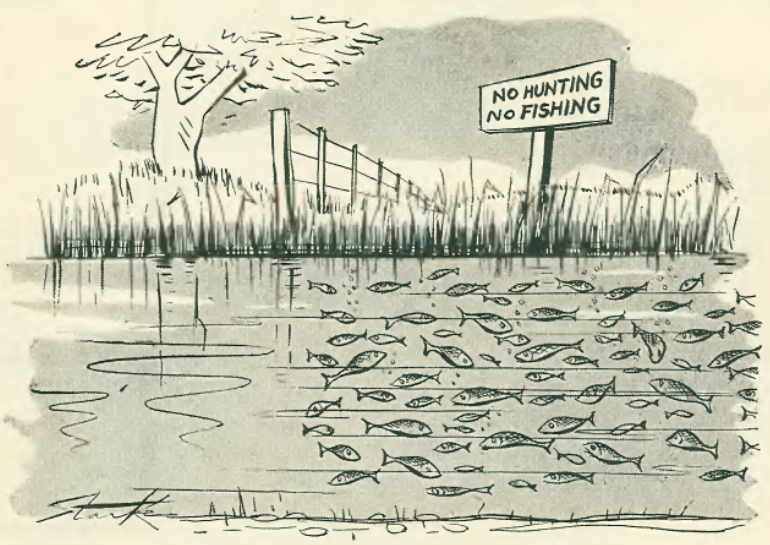
A REPORTER AT LARGE

TAKE THE ORIENT EXPRESS!

THEORETICALLY, it is still possible for anybody to board the Simplon-Orient Express in Paris and reach Istanbul—1,889 miles, eleven customs inspections, and seventy-seven hours and thirty minutes later—by way of Vallorbe, Lausanne, the Simplon Tunnel through the Italian Alps, Domodossola, Venice, Trieste, Zagreb, Belgrade, and Sofia. A hypothetical traveller may also take the Arlberg-Orient Express from Paris to Bucharest, by way of Zurich, the Arlberg Tunnel through the Austrian Alps, Innsbruck, Salzburg, Vienna, and Budapest; or the plain, unprefixed Orient Express, which splits in two at Stuttgart, one section going to Warsaw, via Nuremberg and Prague, and the other to Bucharest, via Munich, Vienna, and Budapest. Actually, though, unless one has a diplomatic passport or is a journalist, one has little hope of getting the necessary military visas. "Very regrettable situation," an official of the Wagons-Lits Company said to me in the Gare de l'Est one evening not long ago, as I was about to board the Orient Express for Warsaw. "But of course there's nothing we can do about it." He was proud of the fact that even in these days the three Orient Expresses are running on schedule, through an Iron Curtain and a cold war. "Unfortunately, the journey gets longer and longer, even though we have better tracks and faster engines than we had fifteen years ago," he said. "Before the last war, you could travel from Paris to Warsaw, by way of Berlin, in twenty hours and seventeen minutes. Now, because of all the long stops at the borders for customs inspections, it takes forty-two hours and forty-three minutes, even by the more direct route, through Prague. The paradox of our modern civilization, Monsieur. We build faster and faster means of transportation, and at the same time we create more and more restrictions against their use. Sometimes it's very frustrating. To think that back in 1900 the Nord Express could go from Paris to St. Petersburg in forty-seven hours, and no visas required! Hah!"

I agreed that progress had indeed presented us with a paradox, and went out onto the platform where the Orient Express, with its string of royal-blue sleeping cars, was standing. I soon found my car, No. 2. On its side was a white shield emblazoned with the words "ORIENT EXPRESS: PARIS, STRASBOURG, STUTTGART, NÜRNBERG, CHEB, PRAHA, ZEBRZYDOWICE, WARSZAWA." The car attendant, a small, chubby Frenchman with a graying mustache, who was wearing a brown uniform and cap, took my bags at the door and preceded me to my compartment, where he stowed the luggage away. I asked if the train was full. "Every berth is sold as far as Stuttgart," he said, looking at his chart of accommodations, which carried the name of every passenger, the station where he was to board the train, and his destination. "After that there'll be more space. Ah, I see that Monsieur goes all the way to Warsaw. *Oh là là!* There'll be plenty of space at that end of the trip, I assure you." He looked at me with what seemed to be new interest. I couldn't help thinking of a friend in Paris who had told me that a trip on the Orient Express would be an exciting adventure. "Watch your wallet and your passport," he had said. "And don't talk to strangers." (He is a very romantic man.) "Ever since I was a boy, the Orient Express has had the reputation of being crawling with gamblers and smugglers, *femmes fatales* and financiers, adventurers and spies. My father always said that its passenger lists sounded as though they were drawn indiscriminately from Europe's police reports and the *Almanach de Gotha*. No doubt you've heard that everybody who rides on it has a mystery in his past and a dark purpose in his future."

The upper and lower berths of my compartment were already made up, and whoever was to share the space with me had not yet arrived. I went back to the platform, where I was immediately caught up in the cheerful confusion of a French railroad station—parents looking for their children, children looking for anything, women venders of fruit and vichy water, embracing couples, around whom the porters made careful detours in order not to disturb them. The train was longer than I had realized. Many of the cars needed a coat of paint. The gilt inscriptions over the windows—"COMPAGNIE INTERNATIONALE DES WAGONS-LITS ET DES GRANDS EXPRESS EUROPEENS"—were faded. Ever since June 5, 1883, when the Orient Express, then consisting of two stove-heated, oil-lighted coaches, made its first run, from Paris to Vienna, the Wagons-Lits Company, the French-Belgian-Italian-English syndicate that operates most of Europe's sleeping cars and diners, has laid as much stress on the prestige of its passengers as on the smartness and comfort of its rolling stock. As I watched the passengers getting on the train or directing the handling of their baggage, it occurred to me that perhaps my friend in Paris had been a too earnest student of Hitchcock movies. Certainly no one on the platform looked mysterious. Most of my fellow-travellers appeared to be tired but happy American Army officers, probably going back to their posts in Germany after a spree in Paris; Swiss and Dutch burghers, who bore no resemblance whatever to international spies; and rather smug-looking German businessmen. Then I caught sight of a slender brunette with a fur coat loosely draped over her shoulders who was trying to convince an attendant that she *had* to have her trunk with her in her compartment. Her husky voice had an indefinable accent that left the way open for speculation, and I was so speculating when a short, stocky man carrying a small overnight



case appeared. He was wearing a camel's-hair overcoat, a light-blue, flappy double-breasted suit, a pearl-gray fedora, and a pair of steel-rimmed glasses, and he had the jaunty, implacable air of a door-to-door salesman. At the door of *Voiture 2*, he stopped and handed his bag to the attendant.

"Monsieur expects more luggage?" the attendant asked, in English.

"That *is* my luggage, dammit," the man said in a flat, Middle Western voice, and added, to no one in particular, "Well, well—so this is the famous Orient Express, the train of mystery." He looked up and down the platform disapprovingly and then mounted the steps. In a minute, the conductor blew his whistle and shouted "*En voiture!*," and everybody on the platform started kissing—men and women, parents and children, overfed women and little dogs. I boarded my car as the train began to move and returned to my compartment. A man in a checkered sports coat was sitting disconsolately on the lower berth. He was bald and middle-aged, and wore a monocle in his right eye and held a heavy cane between his knees. He was French, he told me in that language, and was going back, after a leave, to Vienna, where he had a job in the French Occupation force. "This damned train!" he said, gazing moodily out of the window. "The only available berth on it was in this sleeper, but since this is a through car to Warsaw, I've got to get up at seven to change to a Vienna or Bucharest car at Stuttgart. It's damned annoying. I should have taken the Arlberg-Orient Express, I suppose, but I can't stand the sight of all those Swiss businessmen. They're always so happy, so full of good cheer—disgusting paragons of prosperity, selling their wares to us, to the Boches, to the Americans, to the Russians, to anybody, and keeping all the profits in their big banks. I pride myself on being a man of the world, but sometimes they're just too much for me. Like that damned principality of Liechtenstein that the Arlberg-Orient goes through."

"What's wrong with Liechtenstein?" I asked.

"Oh, I don't know," he said. "It's just that during the war a lot of wealthy anti-Nazis hid out there and were treated well by the natives, and now a lot of wealthy Nazis are hiding out there and are being equally well treated. The world doesn't really change, *mon cher Monsieur*. It merely keeps turning." He shrugged. "Well, at least there's a din-

ing car on this train, which there isn't on the Arlberg the first night out. The Wagons-Lits people put it on because of all the Americans who go to Germany. On the Arlberg, they don't give a damn, because there are so few Americans. Are you French, Monsieur?"

I said I was an American, but had been born in Czechoslovakia.

He displayed no trace of embarrassment. "Then you know what I mean. Americans must have the best. I used to travel on this train before the war. Some of the sleepers had showers then, and the dining cars took on the specialties of each country the train passed through. Ah!" He swallowed, and his Adam's apple shuttled up and down. "Let's go and see what they have for dinner."

In the corridor, we saw the brunette woman standing by a window, looking out. The Frenchman stared at her in admiration, but she kept gazing into the darkness and paid no attention to us. The dining car was already fairly crowded. A couple of American soldiers were sitting at a table behind a battery of empty beer bottles. We took a table for two, and the Frenchman started to study the menu, which was written in violet ink. Then he read it aloud. "'*Omelette à la Turque, escalope à la Milanaise, pommes mousseline, choux-fleurs Polonaise, crème de Gruyère, pomme.*'" He closed his eyes in despair. "My God, you'd think they were running a United Nations *bistro*." The stocky American in the blue suit came in and sat down across the aisle from us. The Frenchman adjusted his monocle and gave him a thorough going over. "Refrigerators, Coca-Cola, or farming equipment, I'd say," he hazarded. "About the only civilian Americans you see in this part of the world at this time of year are salesmen, and nowadays there seem to be fewer of them. Fewer French, too, and more and more Austrians and Germans. If you want to catch the changing mood of the European scene, just watch the passengers on this train. Two years ago, it was practically nothing but your G.I.s, and British officers with red cheeks and swagger sticks. Not a word of German was spoken. And today? One or two American salesmen, a couple of soldiers, and carloads of Germans and Austrians. I suppose it's our own fault. We didn't know what to do with the victory. In Vienna, I have a nice villa, not too far from my office, and in the winter I go skiing in Sankt Anton, and life is cheap, but if you asked me what we are doing

with the Occupation there, I couldn't give you an honest answer. None of us know what we're doing. The only difference between the Americans and us is that they *pretend* they know and we French don't."

The brunette entered the car, still wearing her fur coat, and the Frenchman immediately lost interest in the occupation of Austria. "At last," he said. "Almost like the old days. I wonder whom she's spying for?"

"Maybe she isn't spying for anybody," I said.

He ignored me. "The British? The French? Not the Americans—they're too much like Boy Scouts to employ such girls. The Yugoslav Yugoslavs? The Cominform Yugoslavs? The Tito Bulgarians? I bet she gets off at Vienna or Prague. Vienna is a hotbed of agents now, and in Prague there are spies of all descriptions—Stalinist, Trotskyist, Titoist, and Czech."

DINNER was good, and served at great speed. Even before we had finished our dessert, the maître d'hôtel handed us our checks. "Five hundred francs," my companion said. "That's a dollar-forty, isn't it? When the train is passing through Austria, dinner costs you twenty-six schillings, which is only a dollar, and in Czechoslovakia they charge you forty-seven koruny, which is nine cents on the black market. *Les mystères de la haute finance et des Grands Express Européens.*" He handed the maître d'hôtel a thousand-franc note, and as he was putting his change into his wallet, a gray card fell out. He showed it to me. It was his military permit for the Russian Zone of Austria. "A few months ago, it wasn't stamped 'Via Enns Bridge,' and the Russian soldiers took me off the train at Enns and made me spend twenty-four hours in their wooden border-control shack near the station," he told me. "People are always saying that the Russian privates who come on the train to inspect your papers are apt to hold your passport upside down because they can't read, but I assure you they can read pretty well."

We went back to our compartment and the Frenchman began to undress. "The French border inspectors will be boarding the train at 3 A.M. in Strasbourg," he said, "and the German ones just over the river, in Kehl, so I want to get some sleep. Keep your passport handy so you won't have to get out of bed. They always leave the door open for ages. The last time I went through Kehl, I caught a bad cold." There wasn't room for both of us to move

around, so I stepped out into the corridor. The only person in sight was the car attendant, who was sitting at a small desk at one end of the passageway, thumbing through a pile of papers. Over his desk was a mirror and a rack containing a first-aid box and an emergency lamp; at his feet was a small coal stove. I went down to pass the time of day with him, and he appeared glad to have somebody to talk to. He told me he had a son who was now learning the *métier* and would soon join the Wagons-Lits Company, and a married daughter who lived in Syracuse, New York. "My daughter is very happy in Syracuse," he said. "She and her husband have a small house all to themselves. It seems that every family has a small house there. She wants me to go over for a visit. Of course I'll never be able to afford it. I make about thirty thousand francs a month, with tips. There aren't many of those, I can tell you. In the old days, people travelling on the Orient Express used to really tip. Now some of these American officers going to Germany give us five cigarettes. And the people coming back from the Iron Curtain countries unload their Czech koruny, their Polish zlotys, and their Hungarian forints on us. What is that kind of money good for? Ah, Monsieur, sometimes I ask myself whether this is the same train I worked on before the war. Then we had all the famous people and beautiful women and *real* spies—not these wretched currency smugglers we get now. The best we can do these days is a Marshall Plan official now and then." He lapsed into a gloomy silence, and I said good night and went back to my compartment.

The Frenchman was lying in the lower berth, reading "Croisade en Europe," by Dwight D. Eisenhower. I started to get ready for bed. The mirror above the washbasin was cracked, the rim of the water glass was chipped, and cold water came from the hot-water faucet. The mahogany panelling of the room was scratched, the floor was grimy, and the windows rattled noisily, letting in gusts of cold air. But when I got into my berth, the mattress was pleasantly firm, the linen was clean and smelled of fresh air, and the reading light worked.

It seemed as though I had been asleep only ten minutes when the attendant knocked at the door and said, "French border control; please have your passports and money ready." He left the door wide open, and a draft poured through the room. The French officials came, stamped our passports, and left. In

fifteen minutes or so, the train started up and crawled across the border to Kehl, where it stopped again. This time a procession of French soldiers and German officials marched through, and they, too, looked only briefly at our passports and not at all at our luggage. Everything was over in a couple of minutes, but the train stood in the station interminably.

I managed to get to sleep again, and when I awoke in the morning, the Frenchman was gone. I got up, shaved with cold water, and went out into the corridor. The German countryside looked prosperous and cheerful in the early sun, and the stations all looked as though they had just been swept. I had breakfast in the dining car and walked back to my compartment. The train seemed to be half empty. The brunette girl was standing in the corridor, and we fell into conversation. She was from Nuremberg, it turned out, and was going home after a short visit to England to see her brother, who had a dressmaking shop in London. "I hate to go back," she said. "I would have loved to stay in London and work for my brother. There is less food there than there is in Nuremberg, but the people are so nice and polite. In Nuremberg, nobody is polite any more." She told me that she taught music at a private school and was engaged, or thought she was engaged, to an American soldier. "Not a colonel," she said somewhat acidly. "Not even a major. He's a warrant officer. You know what that is?" I said I did, and she seemed relieved. "He's nice," she said. "My friends tell me that I ought to get at least a major, but I say what if the major isn't *nice*? I guess I inherited a lot of sentimentality from my father, who was a double-bass player at the Dresden Opera House, and from my mother, who is Greek." I said I had noticed her unusual accent. "Yes," she said. "I still speak Greek with my mother." She looked out the window. "I was all excited about travelling on the Orient Express. It sounded so romantic and full of adventure. I'm afraid it isn't like that any more. It's just like any other train."

"Yes," I said. "Just like any other train."

BY the time we reached Nuremberg, where the girl got off, the train was almost empty. There was only one other passenger in my car, the American in the blue suit, and we started to talk. His name was Mr. Gilson (or so he shall be called here). I asked if he, too, was going to Warsaw. He said no, he

wasn't, and then looked at me fixedly, making a vague gesture with his hands, as if to fend off any further questions. Somehow, the look and the gesture seemed familiar, but I couldn't quite think what they reminded me of. I turned the conversation to America, and we were soon comparing recollections of towns, events, and people with all the nostalgia of two Devil's Island convicts talking about the pleasures of Paris. I gathered that he hadn't been home much in the past few years. He said that he had been in China, India, and South America recently, and that he particularly liked India, where he had spent a good deal of time during the war. Suddenly I knew what his vague gesture of withdrawal had seemed like. It was the gesture I had seen made so many times during the war by people who were asked friendly but embarrassing questions about their destinations, their jobs, or their achievements. In those days, it had been almost the equivalent of putting out a sign reading, "Top Secret." I mentioned this to Mr. Gilson, and he laughed. "An unfortunate hangover of a habit," he said. I mentally scored one against the Frenchman, who had pegged the brunette as a spy and Mr. Gilson as a salesman.

In a few minutes, the dining-car steward passed down the corridor ringing his bell, and we went in to lunch. It was a different diner, this one under Czechoslovak management. Instead of posters in French urging travellers to winter in Monte Carlo and summer in Deauville, there was one crying, in Czech, "Step in Step with the U.S.S.R. for Peace and Democracy!" and another about an exhibition of Russian books in Prague. Only four or five tables were set. The maître d'hôtel brought us a Czech *slivovitz* as an apéritif. As he was pouring it, he murmured, in English, "Do the gentlemen want to change any dollars? The official rate is fifty koruny to a dollar, but perhaps I can arrange something better." We said no thanks, and had another *slivovitz*, for it was cold, and the car had almost no heat. One of the waiters sidled up and whispered something about two hundred koruny for a dollar; we again said no thanks. Lunch was skimpy—a watery soup, a tiny slice of meat, a couple of potatoes, and an apple. Mr. Gilson disgustedly wiped his mouth when he was through and asked for another *slivovitz*. "Look at the size of these napkins," he said. "I've noticed it before: the farther east, the smaller the napkin. In restaurants in Switzerland, they're the size of small bath towels. In

Austrian and German restaurants, they're the size of handkerchiefs. Here where the Czechs are providing them, they're no bigger than your hand, and made of paper at that. In Poland, there probably aren't any, and you have to wipe your mouth on your sleeve."

NOT long after lunch, as Mr. Gilson and I were talking in my compartment, the train pulled into Schirnding, the control point on the German side of the German-Czech border, and two trim-looking, black-booted Germans in gray uniforms came aboard, followed by a tall, freckled American M. P., who was trying hard, though unsuccessfully, to look both important and older than his age, which I'm sure was no more than twenty-two. The Germans examined Mr. Gilson's passport briefly and handed it back to him, and then started an extensive study of my military travel permit, which was valid, as a superscription plainly stated, for any number of trips into the American, British, and French zones of Germany. One of the Germans finally took out a pen, drew an "X" across the permit, and wrote *Ungültig* ("Cancelled") on it. I asked him in German if he could read the superscription, and he snapped back at me that he knew what he was doing and that I had better keep a civil tongue in my head. Mr. Gilson and I were so flabbergasted by this unexpected outbreak of German *Frechheit* that we could say nothing. The American M.P. beckoned me out into the corridor. "Some goddam new ruling, sir," he said. "Seems that Headquarters has ordered that all Americans going behind the Iron Curtain got to have their permits cancelled. But you can always get a new one at the Permit Office in Prague for a couple of bucks. I wouldn't start an argument with those Germans, sir. They know pretty well what they're doing."

The two Germans moved on out of the car, but the M.P. stayed behind. "We hardly see any Americans going through here any more," he said, following me back into the compartment. "You mind if I sit down? Them Germans don't need me. They can speak English if they have to, and if they don't speak English, I don't know what the hell they're talking about anyway." He scraped the dusty floor with the side of his boot. "This lousy Orient Express," he said. "I'm from Hempstead, Long Island, and I always thought the Long Island Railroad was bad, but I'll take it over this line any time. At least

they heat their trains and sweep the dirt out once in a while. Everybody says this is the blue-plate-special train of Europe, but they can have it. But what the hell, I should gripe! I don't do a goddam thing here, and I've got myself a nice place and a girl. These German girls certainly know their way around. The one I got left a tech sergeant for me. I'd kind of like to take her back to the States with me."

"Take it easy for a while, son, and think it over," said Mr. Gilson. "I was with the A.E.F. in the first war, and I thought the German girls were terrific until I went to Havana and met some Cuban women."

"I wouldn't know about Havana, sir," the soldier said regretfully. "I just know Schirnding, and that's good enough for me. Well, I better be running along before those krauts start wondering if I'm still in the Army."

Half an hour later, the train started for the Czech border. The houses along the right of way showed marks of shell-fire, and there were some camouflaged pillboxes on the slopes between them. Then I saw the first red, white, and blue Czechoslovak flags, and a few minutes later the train stopped at the frontier station of Cheb.

"Well," Mr. Gilson said, "this is it. My first trip behind the Iron Curtain."

Even before the train came to a halt, a number of Czech soldiers with bayonets fixed on their rifles had run out of the station to guard the doors of every car. They didn't let anyone get off. After a while, three men entered our car—a massive lieutenant in the customs service, who carried a thick book and two writing pads, and two uniformed men in rubber raincoats, who had pistols dangling from their belts. The French attendant looked on jadedly as he stood beside me in the doorway while they searched Mr. Gilson's baggage. "We had a lot of excitement here two weeks ago, coming the other way, from Prague," he told me. "I knew that something was up as soon as the customs men boarded the train. They must have had a tip, because they unscrewed the light bulbs, pried off the mirrors, rolled up the carpets, and told me to open all the berths. It took me four hours to put things back into shape. They couldn't find anything in my sleeper and went off to the next car, a day coach we had picked up, and there they found twenty-five hundred dollars in hundred-dollar bills hidden in a toilet. After that came *le déluge*. They had the coach switched off to a siding, and another attendant told me later that

they searched and questioned those poor passengers for sixteen hours. All of them were Czechs—emigrants hoping to get out. The customs men never found who the money belonged to. Makes me shiver just to think of it. Here somebody must have spent a fortune to buy those dollars on the black market, and then they take every one of them away and the owner can't move a muscle or make a peep for fear he'll be caught and put into a concentration camp. *Ah, quelle misère!*"

The Czech inspectors finished with Mr. Gilson, having emerged triumphant from a violent argument in broken English with him over whether he should be allowed to keep more than three packages of cigarettes, and it was my turn. When the lieutenant looked through my passport and read, "Place of birth: Czechoslovakia," he gave me a quick, suspicious glance. Then he opened my bags, picked them up, and turned them upside down. Everything fell out—a cascade of socks, books, shoes, and shirts—and spilled off the seat onto the dirty floor. I had been told about this method of searching a passenger's luggage at Cheb, and had been warned not to show resentment if I did not want to be taken off the train and made to spend a day at the customs office. I did my best to look unconcerned as the two hearties in the raincoats eyed me closely. The lieutenant pawed through all my things and seemed pleased when he found a box containing fifty razor blades in five-blade packs. He sat down, opened his book, and began to study.

"You can't take them all with you," he said after a while. "Only ten blades are free. The rest are subject to duty." He mentioned a formidable sum. "You'll have to pay in American money."

"But they're for my personal use," I said.

"How do we know? You might very well be intending to sell them."

We kept arguing until I finally offered each of the three men a package of five blades, whereupon the subject was dropped. Mr. Gilson and I were not permitted to leave the coach after the inspection. The train waited another hour before it got under way again. The stations through which we passed were adorned with pictures of Stalin and President Gottwald and banners that spoke well of peace and democracy. In Pilsen, where we stopped for half an hour, Mr. Gilson and I had a glass of beer in the station, and later we had dinner in the dining car. The meal was

even more melancholy than lunch. There was another long wait in Prague. At ten o'clock, Mr. Gilson said he was going to take a nap, inasmuch as he had to get off in the middle of the night, and we said goodbye.

I WAS up at six the next morning. The train was standing in the station of the Czech border town of Bohumin. I asked the attendant if I was too early for breakfast, and he said that, unfortunately, I was too late; the diner had been taken off during the night. "The other American gentleman has left," he said. "You're the only passenger on the train now." A nondescript string of cars evidently waiting for an engine was standing on the other side of the platform. Among the coaches and baggage cars was one blue Wagons-Lits sleeping car, which bore a shield identifying it as being on the Warsaw-Rome run. As I was reflecting that at least I was glad not to be on *that* train, the attendant of the Warsaw-Rome car, an unshaven little man wearing slippers, a torn pullover, and no cap, came over and hailed the attendant of my car. "How many people have you got?" he asked in French, with a powerful Polish accent.

"One."

"You're lucky. I haven't got any. Why they keep that coach running is beyond me. It's always empty now. Up to last year, we had a few correspondents, government officials, businessmen on trade missions, and people who had managed to get emigration permits. Occasionally, there would be a soccer team or something, but now they don't even let the soccer players out. Too many of them don't come back. And then you cross over to the other side of Europe and all the cars are full. I hear that on local trains in France and Italy people have to make reservations days ahead, no?"

"Yes," said my man. "Makes me sick to think of the tips on those runs."

"Tips?" said the little Pole, raising his eyebrows. "What are they? Never heard the word."

After a long wait, my train reluctantly started to move, but fourteen minutes later it stopped again, at the Czech border-control station of Petrovice, and there was another inspection of luggage and papers, and another long wait. Eventually, the train pulled itself together and made the nine-minute run to the Polish border-control station of Zebrzydowice. This time, the Poles did the examining of my stuff. When they were through, the attendant came

into my compartment and sat down. "Sometimes I get awfully lonely," he said. "It's depressing to ride all alone. I think of the beautiful travel posters you used to see in all the travel bureaus of Paris—'Take the Orient Express! Oldest, Most Glamorous of the International Luxury Trains!' *Ah, çà!* If you ask me, Monsieur, this is the most depressing train on earth. Last month, I took a trip from Warsaw to Vienna. Eighteen hours, five of them spent waiting in Zebrzydowice, Petrovice, Bohumin, Breclav, and Hohenau. There were inspections by the Poles, the Czechs, the Russians, the Americans, and the Austrians. I'm told you can fly from Paris to Syracuse in eighteen hours or less. Are you hungry? We'll be here for a long time yet, and maybe I can get something in the station."

I said I was hungry, and cold, too. The attendant came back in a few minutes with a couple of white rolls filled with garlic sausage, and a small bottle of vodka. "That's all there is," he said. "No coffee. And no ham. They're sending all the ham out of the country now. You mind if I sit here with you? I'm getting sick and tired of looking at myself in the mirror over my desk." I urged him to stay, and we ate the rolls and drank the vodka. We talked about Paris and Syracuse and old times until he said he would have to get busy on his forms and reports for the Warsaw passenger agent. I spent the rest of the trip huddled in my overcoat and two blankets, miserable and queasy, cursing the Orient Express and regretting that I hadn't gone by plane.

EARLY in the afternoon, the countryside began to show more evidence of wartime destruction—patched-together bridges, houses without roofs, and acres and acres of rubble. Then, at three-forty-three, the train pulled into Warsaw's makeshift railroad station. The attendant helped me with my luggage, showed me where to get a taxi, and gave me his card. "When you go back to America, perhaps you will go to Syracuse?" he asked. I said it was possible. "Maybe you can go and see my daughter," he said. "It would make her happy." He looked up and down the train, now splotched with dust and appearing shabbier than ever. "Don't tell her what's happened to the Orient Express, though. Why destroy an illusion, Monsieur? Let her go on thinking that her papa is an important man on an elegant, wonderful train—a real *train de mystère.*"

—JOSEPH WECHSBERG