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PROLOGUE

“To have a grievance is to have a purpose in life”

Eric Heffer

Antidote time

There were two reasons for me undertaking the journey described here: one was an old song—and the other was an objectionable man called Harold.

Harold sat next to me on a long-haul flight to Singapore. He was two sizes too big for the meagre economy seat and he announced as he sat down, or rather collapsed into the seat from a great height, “I’m going to make your flight hell,” and he did.

Who was it that said, “Hell is other people”? Whoever it was, they probably had to fly economy. Of course, flying is a modern marvel. Turn up at the airport and a few hours later you can be on the other side of the world. Wonderful. Well, provided you ignore the journey to the airport, the queues, security checks and general angst that pervades the process of actually getting onto a plane it is. And sometimes the flight itself can be a relatively tolerable experience; certainly it is better than the months on a boat to get to say Australia, which people had to suffer in the years of sailing ships. But, and it’s a big but, there is much about the whole process that can be miserable: the seats are too small, the food is dire, the time change on long haul flights adds another hazard to surmount and you need a holiday when you get to the other end just to recover and get ready for your holiday.