There are some things so childish that I am embarrassed to write them down. If I did not have the distinct sense that other adults, for all their staid behavior, are precisely as childish as I am, I would not do it. But I now intend to expose all of us. Perhaps one could explain why we have such childish sensations and notions when traveling by means of Freudian theory.

Our earliest experiences are the ones that are most deeply imbedded and stay with us longest. And childhood travels are surely some of the greatest, most important experiences a person can have in his whole life. Our subconscious child resurfaces whenever, on the train at night, we suddenly wake and see strangers sleeping beside us in the swaying twilight.

That is where the odd feeling begins. For where else do you see strangers sleeping? It makes for unusual intimacy. After brief consideration, the woman across from you slips off her shoes, then lays her head on her husband’s shoulder with that sweet, drowsy tenderness that one otherwise never gets to see in strangers. “Good night,” she murmurs, as if she might even be including you. And now you are more than mere traveling companions. We are like emigrants who carry something of the atmosphere of home and family with them on their journey. A melancholy sense of solidarity takes hold, as it always does among people sharing a similar fate. If we had managed to swim to an island after a shipwreck, who would be embarrassed? We lie down to sleep together in drowsy confidence, and the gloom of a common destiny blankets us weary children.

Yes, this confidence. It is perhaps the most profound, most delightful sensation in the whole experience. When you travel by day, you keep track of what is happening to you, where you are being taken. But when you fall asleep on the train at night, no matter how hard and uncomfortable your bed, you have for a moment the marvelous, blissful feeling of completely surrendering yourself to some caring, benevolent power that is watching over you. Yes, the feeling you had falling asleep in your mother’s lap. And then, when you wake in the middle of the night, everything in the

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car is so still, the sleepers lie exposed, defenseless on their beds. But far ahead you hear the thrust of the engine. Yes, it is doing its job, it is awake even though you sleep. There is nothing to worry about. And you close your eyes again with a smile.

Whenever the conductor comes with his lantern it recalls a memory. As a child I once woke up in the middle of the night to find a strange man standing in my room. They had summoned the doctor to look in on my father. He was a good man, and he had come to help.

And now and again light falls into the car. In a strange kind of singsong the conductor calls out the name of a town. But no one stirs. Sleepers roll by other sleepers. Who is there to notice?

And suddenly far in front of us the train whistles. A whistle like a long, white, undulating streak. Why is it whistling? Is it sensing danger? Something is happening somewhere in the night. But nothing can happen to us.

And perhaps it is raining outside. You can’t see it. Dozing, I have the comfortable feeling of being safe, and only later do I hear the rain beating against the black windows. And when morning comes you see wet, misty fields, and you are someplace else. You haven’t traveled. You have simply gone to sleep and awakened someplace else. Just as in a fairy tale.