rooms for her charges to rest;
To sleep for a moment still dressed in their best.

And each then she kisses there lying in bed,
This child on her eyelids and that on his head.
And after she's kissed them she sits down to wait:
Now everything's finished, she'll meet with her fate.

And when they arrive with their sirens all blaring,
And during the trial with everyone staring,
Not once does she ever her feelings reveal,
Nor ever refer to her lonely ordeal.

But what of the children, perhaps now you're wondering,
The experts admitted had met with no suffering?
They brought with them home something special that day,
A sense deep within they would never betray.

That sense would remain with them all through their lives,
As also that afternoon always they'd prize:
The beauty in which they had shared on the Thames
Revealing the mystery of what never ends.



Map showing route across South London through Wandsworth and Sheen to Kew

The party was travelling westwards along the A3 (not shown) and the A205, from bottom right to top left. Windsor Castle, the original destination, is about 16 miles west of Kew.

It is not recorded where on the Thames the hotel was, but the boat would have taken them westwards and northwards up the river.

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Paul Freeman is an art dealer in London. The poem is from an unpublished work, *The Bus Poems*.

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