

Still Life

by Jack Swenson

In Paris I walked. In Munich I walked. Anywhere I stayed for more than a night I explored on foot. It is a good way to see things, to mingle with the hoi polloi. I had breakfast and dinner in cafes. I ate my lunch at kabob stands.

In Munich I had a week to kill. (I was meeting a lady friend in Zurich on a prearranged day.) I wandered the city. I saw every museum there was to see. I found the Hofbräuhaus, but I didn't go in.

One rainy day I walked to an out-of-the-way section of town where the buildings were old, and the streets were cobblestone. It began to rain, and I took refuge in a doorway across the street from an old building with windows looking out upon a cross street of shops. A window on the second floor was open, and in the window's frame were three children, two boys and a girl. The boys were pointing into the street and laughing. Clearly their boisterousness was meant to impress the girl. One of boys was wearing a red sweater. He had lank blond hair and pink cheeks.

The quiet on the street was eerie. The children began to chatter. The only bright color to be seen was the boy's sweater. I stood gawking before the scene like a tourist in an art gallery or museum.

Then: bang! A clap of thunder. The rain stopped. Women popped out of doorways. A taxicab passed. The children, abashed, stood silently in their balcony window. I continued my walk.

