

THE TRAIN RIDE

Some years ago, during the communist occupation of central Europe, on a trip from Munich to Budapest to visit relatives, we had unknowingly booked reservations on a train with cars from the famous Orient Express. The original Orient Express was dismantled throughout the course of the occupation and the more elegant cars were put into storage. Our compartment car had undeniably been stripped down, however, one couldn't help but notice the marked difference from the ordinary cars in use around this part of the country. The Orient Express cars STILL sparked some of their former grace and elegance !

I had my husband take a picture of me standing along side the car where the printing stood out...ORIENT EXPRESS... and wondered about all the mystery and conspiracy plots that had been woven around this legendary train, maybe we would have an exciting adventure on this train ride too...

(LITTLE DID I KNOW !)

With these thoughts whirling through my head, I was sitting in our compartment half trying to concentrate on a book I was reading but being distracted by the clacking of the trains wheels, the scenery .. the excitement of sitting in an ORIENT EXPRESS train car and wondering WHO had ridden in this compartment in the past.

Only the VERY WEALTHY AND CELEBRATED...and now... ME !

My husband was snoozing ... I was restless so I decided to go out into the corridor for a stretch. Immediately, the smell of smoke stung my nostrils. I looked to my right to see a man leaning against the wall with his arms folded across his chest, smoking a cigarette. He looked EXACTLY like the actor Sidney Greenstreet...straight out of CASABLANCA...Sinister..Ominous..Menacing ! Through his slightly squinty eyes, I saw he was looking at me too. He didn't offer any type of greeting like most European men do, so with an air of *savoir faire*....I gazed out the window..pretending to take in the scenery as I nibbled a chocolate.

Wow, I thought, what a scenario for a mystery plot.. he probably has some spy prisoner in that compartment OR he's KGB... tracking someone on the train. Could be a double agent maybe, meeting with M16 in Vienna for a money drop. OR...a Russian defector !! Whatever he was up to..it was DEFINITELY something devious! THAT was pretty obvious !!

I was caught up in the intrigue of it all. Feeling a bit apprehensive but acting VERY nonchalant, (Bergman style) I returned to my compartment. I shook my husband awake to tell him about the MYSTERY MAN .. his response was a big yawn with the suggestion I STAY in the compartment for the rest of the trip and finish my book ! (I DID peek out once... to an empty corridor !)

Upon arrival in Budapest, my husband was waiting outside our compartment for the porter when he called to me to come out. He said to look down the corridor.....

GOOD GRIEF ...THERE HE WAS ...THE MYSTERY MAN ...

AND

behind him, HIS WIFE.. giving orders: " Jozef, you take little Stefan and Doris, I'll take the baby... take this bag.. the umbrella too... Stefan, take Muffy's leash" ...etc etc..

My husband looked at me and said .. in a corny German accent..
"Ja..Frau Margo, dat Herr ist indeed a SHADY looking character" !

BIG COMEDIAN !

HIS imagination could use some work..

(that accent too)

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