

CHAPTER 9

With Wolfe next to the window, I had to stretch my neck for my first look at Europe, but it was a nice sunny day and I kept a map open on my knee, and it was very interesting, after crossing the Strait of Dover, to look toward Brussels on the left and Paris on the right, and Zurich on the left and Geneva on the right, and Milan on the left and Genoa on the right. I recognized the Alps without any trouble, and I actually saw Bern. Unfortunately I missed looking toward Florence. Passing over the Apennines a little to the north, we hit an air pocket and dropped a mile or so before we caught again, which is never much fun, and some of the passengers made noises. Wolfe didn't. He merely shut his eyes and set his jaw. When we had leveled off I thought it only civil to remark, "That wasn't so bad. That time I flew to the Coast, going over the Rockies we—"

"Shut up," he growled.

So I missed looking toward Florence.

. . . REX STOUT
The Black Mountain

Departure from London was uneventful. We were all sitting in our seats in our nice English bus at least ten minutes before time. We were scheduled to leave at 8:30 and with Odin in charge, we guessed we'd better be ready on time. We were.

We were still ready at 9:00. The greenhouse effect was taking charge of the bus interior and bread was rising in every seat. So were tempers. I was on my sixth cigarette of the trip and we hadn't moved. It was obviously a replay of the London tour.

"My head is killing me," Bob said.

"Have you taken any aspirin?" I asked.

"No, but I think I will." We asked around if anyone had aspirin but it was all packed in the luggage carrier beneath the bus.

"Is it really bad?"

"Yeah. It is. I think I'll pop into the dorm and get a couple."

"Okay, but hurry."

"I'll be two minutes. Don't leave without me." A joke. I smiled. Bob got out of his seat and left the bus. I saw him enter the dorms. Just then Odin boarded the bus. He clicked the microphone off and on, stowed his cigarettes on the dashboard, and turned to count the group.

"Someone is not coming with us?" he asked the bus. Many people volunteered that Bob had just left. Odin came back to where I was sitting. He had suitcases under his eyes that were big enough for a year's dirty laundry. His face was bathed in sweat.

"Where is Rhoberrrt, Daynise?" No good-morning-how-are-you, just where.

"He got a headache sitting in this Turkish bath. He'll be back in a couple of minutes."

Odin turned his back on me, but muttered loud enough: "The bus will wait exactly 120 seconds." I got out my watch and timed him. He waited a little longer than that—say five seconds. The driver let the clutch out and we pulled away from the curb. A chorus of cries went up from the kids:

"What about Dr. Beck? He's not on the bus!" Odin was busy talking to the driver. He couldn't hear a thing. He wouldn't have heard if we'd all shouted in his face. He was tough and was letting us know it.

He might as well have sapped me for all the thinking I could do. I focused on the webbing of the seat in front of me. Faces turned toward me. They were all Odin's. I saw a fist-fight. I saw my fist in Odin's face. I saw an airplane. I saw Ingrid. I saw the bus turning into Tavistock. What was happening? The cigarette in my hand burned my fingers. I jerked my hand and the cigarette dropped to the floor. Ashes sparkled in the dust.

The bus was turning in Woburn Place. A cry went up from the kids. I stood and turned in my seat craning my head to see what they saw.

Running down the street was Dr. Robert J. Beck, B.A., M.A., Ph.D. His arms were in the air waving. I looked up front. The light changed and the bus was caught in the intersection unable to move. Odin leaned toward the driver and the door opened. Bob got on the bus, panting. He smiled as he lurched down the aisle past the kids. A huge collective sigh went up and filled the bus. He fell into his seat beside me. The driver let out his clutch as the light changed and closed his door as we pulled into Woburn Place.

We were on our way to Dover. Like I said, departure from London was uneventful. Just the sort of thing a social scientist looks forward to.

* * *

Each of these contretemps had its effect. As we pushed our way through Greater London I realized that each of the many messes had helped to weld us all into a real group. The faux pas with the luggage on the first day, the hassle with the money on the second, failing to keep to schedule — each had made us the more companions to each other. The shared agony of the lectures, of the miserable food, of the hot water faucets, of the hot bus — we could look each other in the eye and know that we had gone these miles together. The sigh that had filled the bus as Bob boarded that morning made it clear that to a substantial extent Group L faced adversity with arms locked together.

I looked around the bus. Group L was back in hometown formation. Only four pairs of kids broke rank. Jencks and Watson were sitting together again. So were Marina and Lana. Only David Abrams and Taylor Nash sat on the bank of seats in the rear, and they did not sit

together. It looked like the beginning all over again. I thought about the group. For the first couple of days, the Hometown Groups and their Independent-Registrants had functioned together as five separate little galaxies. Indiana hung around with Indiana, Brooklyn had stayed in Brooklyn, the trio from Wisconsin had not mixed with the Connecticut contingent, and the Upstate New Yorkers had stayed together.

Very early on, the I-R's had proved most active. They went through one of two situations. Either they were absorbed by their parent H-T as a full-fledged member or they had started floating, looking for a companion or two among the other floating I-R's or in the other H-T's. The personality of the T-C had a great deal to do with this. Bloch, Jaeckel and the Aikens had firm control over their groups and kept them together. Needham had strong ties of affection with her two boys and they tended not to stray. But Lenz was absorbed in his camera, and his kids split into four groups. Cummings and Johnson hung around together but Abrams, Montaigne and Portman were on their own. This morning Montaigne was sitting with Cliff Jaeckel, but she tended to move with Bloch's group. David Abrams was sitting by himself in the back of the bus and had been the most independent of the entire group from the time he overslept for the London tour. Portman was sitting by himself in the very front of the bus.

The field trip to Avon had seen the group come together. On that trip there were a lot of kids who had violated the H-T groupings. That day Group L had been a group but with out-liers. This position had been reinforced by the skit. Yet this morning we were obviously starting all over again. This was a new venture and it seemed as though a new venture demanded old forms. H-T's sat with H-T's and Lenz's I-R's floated. I know how they felt. For the first couple of days London and the dorms had been new. Then they had been old hat. It seemed as though we had always been a group and had always been in London. With growing comfort in the environment, attention had turned to the social situation. But now we were starting all over again.

We were like kittens in a new home. Before they investigate each other they've got to know what the back of the stove looks like. Before Group L could continue the process of getting to know each other, they had to see what the new day held in store. But our seven days together could not be discounted.

We were a group becoming a group. Before we were thirty-seven people. Now we were many fewer.


			
		ODIN	
	PORTMAN		BLOCH
GARRISON	EBER	Mr. AIKEN	Miss AIKEN
LENZ		PIERCE	FISHER
MONTAIGNE	JAECKEL	HELLER	BILL BROWN
NOYES	LINCOLN	MAYO	BAKER
CUMMINGS	JOHNSON	JONES	NEEDHAM
GORDON	PRINZ	SEWARD	JANE BROWN
HENDRICKS	GRAY	WOOD	BECK
MONROE	GIACONDA	CASYK	PAGAN
WATSON	JENCKS	PALAZZO	CRUZ
ABRAMS		NASH	

Figure 9.0. Bus seating chart, 9:05 a.m., 8 July, on the way to Canterbury from London. Unoccupied seats are blank.

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We did Canterbury in the usual half-hour. We passed through Dover on the run. Above us the castle floated in the air. Then we were on the boat watching the cliffs of chalk vanish in the summer haze. The boat was jammed. Half the world was on its way to Ostende, and most of it was standing or squatting on the deck. After a lazy time and a meal in constant motion we docked. We were in Europe. Immigration was the usual. If you weren't obviously leprous, you passed. Stamp. Stamp. Polite smiles hardened by constant use. Outside it was hot. In the distance was a long line of buses. We headed in that direction. Around us was flatness covered with trolley tracks and train tracks and overhead the sky arched mercilessly in a white heat. Sweat rolled down Mrs. Needham's face and I looked at it and liked it. It was a nice face covered now by a grin of resolution, that smile that says I'm-down-but-not-falling-any-farther.

The first thing we noticed about the buses was the shade they made just waiting for us. Then we noticed that each bus bore a letter. We walked down the line searching for "L." It was a big bus and from the outside it looked comfortable. Red curtains hung at the windows and the windows were high off the ground and still covered half the side of the bus. It was a clean machine. It was also going to be our home for the next three weeks. The thought didn't depress me. That surprised me.

The group eddied around the bus. Some got on. Most got on and got off again. It was too hot in there. Then they'd get tired standing around and get on again. A hardened core stood outside. Mrs. Needham offered to go get cokes. Several others volunteered. Money floated around. Taylor Nash sat on the curb and worked at the railroad tracks. If I'd left him alone he might have had them dismantled by the time we started. The luggage arrived and we helped the driver load it beneath the bus. Odin appeared and disappeared. We collected pop bottles and carried them to a trash can. We boarded the bus and settled into our seats. The driver flipped his switches and the motor growled...

And growled. And growled. The buses ahead of us took off. Our bus just growled. The driver cut everything off and waited. Then he tried again. Growl. Growl. Nothing.

Nothing but tension.

Odin and the driver conferred. Odin picked up the microphone and asked all the males to get off and push. We all got off and wandered around to the back of the bus. It towered above our heads. It was an absurd situation. We could never move this thing.

We put our shoulders to the bus and pushed. It moved, the motor growled, and then it coughed into life. As we got back on the bus we laughed. We'd pushed our tour bus. After that, nothing would ever seem absurd again.

On the bus things had happened. It looked more like the Avon groupings. Where this morning only four pairs of kids had broken ranks, this afternoon nine pairs did. Lana Monroe and Desmond Jencks were sitting together again, and Marina was sitting with Sven. But even more like the Avon trip were the five kids on the bank of seats in the back. Four of the five kids back there now had been back there on the Avon trip: Cummings, Johnson, Abrams and Prinz. Nash joined them this time. One thing struck me: three of the five smoked. The only other kid that smoked, Leslie Casyk, was only two seats up. It was interesting, and I had nothing else to think about.

I reached into my pocket for a cigarette to help the brain along. The pack was empty. I got up and wandered to the back of the bus and sat down next to Erica Cruz and bummed a cigarette from Karl Prinz. Then I had to bum his ashtray because there were none on the seats in front of me. In a way it was nicer at the back of the bus. Away from the courier and the T-C's the chatter was a little louder and a little less reverant. A little more relaxing. You could be yourself without falling asleep.

* * *

That evening in Brussels Bob and I had dinner with Odin. That's being polite about it. What we really had was a fight. Neither side was at all friendly about it and I got the feeling that Odin would have gladly slit our throats for a quarter a piece and danced a reel on our bodies for a dime. What we would have been glad to do was left unsaid. It was generally Odin's feeling that there had been no trouble in London over the maps, that I had invented all that to have an excuse not to attend the courier's meeting. And since I had missed the courier's meeting, I obviously could never be a courier.

The logic of his remarks made me swallow a potato whole and it burned my throat on its way down. "Somehow," I said, "I don't see it in so drastic a light. We're going to have hours together on the bus. I don't suppose you could talk to me then? I mean, I've seen your other couriers. I can pick up in five minutes what it takes them five hours to understand—"

"It is exactly that sort of attitude," Odin broke in, "that makes me extremely concerned, not only about the tour, but as well as for your role as a courier. This was exactly what I was feeling yesterday when

you—"

Bob broke in impatiently and with infinite weary: "Forget yesterday, Odin—"

"Or if you're going to remember yesterday, remember this morning," I added. "What about leaving Bob behind at the dorms? What about your attitude toward us?"

"It was a point I was making to all of the bus that no one will ever be holding up the bus while I am running—"

"Yeah, yeah," I said, "Bob can't hold up the bus for three minutes but you can let us sit there for half an hour—"

"It was an unavoidable situation—"

"And so were our mapping sessions," Bob said. "We are going to get nowhere if we worry about what's already happened. I'm willing to forget the thing this morning if you'll stop with the London maps already!"

"It's not the missing of the meeting by itself that is what is worrying me," pause, "but the attitude toward the tour that both of you are having with me now that is making me angry. Denis' remark about the other couriers is a reflection—"

"On no one but the other couriers. For God's sake, Odin, wake up. All I said was that I have a brain inside my head—"


Odin looked at me out of eyes heavy with cynicism. He was enjoying this dinner. His plate was empty. This contest of wills was what Odin was all about. My plate was full and my stomach was in knots. The ashtray in front of me was overflowing with butts.

"Then you are still willing to be the courier from Venice on?"

"Of course I am."

"Then why is it that you were missing yesterday's meeting?"

We went on around in this dance of incrimination and recrimination for an hour. It was a merry-go-round of the minds that wasn't merry. All it cost was energy. And pleasure. And the good feeling that had been with me when I got on the bus in the morning. It was a merry-go-round with a gold ring that when you caught it, you lost.



P E T E R		ODIN	
	PORTMAN	MAYO	BAKER
LENZ	BECK	WOOD	BLOCH
FISHER	PIERCE	Mr. AIKEN	Miss AIKEN
GORDON			NEEDHAM
BILL BROWN			JONES
GARRISON	EBER	SEWARD	JANE BROWN
JAECKEL	WATSON	GRAY	HENDRICKS
MONROE	JENCKS	GIACONDA	HELLER
MONTAIGNE	PALAZZO	CASYK	PAGAN
LINCOLN	NOYES	CRUZ	
NASH	CUMMINGS	ABRAMS	JOHNSON PRINZ

Figure 9.1. Bus seating chart, 6:00 p.m., 8 July, on way from Ostende to Brussels. Unoccupied seats are blank.

When it finally stopped I was to be the courier from Venice on and Odin would talk to me on the bus and explain the infinite mystery of checking into hotels in the evening and out of them in the morning. We staggered out of the restaurant into the Belgian night and Bob took me on a tour of Brussels.

We strolled leisurely along the wide streets trying to forget the hassle. We tried in vain. There is no forgetting a thing like that. You've lost more than an hour's peace. You've lost more than a meal. You've lost more than a fight. Somewhere you've lost a hunk of your life that'll never come back. What a way to go.

What puzzled me as much as anything was why we were on the trip at all. Not from our point of view, but from theirs. If they were simply being noble, helping science out with a big hand and a dollar cigar, then I could understand their attitude. I wouldn't like it any better, but at least I could ease off on the surprise. But that wasn't the way it was at all. It was an even trade, a business deal. They were supposed to get as much from us as they gave us. We were going to provide feedback to them about how the kids and T-C's were really reading the trip. We were providing them with a self-study program, and any information we collected was to be used equally—by us and by the tour itself. But both these things—our work and their self-study—were just lead-ins to the big prize: publicity. We were supposed to produce headlines. When we'd flown out to Missouri to firm things up with The Director, he'd leaned back in his Eames dentist chair and stared dreamily out the window across an endless rolling of green hills. He had been talking about the stiff competition in the summer tour business, and now he was contemplating the sweet thought of squashing them. As his manicured hand sketched out the headline with an elegant sweep he'd said:

"TIME MAGAZINE: TOUR GROUP STUDIES ITSELF. That would be worth a thousand students to us. You can do it."

He'd looked at us man-to-man, clear gaze, level. From his point of view we were going to attract attention. Do a study, write it up in scientific journals, be picked up by the national media, preferably the travel section of Time. Make the tour a fortune and make back his costs many times over.

Our relationship had started on that basis. Business. All we asked in return was cooperation. Maybe The Director hadn't broken the news to the ranks.

As though we were playing street soccer we kicked that ball

back and forth between us as we worked our way to the center of the old city. The thing that I most appreciated about our relationship with the tour was the sense of openness and willingness to listen on the part of the leaders. If you tell them that most of the kids are sleeping during the lectures:

"But that's quite impossible. I wrote that particular lecture myself, you realize." That shuts you up forever. Yeah, tour group studies itself — just don't use your eyes. You might see something.

We were seeing things at that moment. We were seeing crowds of people jamming the approaches to the Grand Place. We edged our way into the square. It was surrounded by people. On our side of the square was a bank of wooden seats. Something was going on. We squeezed our way through the crush past the stand and standing on tiptoe caught a glimpse of some sort of pageant. Another stand was set up in the square and it was filled with people dressed to the teeth. At this moment in the square itself were troops of citizens got up in gorgeous costumes of long ago. I don't know my costumes well enough to say that they were Medieval or Renaissance, but whatever they were, they were easy on the eyeballs. From speakers came the sound of stately music, obviously Baroque, and to its time stepped the marchers. They carried enormous luxurious flags and bore on their shoulders as elaborate a palanquin as I have seen. The whole scene was bathed in the eerie light of quartz filament floodlamps. It was a tightrope act, poising the square between the 20th Century of the speakers and the floodlamps and the 16th of the flags and palanquin and costumes. Somehow it worked.

It seemed as though we could get a better view from the other side. We pressed ourselves out of the crowd into the warren of narrow streets surrounding it. They had the air of being backstage at the opera. Young men strolled around in costume waiting to enter the square and do their bit. We re-entered the square. It was less crowded but still difficult to watch the pageant. I looked at the square. It was a large space and it wasn't square. It was some sort of trapesoid. It was surrounded by buildings that had nothing to do with the 20th Century. Whoever had built them never dreamed of Frank Lloyd Wright or Le Corbusier. It was a chiaroscuro that bounced your eyes into the buildings' surfaces and rebounded them as fast as you could blink. It was cirriforms that grabbed your eyes and waltzed them around the square and then took them on a polka around the square and wherever your eyes rested did a minuet on your cones and rods. No one had to tell anyone that this square was something to see. The square said that. It said it hard and forever.

Over the heads of the crowd I saw flags flying in the air as graceful as gulls. They would go up and up and furl and unfurl in greens and golds and scarlets and the music from the speakers did nice things to your ears and still the flags were being thrown and all this against an endless procession of curls and swoops on the buildings around the square. The crowds were silent except for sighs that happened whenever a flag would flatten out in the air and trace fleeting arabesques of color in the night.

It was getting late so we reverently debouched from the square and slowly wandered home. Along the way a group of Americans stopped us and asked us something in an abominable language that was supposed to resemble French. We answered in English—the strain left their faces. We followed them at a distance to look at Le Mekanique, the diminutive statue of a small boy peeing forever on a street corner into a riot of flowers at his feet. The boy had been lost and the city had turned out to find him. His father had found him on this corner, peeing against a wall and had erected this small token of his gratitude. Around the corner we dropped into a lace shop and I picked up a tablecloth for Ingrid. As I fell asleep that night I saw the small boy peeing on a green linen and lace tablecloth set in the center of a magical square under a sky filled with colored gulls.

That was the story of the tour. A fight with Odin and a lousy meal. Then Europe to take away the strain. Sometimes the strain wouldn't let you see Europe and the day was lousy. Sometimes Europe wouldn't let you get hassled by the tour and the day was great. Most days were a little of both.

* * *

The next day was the ninth of July, the tenth day of the tour. On the endless flat stretch across Belgium and into Germany we did another set of stereotypes and took our bus seating charts. It was a busy day. We had lunch in Cologne and spent twenty minutes looking at the Cathedral. We raced along the Rhine to catch our boat and then waited in the sun for it to arrive. We rode up the river for an hour and then got off the boat and back on the bus. We arrived in Heidelberg. During the day people sat with a lot of other people. Bob sat with Bill Brown and then in the back of the bus by himself and then with Laura Johnson and finally with Robert Watson. I sat with Phyl Gordon and Bill and Phyl again and then with Marina. Most people were moving around a lot, getting to know each other, passing the time, looking out the windows together.

As we started up the Rhine, castles would start appearing on the high bluffs opposite us. Phyl Gordon would look at one and turn to me:

"Is that a ruined castle, Mr. Wood?"

"Well, Phyl," I'd say peering at the building, "it looks like a castle all right, and since it's filled with holes and all tumbled-down looking, I'd guess it was ruined. By the way, the name's Denis."

She'd look at the castle a while as if considering the rightness of my logic and then say, "Thank you."

After a while around another bend would come another castle.

"Is that a ruined castle, Mr. Wood?" I'd do my routine again. And I'd do it again with the next castle. And the next. For some reason we went through this with each and every castle. Sometimes it wasn't a ruin and I'd say:

"Well, you see the sun glinting off the windows so it's probably occupied. And the clothes on the line on the tower are a dead give-away. So it's a castle, but I wouldn't call it a ruin."

I began to wonder why I wasn't getting sarcastic, why I was getting more and more polite with each reiteration. When we got off the bus I found out why.

"Thanks a lot for all the information, Mr. Wood," Phyl said.

"You needn't thank me," I replied. "That's what people are for."

"Well," and she looked down at her feet, "it's just that no one's ever done all that for me before."

I kicked at the grass with my scruffy shoe. I noticed that it was coming apart on me. The things you notice. "Yeah, well..."

"Thanks again, anyhow..." And she was gone.

* * *

On the way to Heidelberg from the steamer trip occurred another of the contretemps that tended to unite Group L. The bus was equipped with a radio and as we whizzed along we listened to a German radio station. There was a lot of German on the air and that was

interesting but it was a pop music station and that was more interesting. Especially to the kids. Some of the music was even American and that was an occasion.

But it wasn't Culture and so it wasn't education. Whenever the radio was at its best Odin would open his case and pull out the latest horror of media-equipped tour buses. For the bus had not only a radio but a cassette tape player. He would shove the cassette in and the radio would vanish and a voice would announce the subject of the tape. It was one of the voices we'd heard during the lectures but how could you tell one well-modulated voice from another? They all dripped syrup sufficient for an ice-cream sundae or a presidential candidate. What followed wasn't just another lecture. It was a media-cool assemblage of readings and music and sounds. Hidden deep inside was Culture, presented in as "exciting" a way as possible. Thus the kids would eat it up and not realize that they'd swallowed a little Culture whole. It was like hiding the medicine in cherry syrup. And it was just as effective. Show me the kid fooled by the cherry syrup and I'll show you the kid fooled by the tapes.

Perhaps on a set of great loudspeakers in a quiet room the tapes sounded different. Over our dinky PA, they sounded like garbage. We'd heard many before. Odin presented these tapes as the greatest thing since Wheaties and the T-C's all perked up and tried to keep the talking down and pretended they could hear them. At first the kids thought the volume was too low and Odin turned it up. That just increased the ambient noise and made the hearing more difficult. So the kids developed a stoic attitude toward the tapes, and tried to mentally shut them out or fall asleep.

But on this trip to Heidelberg they talked. To talk over the tapes meant you had to raise your voice a little. So they did. Everyone was enjoying this leg of the trip. So Odin increased the volume. The kids talked louder. So the volume went up. It was tactical escalation, musical chairs with the aural environment.

Suddenly there was absolute silence. Odin had taken the tape off and was reaching for the mike. Guilt and panic swept the bus. In this atmosphere Odin dressed us up, then dressed us down. Guilt and panic under this attack turned to sullen righteousness. The kids turned into a block of granite. The T-C's didn't know where to go. It was a lovely mess and created the perfect atmosphere, that just-right blend of ease and comfort under which to see the heritage of the ages in Europe.

It was hot in Heidelberg that night and I slept as poorly as I ever hope to.

* * *

After a fling at a castle the next morning and a chance to buy cuckoo clocks and beer steins we left for Ulm. We had lunch outside Ulm in a restaurant that provided a distant glimpse of the cathedral spire from the front door. Inside two-hundred and fifty kids were being fed in waves. I ate with Leslie Casyk and Tracy Cummings and Laura Johnson. Laura was leaving us here and she was scared stiff. She was off to Vienna to see some famous horses. She sat there filled with personality and no food. She poked at her plate. She was a thin girl, with patrician features surrounded by loose attractive blond hair. When she smiled you looked around to see if there was a handkerchief you could pick up. When she didn't she just looked petulant. She wasn't smiling now. She snapped at Leslie. She snapped about the trip. She snapped about everything.

But she had guts. She was leaving the security of the bus for a long train trip by herself among unknown peoples speaking unknown tongues to see some horses. She must love horses. As she tooled off in her cab she looked like she needed something, or someone. I wondered if I shouldn't have gone along to pick up her handkerchief.

On the bus that afternoon both Bob and I took the mike. We both did something no courier is ever supposed to do: we looked at our audience. Maybe it was always hearing Odin's back speaking that built arrogance into his words. Bob talked about ecology and how everything added up into home. He wasn't bad. I talked about what was passing outside the window and got the kids to talk back. That's a trick on a bus with one mike and it's in your hands. But we discovered that someone in the back could pass his words up to the front in a verbal chain. David Abrams was the star and starter that time. It was fun. Odin was impressed.

It was fun mostly because the kids were as loose that day as they'd been so far during the trip. The old H-T groupings didn't seem to matter. They had found other friends in other groups. New groups were emerging to replace the old. Taylor Nash and Joy Gray sat together for the first time that day; Desmond Jencks and Lana Monroe were sitting together; Marina was sitting with Cliff Jaeckel; Rhod with Miss Bloch; Watson with Mrs. Needham; Tracy Cummings with Leslie Casyk; Susan Lincoln with Sven Heller. Only a few old friends sat together still; Wanda Pierce with Candy Fisher and Betty Baker with Claire Mayo. These couples were friends long before the trip. They had come together and were staying together.

The new groups that were emerging were trip groups, bus groups. Already these groups had hard outlines. At the front of the bus


			
P E T E R		O D I N	
	PORTMAN		
GARRISON	EBER	BILL BROWN	
LENZ		NOYES	BLOCH
JANE BROWN	SEWARD	HELLER	LINCOLN
GORDON	HENDRICKS	BAKER	MAYO
GRAY	NASH	JAECKEL	GIACONDA
	JONES	MONROE	JENCKS
WATSON	NEEDHAM	BECK	WOOD
MONTAIGNE	PAGAN	PIERCE	FISHER
CUMMINGS	CASYK	CRUZ	PALAZZO
Miss AIKEN		Mr. AIKEN	ABRAMS PRINZ

Figure 9.2. Bus seating chart, 2:30 p.m., 10 July, on way from Ulm to rest-stop before Innsbruck.

were the T-C's, the serious students, the lonely unattached kids, and the guide. They spent their time looking out the windows and taking notes and reading guidebooks. The lonely kids just looked. This was the front of the bus culture. At the back of the bus was another group. These kids had been sitting back here since the Avon field trip. They were noisy. They talked. They smoked. They ate incessantly. They did their hair. They threw pistachio nut shells on the floor. They read. They slept. They played cards. They ignored Odin and the tapes and most of what was going on outside the windows. This was the back of the bus culture. In the middle of the bus were the kids who could go either way at the drop of a hat. They could be serious and interested or they could play cards and gossip. These were the kids who mediated between the front of the bus—authority—and the kids at the back. And they mediated in every way. In the front of the bus was authority of a simple logistic sort: how long we'll stop here, where we eat, where we are. These types of information were never heard at the back of the bus. These kids were always saying What? Where? When? How long? The middle of the bus would tell them. In the front of the bus was authority of a moral sort. These people were righteous and knew it. No hanky-panky in the front of the bus. No mess. No litter. But the back of the bus couldn't buy their authority. They bought it second hand from the middle of the bus. So it was on down the line. Front. Middle. Back.

At this time on the trip, the powerful personalities among the kids were in the middle. Desmond Jencks, who organized the London skit, was there. Desmond Jencks had also been the first, with Robert Watson, to break the sex line and sit with a girl. These two girls—Marina and Lana—also sat in the middle of the bus. These were the kids who could speak for the group as a whole. If a kid from the front of the bus spoke, it was brown-nosing. If a kid from the back of the bus spoke, it was smark-alecky. If a kid from the middle of the bus spoke, it was just real words. Of the T-C's, Cliff Jaeckel and Mrs. Needham spent a lot of time in the middle of the bus. And now Taylor Nash and Joy Gray sat together in the middle of the bus. As we'll see later on, it wasn't who sat in the middle of the bus that gave it what it had. Whoever sat there had it. Authority was the prerogative of the front. Hanky-panky the prerogative of the back. In the middle, nothing but sheer power.

It was a nice theory, but that's all. It was a theory. Just something to chew on on the long straight stretches. And then we stopped for a break in a gorgeous little town high in the hills and a little after that we were pulling up into the mountains and nobody did anything but stare out the windows at the mountains. Nobody but Porter Portman and Odin, that is. Porter was panting to see relics of the last war. I mean, mountains were very nice but give him a wrecked hulk of a fighter or an

old gun site for true satisfaction. As for Odin — well, he had seen these mountains a million times. We were coming into Austria, his favorite country. He sat back in his seat and told us the history of Austria. He told us all about its beginnings in the mists of times and its heroic role up to the present. When he spoke of Austrian neutrality and its role for the future of mankind, there was a glow of pride in his voice, a syrupy satisfaction you could have poured on a waffle. There was only one thing wrong: no one was listening. They were too busy looking at the Alps.

We dropped down into Innsbruck like an eagle dives for a lark. Our breaths stopped. Then there was Innsbruck before us, our home for the next two days.

* * *

Our hotel was up a steep incline just feet from the river. It was check-in time. There is a rigorous ritual to be followed at check-in time. The courier (me) approaches the desk and asks for the mail. This is handed out immediately on the theory that it distracts the kids and T-C's while you wrestle with the rooms. In your hands is a list of the kids and T-C's. Another list shows the preferred room-mates. Hopefully, before you reach the desk, you've worked out pairs or more of kids that won't mind being together and you've arranged this list with your knowledge of what the hotel has to offer in terms of rooms. Some have only doubles. Some only triples. Some mix them up. According to Odin, this hotel would be doubles, but I'd made out a triples list to be sure.

The clerk always tries to help you. He has made a list of room numbers with the number of beds beside them. You assign each kid a room number and beside each room on the clerk's list you jot down the names of the kids. While you are doing this the kids are jammed up behind you waiting for their rooms. They can't do anything else so they pant. The mail gambit is supposed to help this, and sometimes it does. But most of the time there's little mail and most of the kids want to read it in the privacy of their rooms anyhow. So I get my lists and lay them on the desk. The clerk says:

"Four rooms with five beds, six rooms with three beds, three rooms with two beds...Okay?"

Okay? Who's he kidding? Okay? No, it's rotten. Shuffle. Shuffle. I can't put Portman in any of the five-bed rooms — too many people hate him. Wood, hold it. Do the T-C's first, first rule, always do the T-C's first. Okay. Oh, no! Needham and Bloch can't stay together. They'll both have fits. Okay. Jaeckel and Lenz. One double.

The Aikens, another double? Me and Bob, the third double. Hand out these keys. NO! NO! Do the whole list, then hand out the keys.

So I hand out all the keys and everyone is happy, but first I inquire about dinner time and announce that to the group. Bags. Make sure the bags get to the right room. Now put up the courier bulletin, but first make out the courier bulletin. This contains the schedule for the next several days. Now copy the rooming list so that each T-C will have a copy and know where all his kids are.

Now pass out.

That evening Bob and I sat on the terrace of a cafe hung above the green waters of the Inn River and considered the project. We figured we'd been doing okay so far. We had a set of stereotypes and an adjective checklist completed and in the data case. What were we going to do for Innsbruck? The adjective checklists had gone so well we decided to try for another the next morning after the sight-seeing trip. That would seriously disturb our supply situation so we decided to print 400 additional copies. That would have to wait until Monday. In London the use of the place names list had been a success, so we needed to make one up for Rome. Bob would have to do that, since he knew Rome and I didn't. He'd need a typewriter and a map of Rome. I knew that Odin had a typewriter and a map of Rome. I promised to deal with Odin.

We toyed around with two other projects born of the moment and of subliminal thoughts left over from our predeparture planning sessions. One of these was to collect a series of postcards on Innsbruck. These we would arrange on a board of some sort and pass around the bus later on, maybe on the way to Rome. The kids would look at the postcards and fill out an adjective checklist on Innsbruck from the postcards. This we could compare with the list we collected in the flesh. What for? Who knew? We were collecting data at this point, not thinking.

The second project was more interesting. We would get our bus seating chart copied. All the kids were interested in this aspect of the project and we figured they'd be game to try and fill one out from memory. Say on the way to Venice we'd have them fill out a chart for the way people were sitting on the way to Innsbruck. It would be interesting to see whom they left off the bus, whom they remembered sitting next to whom, and the perfect day to have them remember would be the day Laura was on the train to Vienna. How many people would put her back on the bus? Both projects meant work. We'd need to collect the postcards, find a board, get glue, put them together. For the other, all we had to do was to print more bus seating charts. We also wanted to compile checklists of all our data so far, to figure out who among the kids was

cooperating and who wasn't and go to work on these.

We had our work cut out for us. In addition to all this there was the morning sightseeing, an evening at the Tyrolean dances, the following morning of lectures and a courier meeting that afternoon that I wouldn't have missed for all the tea in China. There was going to be no vacation in Innsbruck.

We paid for our beers and toured the town. It looked like a nice town, like my kind of town, a small town in mountains. I anticipated a nice two days here. We strolled down Maria Theresien looking in the shop windows. On a door was a poster for an organ concert to be held the next day. I thought how nice that would be. We walked down the other side of the street and into the old part of the town. It looked like a nice town to see by daylight. Then we crossed the bridge over the Inn to our hotel and on to bed.

Daylight came as it did all through Europe — far too early. The sun was always rising long before I wanted to. The townspeople seemed to rise with the sun. Long before five in the morning heavy traffic was rolling past our window. I shuddered and walked down the hallway to the john. This was some hotel. A basin in the room, a toilet in another, and the bath on another floor. What floored me was that I liked it.

Light was falling over itself trying to get into the dining room over the boxes of flowers at the windows. I sat at a window table and inhaled strong black coffee and ate bread smothered in sweet preserves. The kids bounced into the room, sort of like the sunlight. Outside the air was warm but crisp, like English muffins hot from the oven. The sunlight was like butter.

The bus was even different. After two long days of hard use, it had acquired a worn look, like the soles of my shoes. Now it sparkled inside and out. Fred Astaire used to sing: "If there's a shine on your shoes, there's a melody in your heart." He knew his stuff. The bus took us up the side of the valley to the site of the winter Olympics. We parked in the shade a lot of trees were giving away for nothing and walked up to the foot of the ski jump in the sun. We stood on the lip of the green pocket that once braked the speed of the ski jumper. On one side of us was the jump, a long, long perfect slope of green that terminated abruptly in the middle of nowhere. Where it stopped five colored circles linked together. In the winter it was covered with snow and as dangerous to come down as the edge of a razor. Even now, mantled in green, it exuded an aura of menace, but of healthful menace. Maybe I meant

exhilaration. Maybe I didn't know what I meant. It was too nice a day to care. Beneath us spread the red roofs of Innsbruck straddling the Inn River.

But somehow all this was felt rather than seen. It all had competition of the worst sort. You couldn't take your eyes off the mountains, the mountains that climbed and danced and soared and sported, the mountains that stood there and defied and challenged and mocked and encouraged, the mountains that had seen it all, the mountains that could watch anything, the mountains of gray and blue and green and ermine. You tried to look at the town and found yourself looking at the mountains. You turned to look at the ski slope and your eyes left the ski slope and climbed. You tried to follow the road and followed instead the jagged edge of the peaks. They had a monopoly on the scenery in Innsbruck that no committee in Congress could ever do anything about. They were it.

I bet they knew it too.

We wandered on back down to the buses. In the shade nearby were a bunch of tables under roofs. On one of them lay Porter Portman demonstrating something about shooting to someone who couldn't care less. Porter, our militarist in residence. In London he'd gone only to the Imperial War Museum. At night in his room he read about making military models. On the road into Innsbruck he had eyes only for ruins of the war. Now it was guns all over again. He was a big kid, the biggest on the tour, with a gait that was a mockery of walking. His clothes tended to fit him the way a stall fits an ox. He wore glasses and picked his nose. He was wonderful. He had a nifty line he used to greet people with. It went: "Hi! I'm a redneck from Mississippi. I would have voted for Wallace in the last election if I could." Porter tended to make friends the easy way: enemies first. In his case they seldom changed their minds after that first encounter.

Under all that was a scared kid who knew he knew nothing and didn't know how to start.

The bus rolled on down the mountain. It stopped beside a small, unpretentious yellow church that besides being small, unpretentious and yellow was as graceful as a hummingbird and as perfectly proportioned. We went inside. If Heaven is anything like that, Satan better keep his distance because I want in. It was the Grand Place in Brussels all over again. Nobody had said anything about this. No one had to. Even Odin had kept his mouth shut knowing he could say nothing that the inside of this church couldn't say ten times better. As each kid walked in he caught his breath without knowing that he did it and without knowing why. It was like that. Outside I rubbed my neck from the pain of looking and

blinked my eyes from the joy of seeing. And I walked right back in and did it somemore. There couldn't be anything else to see. The bus stopped for the last sight. We stayed on for five minutes and everyone did the adjective checklist. Then we Indian-filed our way toward the Golden Dome and the Cathedral. I was at the end of the line just behind Taylor Nash. I hurried to catch up and came beside him as the bells in the tower tolled noon.

There is no sound quite like the sound of church bells high in a tower tolling a Sunday noon. Especially when they have the mass of a large cathedral in which to resonate. We both stood still and let our ears fill with the sound, our heads cocked at that crazy angle people use to listen. They stopped and as we stepped into the shadow of the porch he said something about the sound of those bells that made me stop and look at him. He had heard them. I was amazed. Most people have ears but the people that truly use them are as rare as an honest used-car salesman. He said something else that told me he knew he could hear and that he was interested in sounds. He said sounds, as though he understood the distinction between sounds and music. I mentioned the organ concert that night. He was interested. Wow. The things you find on a summer tour. If you listen hard enough you can even find a pair of ears.

Bob and I spent the afternoon in our room working. That might seem to be a crazy thing to do while the kids were cablecarring to the tops of mountains, but that's just what we did. We had a lot of work to do. We went through everything we had so far and made up lists of who had completed what. Bob would sit there on his bed with a stack of folders on his lap reading off names which I would mark off on the lists. We sat surrounded by the litter of the project and it was terrific. Sunlight bouncing off the surface of the Inn sparkled on the walls and the air was fragrant as though Spring had just come to New England, fragrant and soft as fine spun gold. I figured we had collected as many of the predeparture mailings as we were going to get so I totaled them. We had nothing at all from nine kids. Rhoda Noyes had sent us nothing. Neither had Trudy Blom, but since she wasn't even on the tour, I couldn't much blame her. Laura Johnson, Agatha Jones, Porter Portman, Karl Prinz, the two Browns, and Taylor Nash were the rest of the villains.

But that was predeparture. That was long ago. How had these eight been doing lately? Basically, they'd been doing fine. Of the last four exercises, five of the eight had done all of them. Agatha Jones, Porter Portman and Jame Brown needed something special; they had done only one of the last four exercises. They had things in common. Agatha was a Jesus freak. She was also a small, mean looking girl with dusty colored hair and a nose you could slide down. I figured she looked mean

because she was always so serious. I had caught her smiling once but the look she followed that up with made me feel like a thief. I recalled her argument with Joy Gray about divorce. She made Joy so mad she looked like pulling hair. But the righteous are very strong. Agatha hadn't batted an eye. She was also very lonely. I mean God is fine, but when he's your only companion things can get rough. Jane Brown was beyond me completely. She lived in another universe hidden behind eyes of slate. When she came into mine she was nice and as the trip grew she came into my universe more and more often. Then you could see that she, too, was lonely and a little scared. The loneliness and the fear is all they had in common with Porter. They each wore their mask at a different angle: Jane's was retiring, Agatha's was adamant but reticent, and Porter's was bullying belligerence. Neither of us had a line into Porter or Jane. We just tanked up on hope that they'd come through. Bob figured if we couldn't get Agatha to participate in the regular exercises, maybe she'd draw floorplans of churches or something along the God line. I wished him luck.

We turned to our next group. These were kids who had sent in the predeparture things, but who weren't doing too well now. There were four of these: Vanessa Garrison, Bobbi Seward, Wanda Pierce, and Candy Fisher. It was less clear with these whether they were with us or not. Their records were simply very spotty, a hit here, a miss there. Bobbi was still a grey sheep for us, a total blank, an unknown cipher, but she was the constant companion of Jane Brown. Vanessa was another story altogether. She palled around with Janine Eber, our predeparture star. In London she had proven she had plenty of guts, spending an interesting Sunday on her own. She was enigma personified. I'd look at her one minute and see a lady of twenty-five. In the next minute she was ten. I had no real fears about Fisher and Pierce. They were busy getting it all together. I just hoped they'd get it together before we got back to New York.

Why am I telling you all this? Because that was how we spent one gorgeous afternoon in Innsbruck and because at that point in time nothing mattered half so much as why Vanessa wasn't mapping and because I want to pound the names of these kids deep into your skull the way they bore into mine. We shuffled our papers around a little longer and went down to dinner.

Dinner was early that night. After dinner I was to lead Group L on foot to the hotel on the main drag where they'd watch Tyrolean dancing. So they came to eat dressed, or as dressed as I ever saw them for a long time to come. With the clothes came a hum of excitement and most of the hum was about Porter Portman. Bob and I sat together and the news came to our table in hot flashes. Porter had climbed off a

mountain, was the way I first heard it and I looked around for him. He wasn't eating.

"What do you mean?" Bob and I asked in unison.

"Well, you know we went up the mountain in the cable cars. Well, at the top is this space...the view was simply...You didn't go? Well, anyhow all of a sudden I looked down and there was Porter climbing down this cliff...It was this straight...And Cliff was yelling at him and you know how calm Cliff is and Omar and well...I was never so frightened. I was sure he was going to fall off...but he got back up somehow. We were all so scared." And so on. We heard the story from everybody but Porter. He never mentioned it at all.

The Tyrolean dances were a big success with everyone except Lana Monroe. Something she drank made her a little sick. In fact, she threw up, and talked a lot about things she didn't mean to. If you know what I mean. I didn't see it. I took one look at the auditorium and opted for a cup of coffee with Bob at a nice shop in the old city. We made it back to the exit just as the dances ended and the kids started coming out. Taylor Nash appeared with Joy Gray in tow and the three of us grabbed a cab and headed for the organ concert. It was in a plain church at the edge of town.

The interior of the church was as simple as the exterior and we sat on crude wooden benches to listen to as fine a concert of organ music as I've heard. It was a short history of the music for the organ and the selections were chosen by someone with a sense of humor. The Buxtehude "Fugue in C Major" was as funny as ever and I grew goose-pimples trying to keep from chuckling out loud. The beautiful thing about the concert was the audience: entire families with little kids had come and they didn't listen as though they were at church. There was head bopping and foot tapping. Taylor and Joy sat like good Americans, stiff and unmoving, practically holding their breath. After all, this was classical music...

"How'd you like it?" I asked, accepting one of Taylor's Kools.

"It was OK."

"Why did you laugh in the middle of one of the pieces?" Joy asked.

"Because it was a very funny piece of music," I answered.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean the guy that wrote it was having a good time. He'd get carried away and work himself into a corner and chuckle as he found an out."

"But how did you know that?"

"I listened. Didn't you?" I changed the subject. "Let's walk home. Do you know the way?"

Joy didn't so I said, "Well then why don't you lead us?" She agreed and off we went. This was Project Group L in action and we all knew it. We talked about the project and the trip and the tour as we walked. They were both nice kids. Taylor was looser than Joy but both were explorers, rangers as we would have called them in predeparture. Joy took us straight downtown without deviation. We parted on the Maria Theresien. They walked on home and I went to get Odin's typewriter for Bob.

I reached our hotel about an hour later. Cliff Jaeckel was dangling his legs on the wall beneath our hotel and I figured that was as good a time as any to catch up on my leg dangling. I hitched myself up beside him and we chatted about nothing and about Porter Portman and what was ahead. Like that night, for instance. That night a group was planning to sleep out on a mountain knee so they could see the dawn coming over the mountains. Omar the Camera was leading them. The kids began to collect on the sidewalk with blankets and other stuff. It had the air of a millionaire's pick-up expedition to the Antarctic. Taylor Nash and Joy were going. So was Laura Johnson, fresh from her adventures in darkest Europe. Karl Prinz, David Abrams, Tracy Cummings and Porter Portman made up the rest of the party.

"Hey, Denis. Why don't you come along?" It is a nice thought Taylor, but I'm courier and I've got to get up and make sure the cook doesn't put arsenic in the coffee.

"Good Lord, what's that?" I nudged Cliff in the dark. Coming across the bridge was Robert Watson supporting a weaving Candy Fisher. If the kids had been allowed to drink, I'd have sworn she was drunk. When she got close enough, I knew she was. She was also crying and talking a mile a minute. Cliff jumped down to help Watson get her to her room. After a while they reappeared with assurances as to her safety and Watson decided to join the sunrise expedition. They straggled off into the night dropping blankets and cameras.

I wished I was going.

Cliff went to bed and I sat there dangling my legs enjoying the night. Little cars would beep in falsetto as they wheezed by. I trailed them with my eyes, lazily, like a fish browsing in a sunny pool. As my eyes swept back down the hill, they froze on a blur. Wanda Pierce was leading Candy Fisher out of the hotel and up the hill. As courier it was none of my business. As social scientist, it probably wasn't either. As Denis Wood, I wandered up the hill to see what was going on.

They were sitting in a little plot of grass in an angle of the hotel banked up against the wall. Wanda was acting concerned but not as if it was the end of the world. Candy was moaning and thrashing about. At first she refused to talk to me. "Go away, go away," was all she would say. She wasn't all that drunk if she ever was but she was crammed to the eyeballs with remorse, remorse and anticipation. They both wanted to talk and I learned a lot about life in a small town in Iowa. First Candy wanted her boyfriend. Then she wanted to go lie in the grass of a park down by the river. I thought that idea stunk. Then she talked about what she wanted from life.

She wanted to work when she got home, anywhere. She wanted to make enough money to buy a white fast small car. She wanted to jack up the rear and drive her dream to Florida and get a job and have fun.

"What kind of fun, Candy?"

"I don't know...just fun." Her voice had a high keening in it like a cornered dog. "I want to lie in the grass with Fred."

"Where's Fred, Candy?"

"He's on an Army base in Louisiana...We're supposed to get married." Pause. Hiccup. Wail. "I don't want to get married," and she'd start crying.

They both wanted to know what Bob and I had learned about them from the psychological questionnaires. I told them we hadn't looked at them very seriously so far.

Candy looked at me like a naughty girl and said smiling: "We lied on them."

"What do you mean?"

"We made up the answers," Wanda said, "together."

"We didn't want you to think we were icky or anything," Candy added.

"Well, you want to fill out another set? I don't think you're icky. Why do you think you're icky?"

"We don't do good in school. We don't have many friends. The somebody-or-others always give themselves airs in church. They sing better than we do. My mother always says I'm stupid."

"I guess we are icky," Wanda said. Wanda had a sense of humor. She was a strong girl. She could laugh at herself. I only wondered if she ever took herself seriously. After an hour of this we all entered the hotel, and they went to bed. But probably not to sleep.

I walked up the stairs. On the second floor Desmond Jencks stood talking to Lana Monroe. I talked with them for a while and then Lana went to her room.

"I'm tired," Desmond said.

I pulled out my watch. "No wonder," I said.

"I don't mean that. I mean I'm dropping out of the trip." I understood him. He meant he was going to fade into the background and let his personality have a vacation.

"This ego business is wearing me out." If he wanted to spill it, I was game. I got out a cigarette. It looked like it was the night for confessions. Desmond is an adopted child and more than anything he wants to do well, to prove to his parents that he was worth their effort. I'd sure like to meet them. They sounded keen. I wondered how old he had been when they started making the point. Somehow he ended up giving me a list of his accomplishments. He was head of this and head of that and president of his senior class and star athlete and anxious to get into college and make it in the medical profession. When he talked about the two ulcers he'd already had there was mingled pride and scorn in his voice, pride for the effort that gave them to him, scorn for the weakness of his body. Looking at him and listening to his calm frenetic voice I felt a million years old. I stubbed my butt in the dirt of a potted plant and abruptly said goodnight. I was hearing too much about too many other people's lives. It made my skin feel dirty.

I went up to my room and took a bath in the sink and passed out between the sheets. Hoagy Carmichael whistled in my ear:

Sometimes I wonder why I spend the lonely night,
 Dreaming of a song, the melody, haunts my reverie,
 And I am once again with you...
 Oh, but that was long ago,
 Now my consolation is in the stardust of a song...

* * *

The next day was more of the same. More sunshine, more beautiful mountains, more green river, more Innsbruck. In the morning there were also the lectures. They were held in the gym-auditorium of an elementary school on the edge of town. I led the bus there. For the first time since the trip from the airport in London I was in the courier's seat. Odin sat somewhere in the back taking notes. The lectures were the usual once-over-lightly-with-hash-browned. The first was on German national identity and the 19th Century. It might have gone over big in an advanced seminar in something but not with the ahs, ums, coughs, and stumbles we heard. The postage stamp size slides didn't help either. The next was by an old lawyer who talked about the legal implications of Austrian neutrality. That went over like a ruptured appendix. His slides were great too. They showed sixty-color maps of Austria that couldn't be read in the book they came from and on the screen were just blurs of color. The third lecture won my heart. It was a history of Austrian music with musical examples. They told us about Mozart, Beethoven and Strauss. Never mind about Berg, Webern and Schoenberg, the kids wouldn't understand that stuff. They couldn't understand the stuff that came out of speakers I could lose in my hands either. No one could. They might have made a decent pair of earphones but they were never made for an auditorium. The final lecture was by Odin himself. It made the first three look like what they were. He showed huge slides in pairs. On the right was something American, like the Marina Towers in Chicago. On the left was something European, like the Tower of Pisa. The slides were great. I only wish I had understood what he was talking about. Cliff Jaeckel spent the morning against the wall at the back taking notes — on how not to run a tour lecture series.

The courier meeting that afternoon was not so long that I hated more than an hour of it. One courier kept asking to have the route repeated over and over again. I escaped into the afternoon and Bob and I went to pick up our adjective checklists and the bus seating charts. We also picked up our postcards and did a little shopping. We hung over the bridge on the way to dinner and watched the Inn rushing away beneath us with creamy furls of froth that seemed to be afraid they'd miss something

downstream if they didn't hurry. The water was the dusty green of eucalyptus leaves after a rain has scrubbed the dust to a murky green. The green went with the grey of the mountain flanks and the creamy froth picked up the white in the snow on the high peaks. God had planned it that way, I guessed.

Bob went in to dinner and I went up to wash. When I came back down he was seated at a window table with Agatha Jones. My food came and while I ate I listened. Agatha was trying to tell Bob why she wasn't going to draw church floor plans for us. They were talking about the little Baroque gem we'd been in yesterday. Hunks of her conversation are with me now, like stale crusts of bread:

"Of course I was greatly moved by the beauty of the church, but I know they didn't know what God was...A church is when two Christians come together, and I just know the makers of that church weren't Christians...I was moved by the beauty of the church but I could tell it was built to exalt the builder, and not God...You can't see a church without seeing the congregation. The congregation is the church."

Bob said something or other. She said, "You couldn't believe because you don't have the faith to believe, to feel. I have faith. I know God. I can't do your maps because you're trying to get something out of me I can't give to you. I give myself to God and God is mine."

I poked at my boiled potato. In my mind Agatha's voice turned into Candy's. I compared the two. They had one thing in common. At their tender age they had life all psyched out. They knew what it was and knew what it had to give them. For Candy it offered a job, fun, and a jazzy white car. For Agatha it offered God. I chewed a potato for the both of them and wondered if they'd ever noticed the mealy yielding substance of a potato. Somehow I doubted that they had.

Janine Eber and Vanessa Garrison rushed panting and laughing into the room. Janine came up to our table, face flushed and smiling, eyes sparkling and dancing.

"We've been on a picnic," she announced.

"And you're all wet," I said. She looked down at her clothes and laughed. Vanessa started talking too. I flipped the page in my notebook from the Jones conversation and started writing. Good old Wood. Everything is something for the mill. Rhoda, Janine, Vanessa and Susan had gone on a picnic down the river with Desmond, Watson, Taylor Nash and Cliff. They'd had three bottles of wine, two loaves of bread, three kinds of cheese and peaches, cherries and apples. Janine had started the

fight. Desmond had pushed Rhoda in the fountain, Laura went around spitting streams of water on everybody and tossing a Frisbie, and Watson worried about his wig. Telling me about it was as exciting as doing it.

"Do you have it all down?" Janine asked and she looked over my shoulder to make sure. Her eyes twinkled. She was having a ball. She ought to, she was still full of life. I wondered if she'd ever grow sure of life like Candy and Agatha. Her eyes said no. I was glad.

Like I said, this day was more of yesterday until sometime after midnight. Bob and I were packing things when someone knocked on our door. It was a strange knock, like whoever was doing it was about to die. I opened the door. It was one of the kids. He was about to die. He was shaking and his teeth were chattering.

"Can I talk to you?" he asked. I said sure and waved him in.

"Not here," he said, "outside." I looked at him again and said sure.

I followed him down the stairs. Something had scared him and scared him bad. We walked up to the little corner of grass and sat down. He rocked in agony.

"We had to talk to someone and we decided to talk to you." I got out a cigarette that I had trouble lighting. I nodded at him.

"One of the kids has been taking drugs — pills. I don't know where they came from, but we think someone in another group. Anyhow, she's passed out in her bed. What are we going to do?"

I asked who it was and he told me. I nodded again. We talked about it some more and I said we'd have to talk to Bob. This was out of my depth. He agreed. He guessed so. We walked back into the hotel. On the first landing five kids sat there with worried expressions on their faces. They talked in whispers. What's going to happen they wanted to know. I said I didn't know. On the next floor another group of kids were talking in hushed voices to Bob. All the kids knew already. Everybody always knew everything in this group.

"We're going to have to tell the T-C's, Bob," I said. He shook his head.

"Let's have a group session with the kids and talk it out." I looked at the idea and didn't like it. I could see his stance and I admired his humanity. But it was rotten politics. I kicked myself thinking that

but kept on thinking it.

"We're going to have to tell Odin. The kids downstairs think she should be sent home."

"I want to talk it out with the kids first."

"Bob, they're going to find out about this. How long do you think it'll take. Someone is probably telling one of them now. The kids are scared. Hell, I'm scared."

"We don't have to tell the T-C's. Let them find out. So what? The kids came to us. Let's deal with it."

"Bob, if nothing else hung on this, I'd say terrific. Something hangs on this. The Project. My project. Our project. If we cut out the T-C's and Odin on this, they'll find out. Then where will we be? Okay, so I'm inhuman. I didn't come on this tour to do anything but complete this project. I'm not selling it down the river for this."

"We don't have to tell the T-C's, Denis."

"They'll find out—"

"They already know," a voice said from the stairs above us. We looked up and saw Miss Bloch in a red bathrobe. She looked like Fate personified. She looked like a block of granite. She came down the stairs like the British Empire.

She looked at Bob. "Keep it from the T-C's?" Her scorn was immense. Bob switched gears and kept right on going. He used her first name. It was Germaine this, Germaine that. She listened. I guess she realized that Bob had reasons, good, sound reasons. It was hard to believe. We discussed the whole thing. How was she? Bob had checked. She was just sleeping now. We agreed on one thing. Odin had to be told and the final decision, whatever it was, would be his. There was comfort in this, but it was cold comfort. It was dirty comfort, like cheating on a friend to get ahead on a job.

Bob and I walked slowly to Odin's hotel. I had my room key in my hand and twirled it nervously. My mind twirled with it. We were crossing Marktgraben on Maria Theresien when Bob looked at me and said:

"They all take drugs you know."

My stomach suddenly hurt very badly. "How do you know?" I asked.

"I don't know," he said, "but I can tell. I'm sure so-and-so's do. Things they let slip. You can tell."

"I don't believe it!" I stated flatly. He shrugged knowingly.

"Don't," he said. And then I did. I threw the room key on the sidewalk. For some stupid reason I felt betrayed. For some stupid reason I had felt that in return for my liking them all, that they had owed me something. That understanding hurt. The realization of my arrogance hurt more than anything, of my unconscious dealing with them, trading my smiles for their lives, as though my smiles carried with them the righteous force of my own peculiar morality. I picked the key up off the ground and we turned into Odin's hotel.

"Good evening Rhoberrrt, Daynise," said Odin. He was standing in the hallway. We conducted our business there and in less than ten minutes were on the way back to our hotel. Odin had said that we weren't out to punish people, but to help them. She would stay with the tour, but he would talk to her and extract a promise to behave. It sounded slightly flimsy but that was his problem. I suppose he'd had sufficient experience. I didn't know. I didn't know anything. I was naive, a little arrogant and very stupid.

I felt about as useful as yesterday's want ads. I tried to visualize the kids in my mind. I went over them one by one. How about so-and-so, I'd ask Bob. He'd say doubtful or certain or he couldn't tell. Sometimes he'd say absolutely positive and I'd groan. I looked into the faces of these kids and I saw strangely distorted masks. They were leering at me, derisive, degenerate, leprous faces. The kids I liked best grinned at me the most maliciously. I thought I knew them. Now I knew I didn't. I was a sham, a fraud, a pretense. All my groupings and charts and thoughts didn't add up to a hill of beans if I missed this. We reached the bridge and I hung out over the water and felt its coolness on my face. I saw the kids down there drowning, gurgling, and liking it.

Then I saw the green water.

It was real. I could touch it if my arms were long enough. I felt the spray of it on my face and heard rushing and swirling and shook my head. My head cleared. Deep inside me a wonderful warm feeling began. As it grew in me I started laughing. It was a wonderful laugh, a healthy laugh, the sanest sound I'd ever heard. I saw the lights on the river banks and the trees moving in the breeze and all around me I felt

the hugeness of the mountains and the enormity of the sky. I threw back my head and laughed with the stars.

Who had I been kidding? The kids didn't change because of this fact. I had lived with these kids for two weeks. I knew them. They were human beings, mostly nice and some sad. So they popped some pills and smoked a little grass. That said more about the inefficacy of drugs than it said about the degeneracy of the kids. I had been laboring under a specter sold to me by magazines and TV. I saw the punctured arms and the fetid rooms and listened to all the talk about the new generation. I had actually believed that drugs made a difference, that drug users were somehow inherently different from others. What I saw were the kids, Group L. I saw their loneliness and their fear and their happiness and pleasure. I saw Desmond Jencks sitting next to Lana Monroe. I heard him telling me about his ulcers. I knew that story. I listened to Janine telling me about the water fight. I knew that story. I thought of Watson and his wig. That was familiar. I heard Candy Fisher wailing and the strident voice of Agatha Jones. I saw Porter Portman calling Watson and Desmond dingbats. I watched David Abrams packing to leave London and Marina Giocanda at the airport and Taylor Nash's head cocked hearing the church bells and Laura Johnson driving off in her cab. They were all old stories. Rhoda and Susan were telling us about getting lost in London and Leslie Casyk was puzzled by the Tower of London, and Nybia Pagan was asking directions to the Post Office Tower and Therese Montaigne was eating ice cream in a small town in Germany. I'd been there. In front of me Vittoria Palazzo 's eyes flashed and Jane smiled like a cow and William threw spitballs on the bus and Tracy Cummings looked coy and Karl Prinz took a drag on a Marlboro and Phyl Gordon asked about the ruined castles and Bobbi Seward stood around silently and I had been to those places as well. I saw Sven Heller at the Changing of the Guard and Erica Cruz leaning over her map of London and Ann Hendricks pushing peas around on her plate and Vanessa leaning on the bar in Avon and Claire and Betty sitting together on the bus talking quietly and Wanda helping Candy back into the hotel.

They were just people like I had always known. That they took drugs — some of them — made it more complicated, but it didn't change them. It didn't turn them into animals, into degenerates, into lepers. Maybe it was just their way of coming to terms with growing up. That didn't mean I had to like it, but it did mean that somehow I could begin to understand it. In their own worlds, who knew what they lived through? I'd grown up. It hadn't been a bed of roses for me either.

I lifted my face from the river and turned to the hotel. Bob was just standing there waiting, watching me, saying nothing. We crossed the bridge and looked at the hotel. Twenty kids were hanging out of the

windows, their faces taut with tension. They were so serious I started laughing all over again. Nothing was that serious.

We walked into a crowd on the landing. I left Bob to tell them the news and walked to one of the kids' rooms and knocked. They said come in. There were five of them in the room, ranging in age from 15 to almost 18. I looked at them. I knew them. I said:

"How many of you take drugs?" I had to know, that was all.

"What do you mean?" I repeated my question. One of them said he didn't. Another said they made him sick so he stopped. Two said they'd tried them. One said he used them all the time, but never on the trip. I looked at him. Of all the kids on the tour I liked him best of all. I searched his face for the signs of ravaged degeneracy. All I saw was a face. Worse than that. All I saw was a nice face. I learned later that he'd lied to me that night, that he had taken stuff on the trip. You could have fooled me. I threw my hands in the air and went up to tell Miss Bloch the news. We all got to sleep late that night. Bob and the kids searched the girl's room. They pulled her bags out and searched them. They were all a bunch of pros. Maybe it was too many cops-and-robbers movies. They sifted through face powder and squeezed tubes and checked the window sills inside and out and felt the seams of her clothes. I looked at her. She was sleeping deeply. Every now and then she'd move in her sleep.

I had to get up at 5:30 the next morning and do the checkout. I went to bed. I also went to sleep.

* * *

After Innsbruck we spent two nights in Venice. After that we spent two nights in Florence. It was more of the same. After that we were on the road to Rome. It seemed we'd been a year in Innsbruck, two in Venice, and ten in Florence. The trip to Rome was forever.