

London still sparkles

Heading up the M4, squabbling in the backseat, watching for the sparkle of the Lucozade sign. We swoop over the houses, counting down the minutes until the tall Martini clock tells us it's time. Rushing past the Thames with its ABC of bridges and power station lying like a dog on its back. Greeting fellow puffineers and going to see the pelicans, following the street names on an A-to-Z map.

Clutching cardboard tickets as the train clacks into Paddington, exploring Portobello and visiting the Zoo. We stand in awe at Tussauds, deafened by Trafalgar's roar, and put our copper pennies in the turnstile at Kew. We dress in Biba boas though the IRA is bombing, and stand against the National Front in Laura Ashley frocks. We're FoE and CND – no Atomkraft – nein danke! Hear us chant for freedom in our peeling stucco'ed squats.

The Barbican's a labyrinth and Lloyds is turning inside out. There's a riot in Trafalgar Square; the poll tax must be stopped! We're living in Stoke Newington and cooking with le Creuset, jumping tables at Joe Allens, getting high at Ronnie Scotts. The city's going po-mo and everyone's a starchitect; we're topping out at Broadgate and knocking back champagne. It's private views and canapés and watching all the YBAs swooping over Docklands in a driverless train.

A wobbly bridge and fireworks bring in the new millennium, with a green Mohican-ed Winston, paint on the Cenotaph. Spiders stalk the Turbine Hall and art is powering London; millions march against the war and still they bomb Iraq. Four blasts, four shocks and London stops. Remember 7/7. There's a whale in the Thames and she seems to be lost. Somewhere in the east, a stadium is rising, while crowds attend the passing of the last routemaster bus.

Shops shutter in the afternoon as hashtag riot is trending; tents and speakers occupy the space around St Pauls. Isle of wonder, bloodswept lands or fatbergs in a sewer? A tower clad in lies ignites. We stand and watch, appalled.

Yet I love you still, my London, I love for your people. Your crowded, mobbed protesters, your refusal to conform. While we stand against the profiteers, linking arms to stand together, this city is my safe space – my workplace, hearth and home.