

Europe, 1960

by Jack Swenson

On the way over, on the ship, I met a girl from Cleveland. She got very huffy about the city where she lived. Cleveland was a nice place, she said. She glared at me, daring me to say otherwise. In London I followed a pretty girl around an outdoor market snapping pictures. She tracked me down and planted herself in front of me, hands on hips. She scowled and wagged her finger. No photographs, she said. I stood by the tube entrance and read the notes posted by the girls on a bulletin board. Oh, my! My mind worked overtime. Eeny meeny miney.... I couldn't decide. In the Louvre I met a girl from Las Vegas. She was in a room all by herself peering at a huge painting by Seurat. The painting was on loan from a gallery in Chicago. We stood there connecting the dots.

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I expected German girls to be fat. They were not. Blonde hair in bobs and braids. What happened to the hausfraus? Gone. Gone with the wind. The American girl and I sat at a picnic table outside the walls of the old city listening to a band play German marching songs. A trio of young sailors at a nearby table sang along. Old folks with sour faces sat at other tables looking at things we couldn't see. Everybody spoke English in Copenhagen. Everybody spoke English in Amsterdam, too, but nobody admitted it. One of our Dutch friends was telling a story. A girl with hairy legs glared at me. She didn't like me; I don't know why. I stood by the fire, took a book off the mantel, opened it, and something fell out. I picked it up. It was a fabric badge of some kind. I turned it over; it was a six-pointed star.

