



This is my best friend, my yellow suitcase. It comes on every long-haul destination with me and every knock and mark are souvenirs of our journeys.

It now lives in my bedroom and we are sharing stories of our travels together. I decided to draw it, scuffs and all.

It and I should be going to India in September. I don't now think we will. In fact I know we won't. This Coronavirus has us pinned down like butterflies on cork, two metres apart.

Suitcases in the past used to bear coloured labels of where they had been. This does not happen anymore; stickers appear on some car rear windows, but rarely on suitcases. However, I only have to look at my yellow case and the stories and memories of places we've been seep back.

In Panna, for instance, I remember it being hoisted onto a diminutive lady coolie's head, despite my protestations, along with two other heavy cases. She then glided along a footpath with so much grace she could have been on a catwalk.

Another time: of finding it all alone, after a long search, ages after all the other cases had been collected. Someone had attempted to hide it in a corner. If ever I have to buy a new suitcase I will always buy a yellow one and try to overcome my guilt at no longer having this one.

Being reunited with it in my room after a long adventurous day, guarding a change of clothes, malaria pills and my razor, is an immense comfort. Seeing it balanced on top of a jeep, under other cases and bags lifts my spirits. Flung into the holds of 'planes it is fearless.

The joy of seeing it emerge onto the carousel at an airport and being reunited is a joy.

Now my suitcase and I see out these long days, which feel like a seamless stretch of Sundays. The only news anywhere is of how many have died of this plague.

However, my case is proving far more stoical than I, who searches for the most trivial things to do to fill the days. Perhaps its colour helps? I ought to wear more yellow.

Travelling does consist of long patches of time doing absolutely nothing other than waiting. My suitcase has learned how to cope but I have some way to go.

I jealously watch birds sitting in trees until they decide to fly to wherever they fancy. My eyes follow them until they disappear.

In around two weeks time the swifts will be back in Castle Street and I will envy them their freedom however tortuous their journey was from southern Africa.

My suitcase sympathises of course but says nothing.

Meanwhile, it's almost eight o'clock on this fifth lock-down Thursday and time to emerge and clap and sing with the other captives who live in the street.