

A Night In Frankfurt
Fear Comes With the Night
Saturday Night, September 26, 1953
By J. W. Henson

THE train slowly pulled into the station at Frankfurt, Germany from Heidelberg to the south. I was in post-war Germany as a student. The Country did not resemble the beautiful Germany of today for the War had only been over for eight years. Scrambling from the train I began to look for a hotel in which to spend the night. I went from Inn to Hotel only to be told that a Book Publisher's Convention was in town and there were no rooms to be had. At last I discovered a 'Zimmernachweis' (Room Information Agency) and went inside to see if they could help.

Yes! they told me. You are in luck. We have a room in a small hotel over in the center of town. I got instructions how to find the place, and took a streetcar going in that direction. After several transfers I arrived at the designated street. It had gotten dark by this time. I stepped off the streetcar, and stood under a small incandescent light on the corner of the street studying the directions. All else was dark save for soft light coming from apartments lining the street. This did not look like a commercial area for all of the buildings were just a couple of stories tall. When I arrived at the designated street number, I stopped a passer by and asked for the hotel by name. Just then a window went up and a woman said in Low German, "Quiet! We don't want people to know that we keep roomers."

As the front door was opened I found myself in a long hall with doors opening off each side of a professional looking structure. All was dark. I was escorted into a small-furnished apartment, and sat talking with the ladies. The house was disheveled, and the conversation uneasy. Being very tired I asked for a glass of water, and to be shown to my bed. One of the two middle aged women got up and went down the hall to the kitchen for the water. All of a sudden from down in the kitchen came the most blood-curdling chant I had ever heard. Thinking the woman to be in distress I hastened to the Kitchen to see if I could be of assistance.

As I entered the kitchen I was confronted with two stacks of suitcases each stack six feet high against the left hand wall. The woman had stopped the weird chant, and began a pleasant conversation. Then back in the living room the other woman took up the chant. Wondering if my suitcases would be added to the pile in the kitchen before morning, I entered my bedroom and locked the door. Sitting there on the side of the bed I wrote a letter home, and prepared for the night. Before going to bed I surveyed the inside of the entire room for trap doors or ways of entry from the outside. Being satisfied that all was secure I went to bed. I lay there in the darkness thinking of all the occurrences of the previous few minutes, and came to a firm resolution that 'I was not spending the night in that place'.

Dressing again, I picked up my freshly written letter and opened my door into the apartment's hallway. All was dark except for a thin shaft of light coming from under the living room door. The door was opened at my light rap, and one of the women stepped out into the hall, put her hand on my chest and gently pushed me back down the way saying, "She is talking on the telephone and you must not hear". I told the lady that I was going back up town to mail a letter, and much against her protestations had her unlock the door and let me out, leaving my luggage behind.

I stood on the street corner waiting for the streetcar back up town. My suitcases were still in that house, but the bracing freshness of the night air made that seem a small problem. At the train station up town I bargained with a very old cab driver to take me back to that house of death to retrieve my cases. He had a heart condition and could not carry the cases, but that did not matter for help was on the scene. While I paid for the night's lodging and the unexpected trouble I had caused, and recovered my suitcases, I could hear him interrogating the couple. "Where do you advertise?" he asked of the women. I could hear them telling him that they did not keep roomers, but was doing this as a convenience for the nice young gentleman.

I was never to know what was going on there that dark night in Frankfurt, Germany, but as I sat the night away in the train station, I often thanked the Lord for my delivery from some unknown horror.