

## CHAPTER 10

She took hold of my sleeve. "There is just one thing, Walter. I don't mind a little fighting because it is manly. But you mustn't cause a disturbance that would bring the police in, you know. And although you are very big and strong and played right tackle at college, you are a little weak about one thing. Will you promise me not to drink any whiskey?"

"This Eichelberger," I said, "is all the drink I want."

. . .RAYMOND CHANDLER  
Pearls Are a Nuisance

One of the things that made the trip to Rome seem forever was the way it started. Peter had pulled the bus around to the side of the hotel. The bell hops had brought down the luggage and I'd counted it and checked labels and Peter had stowed it under the belly of the bus. And then I'd checked my lists again and I was missing a piece. Only one thought scared me more than having Peter unload the luggage: arriving in Rome without Bobbi Seward's bag. I looked at Peter. I looked at the hops. It was only 8:00 in the morning. I'd had three hours of sleep, was full of no coffee and already my collar was fastened to my neck by rivets of sweat.

"Unload it."

Peter got his key out and opened the doors. The hops came up to help him. As the bags hit the ground I pulled out a fresh list. The luggage sparkled in the sun. I hated it. Bobbi Seward's bag was still missing. I gave the room number to one of the hops and he went upstairs to check out her room. We pulled out cigarettes and pulled the acrid smoke into our lungs. It made nothing any cooler. The hop reappeared. No bag. He shrugged his narrow shoulders expressively.

I walked among the bags spread out on the ground. There were over a hundred pieces: floral patterned, leather, plastic, matched pairs with gilt clasps, several boxes. I racked my brains, but there wasn't much left to rack. What did Bobbi's bag look like? Then I saw it. It was right there in front of me shining out like a cafeteria sign. I marked her name off on my list and threw my pen into the air. I never knew where it landed. I could have cared less.

"Load it up," I told Peter. His face was expressionless, but there was tension in the air. I tipped the hops more than I should have and walked around to the front of the hotel to make sure that we were all ready to go. Everyone had been ready for half an hour.

"When are we going, Mr. Wood?" Leslie Casyk croaked.  
"All the other buses have left already."

"Right away, Leslie," I said. The bus pulled around the corner. Peter got off the bus and stood at the door. No matter what else, he was always polite. He helped the girls up onto the bus and said hello to the boys. I made a final count to make sure we were all aboard and settled into the hottest seat on the bus. The door closed and Peter pulled out into the traffic.

I read the courier manual one last time. I had about three minutes before we made a turn from the road we were on. I dug my crumpled pack of cigarettes out of a pocket and put them on the ledge in

front of me. I folded the map of Italy to the part of the country we were in and raised my head to watch the road. The road widened from two lanes to four. In front of us was a truck. Peter pulled into the left lane to pass it. As he accelerated I saw our turn to the right of the truck. I groaned audibly and gestured to Peter.

"That was our turn," I said.

He continued driving straight ahead. He didn't even look at me. I kept my eyes peeled for a place to turn. We passed a couple. Sweat broke out along my arms. Under my jacket the shirt clung to me like a dying dog. The road T-ed in front of us forming two narrow lanes.

"Peter! Can you turn here?" He threw the bus into a turn. It was tight. He worked the wheel over. The muscles in his arms bulged beneath his rolled-up sleeves. He grunted. The bus seemed longer than ever. It seemed enormous. Turning it took forever. Oblivious chatter welled up from the kids. Peter made the turn and looked in my direction.

"I can turn! I can go back to Florence too!" He spit the words at me. That was all I needed. To lose my driver. I made a feeble joke. As he made the turn onto the Autostrada del Sole he made a great show of asking me if this was the right turn. His sarcasm was as wide as his shoulders. They were as wide as a beer truck. He might as well have asked;

"You're a courier?" I was asking myself the same question.

Nobody answered.

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That evening we would arrive for our week in Rome. That meant the regular mapping sessions would start all over again. As we left Venice we had collected a map, but in the last ten days that had been the only mapping the kids had done. We figured that it would be a good idea to go over the kids' London maps on this trip, to get them up for the Rome maps. In Florence Bob and I had sorted all the London maps into individual folders. Sometime during this day I was going to sit with each kid and talk over his maps with him. But not yet. I watched the road.

The bus ate up the miles. Smoothly and easily we crept up on and passed everything else that was moving. Peter relaxed. He dug out a cigarette. I lit it for him. Things were back to normal. We were usually on good terms. It was only when I was stupid that I lost him.

I lost him seldom.

A slight breeze stirred through the bus. I got up in the aisle and took off my jacket. I looked back at the bus. There was a lot of sleeping going on. Had Odin still been with us, he would have waked them up. They might miss the scrubby vineyards passing the windows. Then what could they tell their folks next time they opened a bottle of Chianti? What could they tell them if they'd been awake? That they'd seen some scrubby vineyards? I passed over the temptation to wake them up. You'll never know how easy it was. I scanned the bus for boy-girl pairs.

On the gondola ride in Venice all the boys had been paired with girls. On the bus trip from there to our hotel the pairing had stuck. Most of them had stuck the next day and the next. Even Portman had had a mate—Nybia Pagan. Mate may be the wrong word, but you get my point. Now only two of the pairings were left. Taylor Nash still held Joy Gray's hand and Karl Prinz still sat with Erica Cruz. The four of them were sound asleep. David Abrams was sitting with Nybia now. I didn't think it meant a thing. David sat with everyone. The back of the bus was still the back of the bus. Casyk, Johnson and Cummings still made a mess of things, but they had new friends: Fisher and Pierce had joined them. So had Jane Brown and Bobbi Seward. Sven Heller was back there too. They were having a gay old time. Casyk was teasing her hair and Johnson was smoking up a storm. They sang sporadically the Group L song. It was something they'd come up with and something only they would sing. It was corny, but it was theirs. The only thing out of the ordinary about the bus was where Jencks and Watson were sitting. They were sitting in the front of the bus, right behind me. They were sitting there to keep me company. I liked that. It was a nice gesture.

Otherwise it was the same old bus, front, middle and back. Bob and I couldn't get over the cultures that developed in our midst. Neither could the kids. They loved every scientific minute of it. We chatted up the bus cultures with the kids. It didn't make them change their seats but it opened their mouths. They knew what they were up to. David Abrams pointed out that the kids in the back of the bus were the furthest from the guide. He should know. He sat there often enough. Talking it over with the kids brought five bus regions to sight. There was the front and the back. We all agreed on that. But there was also the front-middle, the middle-middle and the rear-middle. To get five regions out of forty-five seats is going some. I went along with them. As they saw it, it was much more than a social function. It had to do with the relation of seats to windows, seats to PA speakers, seats to drafts from holes in the roof. It had to do with passivity and visibility. All concerned agreed that it was a less passive experience to sit in the front. In the back it was like being the tail that the dog wags. The middle of the bus was some sort of pivotal position. Everyone also agreed that you could


			
P E T E R		W O O D	
	PORTMAN	JENCKS	WATSON
LENZ	JONES		BLOCH
NOYES	LINCOLN	BECK	GORDON
BILL BROWN		Mr. AIKEN	Miss AIKEN
MAYO	BAKER		JAECKEL
NEEDHAM			HENDRICKS
GARRISON	EBER	MONTAIGNE	PALAZZO
PAGAN	ABRAMS	GIACONDA	MONROE
NASH	GRAY	PRINZ	CRUZ
HELLER		FISHER	PIERCE
Jane BROWN	CASYK	SEWARD	CUMMINGS
			JOHNSON

Figure 10.0. Bus seating chart, 9:30 a.m., 17 July, on the way from Florence to Assisi.

see more up front—and hear better if anything worth while was being said. The back and back-middle noted that they had more leg room, for comfort—and for stretching out for a summer tour snooze.

How did all this relate to the maps? How did it relate to their being mixers or rangers or fixers? Maybe I could start finding out. I sat down in my seat and reached under it for my sisal fiber book bag. I pulled out a handful of folders and considered what I was going to do. Peter leaned on his horn as we passed another bus. I figured that I had at least three sets of maps I wanted to show each kid. There were the maps I'd drawn of London, the maps Group K had drawn of London, and the maps the kid had drawn of London. Bob and I had decided that it wouldn't do to show kids maps drawn by other kids in Group L, though we really weren't sure why we decided that. Scientific orthodoxy clung to us like wisps of stray fog. I didn't think the sun of Italy would be good for these remnants. That made me happy.

I put the folders under my arm and stood up. I walked back to where Bob was sitting:

"Okay, courier, it's your bus," I said. Bob got up from his seat next to Phyllis Gordon. I put my folders on his seat and went up front with Bob to show him the various manuals and maps. He sat down in the courier's seat as though he'd never sat in any other. We went over the route briefly. It wasn't the simplest route in the world because we weren't going straight to Rome. We were going via Assisi. To see some more churches. We hadn't seen enough churches so far on this trip. We needed to see six or seven thousand more.

Besides that, we couldn't arrive in Rome too early. Had to give them time to make up the beds that the wave in front of us had left this morning. Two hundred and fifty kids in, two hundred and fifty kids out. One thousand dollars, please. This church, that church. Two hundred and fifty kids in, two hundred and fifty kids out. Thank you very much, come again next summer. I went back and sat down next to Phyllis Gordon.

"How are you this morning, Phyllis? Enjoying the trip?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Wood. Bob makes everything come alive. I'm so glad you're both with us."

"That was a nice discussion of how you'd paint the landscape you gave us a couple of days ago. I meant to talk to you about that." Instead of boring the kids with the history of Medieval Bologna on the way to Florence, we'd broken the cardinal courier rule and turned the bus

mike over to the kids. We had started out by having them simply describe everything they could see outside the window. As usual, the first volunteer had been David. He'd managed to talk for fifteen minutes. Several other kids had followed. Omar Lenz had told us about life as a parable of the sun and tunnels on the road. Erica Cruz had seen the hills as an ice cream sundae. Robert Watson and Phyllis Gordon had told us how they would have painted the landscape. Phyllis sounded like a conventional, but talented, Sunday painter. It was on the order of a revelation.

We chatted for a few minutes about painting and then I set the maps she'd drawn in front of her.

"How do you think you did with London?" I asked. She'd only drawn us two maps in London. She looked at her maps with all the distaste of a cook for a fallen cake.

"I didn't do too well."

"What do you mean by that?" I asked. "I mean, 'well' is a big word. Where do you think you fell down?"

"I didn't include many things on my maps."

"That's one thing..."

"And I don't think that things are in the right places..."

"That's another thing..."

"But at least I put in question marks where I thought I was wrong."

There was a longish pause. I broke the silence with a question: "What about the differences between your first try and your second?"

Phyllis thought about that. "I think my second try is better. There are more things on it. There are less question marks. I knew more...Didn't everybody do better on their second map?"

"Most people did. I want you to look at my maps for a second." I spread them out on her lap. She caught her breath and made a quick gesture with her right hand, as if to catch a map that was falling. None was.

"Those are great maps," she said.

I was proud of them too. I didn't deny what she'd said. "Yeah, but don't forget. I'm a geographer. I'm supposed to be able to do this. And besides, they're not that good. Look, the Thames is all off here, and I haven't included two of the streets on your first map, and I got the Tower way out of line." She looked up at me to see if I was kidding.

"No, I'm not kidding. They are the best maps anybody drew of London, but they're far from perfect. But I want to show you something else. I've got the maps Group K drew for Bob that day. Take a look at them. Here, take a whole bunch. What do you think?" There were over forty maps in the folder. She took her time going through them, like a little child going through an illustrated encyclopedia. She put several aside.

"Well," she said, "most of the maps aren't any better than mine, but these are even better than your's...sort of."

I looked over the maps she had selected. They were gorgeous highly pictorial detailed maps—of the dorms. If I had a ploy, she'd fallen for it.

"Yep," I said, "these are terrific maps, Phyllis. Only I don't think so. Can you figure out why I think your maps are better than these?" She peered at the maps intently. I prodded:

"Bob asked them to do the same thing you were doing: to draw a map of the city. That help?" She looked from me to the maps.

"The only difference I can see is that they mapped only close to the dorm. I tried to do all of London. Is that it?"

"Sure." I shrugged dismissing the K maps. "They mapped the dorm area, maybe even Cartwright Gardens. Their whole map is usually something you show with a dot. You tried to do something harder. Take a look at the few K maps of more than the dorm area." I rustled through the folder and pulled them out. "Look at these. They're terrible. They've got the Thames running North-South. Nobody in our group did anything that stupid. And look at Piccadilly, north of Oxford Street. See what I mean? Whenever they try the whole city, they fall apart. You tried the whole city and did fairly well. And remember what a mess London was anyhow. I'll tell you, Phyllis, I think you did a good job."

"But I can do better," she laughed. She reached down under



her seat and came up with half a Cadbury Bar—Swiss Chocolate with Almonds. We split the half and munched and chatted.

I excused myself and went to the back of the bus. There was an empty seat next to Sven Heller. I looked at my watch. Half an hour. I could never do thirty-one kids at that rate. It was cooler back here and less bright. I decided to keep the set of maps Phyllis had picked out of the K folder with the addition of the failed whole-city attempts. I ditched the rest of the K maps. I turned to Sven:

"How are you this morning, Sven? Enjoying the trip?" Talk about patter. I had my approach down cold with one try. Sven went like Phyllis. Marina went like Sven. Lana went like Marina. Hi. Excuse me. I want to talk about your maps. Do you think you could move to an empty seat for fifteen minutes? Hi. I'm an insurance salesman. Let's go over your portfolio. I felt like I was selling something. Most of the kids I hit before Assisi were interested. Maybe all of them were interested. I couldn't tell with Jane Brown. It was still like talking to a cow. I'd talk, she'd moo. Maybe she heard me. Maybe she wasn't in my universe that day. Agatha Jones didn't want to talk about them at all—bud did. It was uphill work. Somehow I even got a promise from her to draw us a map in Rome. God must have been my co-investigator. Bill Brown thought it was all a joke. He'd suddenly stare off into space and I'd try to see what he was seeing. Then he'd laugh. Mr. Aiken would laugh too. They were a barrel of laughs. Bill got me to look five times. The sixth time I didn't look and just managed to catch a glimpse of the weirdest looking animal outside of a zoo. After that he caught me twice more. Ha. Ha. On the other hand he knew what I wanted and promised to deliver. Claire Mayo and Betty Baker wanted to know how Miss Bloch had done. I showed them. They snickered. They were good girls, but they always tried to sit behind Miss Bloch.

By the time we reached Assisi I'd said "Hi. How are you this morning? Enjoying the trip?" fourteen times. Fourteen times I'd spread out their maps and my maps and the K maps. Fourteen times through the same spiel. I was beginning to think I was a tour leader. I was beginning to think we were in London. I was beginning to think I needed a break.

Assisi grew, first outside the left windows, then directly in front of us. Out of the smooth grey-green plain rose a russet cone etched with narrow streets and crowned by the largest building I'd ever seen. Maybe it just looked large on that hill. As we got closer I saw that it wasn't a single building, but a complex of buildings built helter-skelter on top of each other. Buttresses, arches, arcades flung themselves in an ethereal reaching to the sky. The sky hung piercingly bright behind the hill.

The bus climbed a wide street to a knee of the hill and stopped in a large parking lot. Just above us was our restaurant. We had lots of time. I announced the dinner hour and we got off the bus. Bob and I wandered up to the church through narrow cobbled streets. It was warm and brown and old in Assissi—and very lazy. The interior of the church was cool. We looked at the Giotto frescoes. Once they had been worth seeing, but now they were faded and peeling, a shadow of some earlier time. We climbed a back stair and found ourselves in a high inner courtyard where sun and shade gave substance to the building. We stayed there a long time doing nothing. We left by an inner stair and found ourselves in a still more interior courtyard. We weren't supposed to be here so we walked to the far door and popped out in front of the church where we'd started. It was a pleasant surprise. We'd gone up and up and down and around and come home, but I couldn't have told you how it happened. We walked up above the churches and lay in the sun on a wide wall overlooking the valley. A slight haze lay over the land. Other small hills poked their heads through it in the distance. I wasn't looking at anything real. The whole scene was an apparition made for us by a friendly but powerful magician. The sun seeped into my limbs and warmed me. Life stirred in my blood. Three hours of sleep! I was about to get some more.

"Wake up, Denis," Bob said. "Let's go get a cup of coffee."

I had four cups of strong black espresso in a row on the terrace of one of those restaurants that is always popping up in foreign films, the ones with beautiful people lingering over a half-eaten meal talking about nothing while the camera prowls the background. I was poor, tired and very much alone, but that terrace made me feel like a million dollars. We went down the hill to lunch.

I got the rest of the group seated and looked around for an empty seat. There was none. The head waiter saw me looking and asked if I wasn't the leader of the group. I said I was. He led me to a private room dappled with light and with so many windows that I was more outdoors than in. My place was set. There were flowers on the table and flowers in the windows and the air was sweet and fresh with their perfume. Couriers always get treated like this. For one, if they're not, they might not bring the group back next summer, or next month. For another, couriers are supposed to be sick of their groups after five hours of contact. They want to be alone. I didn't. It made me mad but I was too tired to care. I had soup and pasta and meat and vegetables and desert and cheese and fruit in a little wicker basket with a bow. It could have been great but the food fooled you. The soup was water, the pasta was iron, the vegetables were mush and the meat was stringy. The pastry was soggy, the cheese rancid and the fruit bruised nearly past recognition.

But the basket was cute and the ribbon was fresh. I guess they figured the new ribbon would take your mind off the old fruit. Anyhow, what did tourists know?

The whole affair reminded me of an American pop music radio station: lots of decoration, lots of payola, lots of come-on and hype and inside: lots of no guts. I paid for thirty-nine meals with a voucher and we went back to the bus. Omar Lenz was running around delirious. He'd shot four rolls of film in Assisi and wanted to take the train to Rome and catch up with us later so he could shoot four more. Mrs. Needham wanted to go home and be with her family. I knew what she meant. Assisi was magical. Whatever you had felt on arriving you felt more strongly with each passing minute. If you were tired, Assisi was lazy. If you were lonely, Assisi made you homesick. If you were happy, Assisi made you delirious. Since we all wanted to stay in Assisi for days, we boarded the bus and headed for Rome.

A summer tour is like that.

That afternoon I tried to do the rest of the kids. I varied my patter a little. Now I said, "How are you this afternoon? Did you enjoy Assisi?" Otherwise it was more of the same. But from each kid I learned something new. I uncovered the mystery of certain line symbols not in our booklet. I listened to kids explain the strategies they'd used in mapping. I found out why some of the kids had only drawn two maps. I learned how they'd felt while drawing them. I learned how they felt about us, the trip, the project, about Europe and the other kids in the group. When that afternoon had drawn to a close I'd done my dance for fourteen more kids. That left three. They were all bright. They were all drawing good maps. I put my folders under the seat and dozed. Rome, a room and a shower were only minutes away.

I knew the approach to Rome by heart. It was supposed to be tricky. At the courier meetings in Innsbruck, Venice and Florence we'd gone over this route forever. They probably had gone over it in London too. I went up to the front of the bus and squatted beside Bob. He was enjoying himself up there. We got off the Autostrada okay, right onto the Raccordo Annulare. From there we followed the Via Salaria and the Via Olimpica. The huge dome of St. Peter's floated in the afternoon haze off to our left. You would know it anywhere. Off to our right we saw one of our tour buses listing at the curb. We stopped. One of the couriers had had an accident. Another was apparently lost. We promised to tell them at the dorms.

We crossed the Via Aurelia and continued straight ahead down the narrow Via del Casaletto until a sign pointed to our dorms. We left

the road and followed a long shaded driveway to a parking area beside a beautiful modern building. Quiet sprinklers fed water to lawns and little men poked around at flower beds. It looked sumptuous. I got off the bus and got the word. Dinner right away, a general meeting afterwards and the pool was open. Tell your kids. They'll foam at the mouth. They did. We were here.

I had my room assignments all ready, neat pairs as Odin had promised. I wanted to get that out of the way. But no. At the meanest hotel on the trip, that would have been the first thing to do. My manual said it was the first thing you did on arrival in Rome. But no. This was going to be London all over again. The Dorm Organizer was too, too busy making with the gossip and his pipe to deal with the room assignments. As he waved me away with his pipe for the third time, I went downstairs to eat.

If I had thought that the food in Assisi left something to be desired, this left everything to be desired. It was truly comic cuisine. Our dorms in Rome were ordinarily the residences of Mexican monks who come to study here and at the Vatican. The cooks were Mexican. So was a lot of the rest of the help. So the food was Mexican cafeteria with an Italian cast and ingredients. It was also something else. One of the girls behind the counter had a sweatshirt that read "I am a pear."

She was. Maybe they made her wear it to keep your eyes off what they were putting on your plate. Whatever it was I ate mine and all of Phyllis Gordon's. I was beginning a slow burn. I couldn't appreciate the softly rolling country bathed in the red glow of the setting sun that was happening beyond the glass walls. I wanted a shower and a bed.

I went upstairs. Naturally the Dorm Organizer was now looking for me to give me my room assignments. What I was supposed to have done was to stand around with the rest of the couriers and complain sarcastically about my group. Then I was supposed to do the room assignments and then go out to a restaurant with the couriers and complain some more. None of the staff ate in the cafeteria. They knew better. Also, naturally, my pairs of rooms were way off base. I had a fiver and some singles and a few pairs. Not enough to go around. I passed out the numbers and sought the Dorm Organizer.

"What about rooms for Bob and me."

"Well, Denis," he said twirling his cold pipe in his hands, "I've got a special treat for you and Bob. We've got a seventeenth century mansion on our hands just up the hill. You and Bob have a room up there."

He paused significantly.

"Okay," I said. "Hit me."

"Well, we're going to room thirteen young kids up there. Their T-C's will stay here, of course. You'll be looking after them... It's nothing really." It never is anything really with these people. Just a new way to break your back.

"You mean, we won't be staying with our kids at all?" I asked.

"Well, they're right down here. You'll be coming down here often anyhow. There's no shower in your building. You can use mine. The door's always open."

"Why don't you put some of the couriers that aren't studying the kids up there—"

"They don't stay here at all," he said. "They live in a hotel half a mile away." All the answers, always all the answers. I turned my back on him and went to find Bob. We carried our four heavy bags up the long drive to the mansion. A sprinkler with a wide sweep lay across our path. We hopped through it and made the building. It was a mansion all right — a long time ago. Now it was just a mildewy rotting hulk. Inside it smelled of damp and dirt. We found the stairs and climbed them and searched for a room my key would fit. It was a huge room with a wooden wardrobe of the kind they stopped making in the Middle Ages. The beds had iron steads with bulking things on them that passed for mattresses — but just barely. The windows were huge and the porches were lovely in the evening murk, except that you had to work your way through a cloud of mosquitoes to get to them. A bottle of insect repellent on the night stand said things, unpleasant things. Bob rolled his eyes and shook his head. This and the Dorm Organizer's shower, too. We poked our heads into the bathroom, and pulled them back fast.

Then we marched in, livid with anger. A five watt bulb lit the scene. Sodden plaster oozed down the wall. Where it wasn't cracked it was stained. I turned the handles on the sink. A rusty black scum trickled out. I opened the valve all the way. Nothing more happened. We fought the flies away from the toilet and saw what so interested them. Someone had used the toilet — used it a lot. Too bad there was no water to flush it. We let the flies go back to their business. The room stank. Back in the bedroom we stood just long enough to get covered with mosquito bites and, without a word, we picked up our bags and left. We carried our bags down to the bus. I climbed in through a window and got the luggage key and we opened the racks and put our bags inside. Then we

went to find the Dorm Organizer.

He was on the roof of the building with the rest of the tour leaders. He was surrounded by two hundred and fifty kids. He was telling them the rules of life. It was nice on the roof, too high for the bugs, and high enough for a view miles into the dusk. We were surrounded by country. Silhouetted against the pearl of the sky was the most fantastic castle of anyone's dreams. I joined the kids in not listening to his drone. Every now and then I'd catch a word. "No snapping of towels poolside, and no running." Blah-blah. Blah. The kids were champing at the bit to go swimming. He let them go. We held Group L back and gave them the list of place names for Rome. We wanted them to have that on the sightseeing tour. Bob gave it to them. I lay on my back on a wide wall four floors up and looked into the sky. The stars were so huge they hung flat on my face, vivid, more than real. As I counted the stars darkness came and the stars were without number. My body felt numb but anger kept it awake. Anger throbbed in my veins in time to the music of the stars. We together were a symphony—the Rhapsody of Hate.

We waited for the Dorm Organizer in front of his office. Finally he appeared, accompanied by two T-C's. They were a young couple, pleasant looking. They looked as though if you turned your back, they'd start holding hands. I knew them. We'd met on the bus to the plane back in the States. They were the T-C's for the twelve and thirteen year old kids, the kids that we were going to watch. Someplace deep inside my head a buzzer rang and energy surged through me. I saw the light.

The light was the one in the Dorm Organizer's office. We followed the three of them in. The two of them were mad. I could guess what about. Their faces were serious but open. The husband spoke but the wife was with him every inch of the way. In fact, she was out in front of him. They didn't want to be separated from their kids. The Dorm Organizer suggested they stay in the mansion. They'd seen it and wouldn't stay there to get in out of a blizzard. I chimed in. So did Bob. We mentioned the lack of running water.

The Dorm Organizer looked at us. He twiddled his pipe. He would deal with us later, his look said. Much later. The husband continued. He didn't see the kids spending so much money and having to take a five minute walk to go to the john. He had mentioned money. Pain crossed the face of the Dorm Organizer.

"We had fifteen kids there last week and they loved it. It was like camping out. And they were close to the rest of the group. The alternative is to put them up at a hotel a half-mile away. If we put you

up there, you'll all have to stay there for the week. We have to guarantee a week's booking." He made his face sincere, fatherly. Too bad he was a twenty-five year old bachelor. "Last week we put the kids up at the hotel. They were back here in two nights, begging me, crying right here in this office, to let them stay in the mansion."

"Well our kids don't have much in common with the rest of the group. I don't think they'd mind," the husband said.

"I'm asking you to try it for one night. Just the one night. If you don't like it, then we'll move you tomorrow. But if you like it, we'll all be happier, I can assure you." He did his best to look assuring but just looked stupid.

The couple shrugged. They looked at each other. "Okay," the husband said, "we'll try it for tonight. But they're no beds up there. What do they sleep on?"

"On the cots behind you." We all turned and looked at the aluminum folding things.

"What about sheets and pillows?" the wife asked.

The campus director coughed and fussed with his pipe. "There aren't any," he finally said. He quickly added, "It's part of the camping atmosphere."

The wife turned to him, amazement alive on her face. Amazement turned rapidly to anger and anger to scorn. The Dorm Organizer was an insect so low she could barely see him. Between her teeth she said:

"We're going to the hotel tonight." That was that. I went down with them to their room in the dorm and helped them to get their bags out front. I also helped them out of their room key. Cliff Jaeckel and Bob Watson helped us get our bags from the bus. We had a room. I let my eyes wander around. In front of me was a huge window. It was low and reached to the ceiling. Wooden slats could be lowered over it to keep out the sun and the thousand eyes of the night. Since it was on the ground floor, that so that with the slats raised, it would be easy to pass in and out without using the door. I considered the advantages of that. None struck me. In front of the window was a desk and one entire wall was done up in wooden shelves. A lamp over each bed, a pair of nightstands and two chairs comprised the furniture. To my right were dry roomy closets and to my left was the bathroom. I looked at it. It wasn't the greatest bathroom in

the world. The shower didn't grab you, undress you and scrub your back, but it had clean running water. So did the sink. The toilet flushed. It was heaven.

\* \* \*

Rome was like that all along the line. London began to look like a place of sanity and calm and care compared with Rome. As the tour leaders showed us that their true colors were "don't-bother-me," the kids and the T-C's showed us that their colors were "we're-with-you." On the full day sightseeing of Rome, lots of kids drew maps of their routes on little pieces of paper. Most of them had maps of the city and were following them with care. When we came back to the dorms for lunch I cast an eye at the schedule that had been set up for the week. The first item under Group L caught my eye. It was for today and said:

Dinner: 6:50  
Mapping Session: 7:00  
Opera Option: 8:15

That's cute I said to myself. Cuter than blue blazes. I copied it off to show Odin if he reappeared. This is real cooperation. Ten minutes for dinner! I snorted audibly. Taylor Nash heard me.

"You don't look too well. What's the matter?" I told him. I told him and Bob and Joy while we ate lunch together. I got madder and madder. When we got back on the bus, I told the whole bus. I was out of patience with the tour leaders. I raked them over the coals. I also told them to ignore the schedule just as we did in London. The mapping session tonight would be from 6:00 to 8:00, whenever they could make it.

That afternoon in the furnace called Rome we saw the catacombs and the Trevi Fountain and the Pantheon. That morning we'd seen the Coliseum, the Forum, the Capitoline, the Spanish Steps and St. Peters. That evening the kids mapped them. Everyone drew us a map: all the kids and all the T-C's. I went over them as they were turned in. They were superb. Everyone had tried, and had tried hard. It didn't mean they knew two hoots about Rome. But at least they'd tried to put what they did know on a piece of paper. Two of our group had been to Rome before: Cliff Jaeckel and Bob Watson. They'd been here last summer when the tour they were on had gone bankrupt stranding them in downtown Rome. Their maps were excellent, but then they'd had plenty of time to get to know the city. The only thing about them I couldn't figure out was why they'd gone the summer tour route a second time. Once burned, twice a fool, I figured.



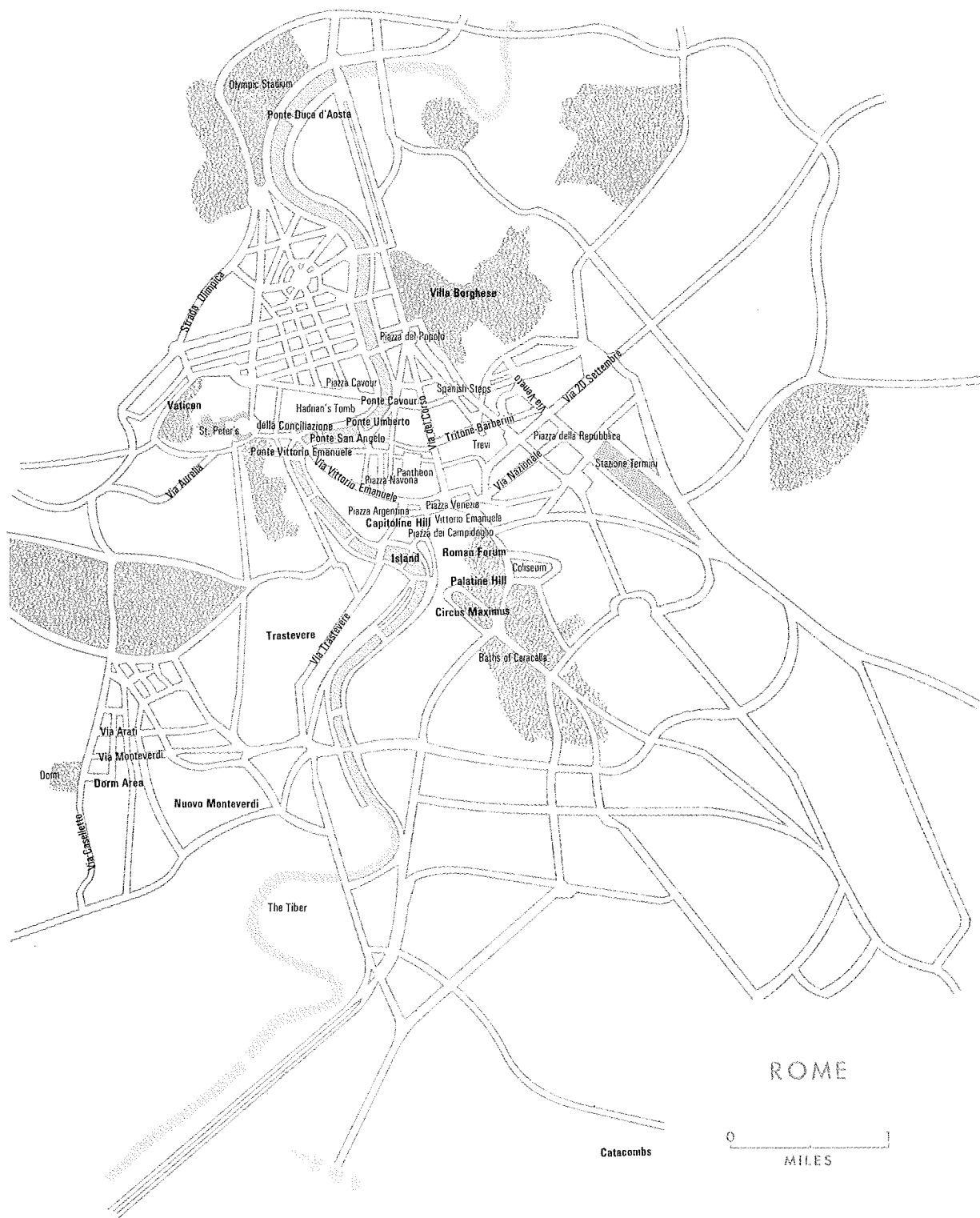


Figure 10.1

I slept through the lectures the next morning. All I needed was to hear the staff make a big deal out of the ancient history and the great art. I had a tasteless lunch and spent the afternoon on office duty in the Dorm Organizer's office. We had a new Dorm Organizer and his name was Dino. He was a squat corpulent Italian, and Odin's chief assistant. And from now on, he was ours.

We went to the opera that night. Five bus loads. The unit Director got lost on the west side of the Tiber. It was a joy to watch him jump out of the bus and ask passers-by in pseudo-Italian for the route. Peter and I pointed at him and laughed. The opera was held in the Baths of Caracalla, a huge outdoor amphitheater set among Roman ruins. The bus drivers invited me to go drinking with them. I wanted to. I needed to. But I went in and watched Aida. I sat way up front with the Italian truck drivers and mobile vendors. They knew their opera. They hummed along with every aria and waved their hands and swayed their bodies till the wooden stands nearly toppled over with sheer pleasure. In between acts vendors hawked coffee and brandy and pop-corn and sandwiches in the stands. It was a show beneath the stars. I loved Italy. I loved the life that pervaded every inch of it. I loved Venice. I loved the urchins swearing and the pigeons and the mad clarinetists in the Piazza San Marco. I loved the color of Florence and the long walks along the Arno River. I loved the scrubby vineyards stragling the hills and the dusty green under the white of the sky. I loved the horses on the stage and the way the soprano floated her song out into the softness of the night until it vibrated with the stars and the audience was hushed in sympathy.

And I loved Group L.

But I hated the tour and I hated this experience and I hated the leaders with their ancient cynicism and tired eyes. I saw Ingrid and I saw her coming home from work and taking Homer up to the park for his run and I saw her sitting on the ledge of rocks while the sun set cool in Worcester and I saw my place beside her. A loud blast of trumpets from the stage woke me with a jolt.

It was cool now, too cool. I grabbed a passing vendor and inhaled a coffee with brandy. I tried to listen to the opera but my mind was elsewhere. I got up and annoyed a lot of people by creaking the floorboards as I passed. I walked down from the stands and smelled the flowers on the night air. Out of the bowl of the seats the opera was like a radio on low in the background of my mind.

\* \* \*

Bob was waiting up for me. He hadn't gone to the opera. He hadn't had to either. He'd spent the night with the "back of the bus" talking about things. They hadn't gone to the opera either. They wouldn't. Stale culture was not their meat. I understood their point of view. Bob handed me a sheet of closely typed paper. I shed my jacket and my scarf and started to get undressed. I had the paper in one hand and my other arm half-way out of my shirt sleeve and I skimmed the page. Then I put it down carefully and got out of my shirt and read it over again with care.

Beautiful talk tonight—the first I have had with a group before that was so large—in attendance Pierce et.al., Erica and Karl, Sven and at times Omar, in which we discussed the whole Innsbruck drug thing. Many things came out about the girl proving herself by being good. Karl and Sven were very relaxed. Tracy Cummings more than anybody. Denis has been in a bad mood lately which through discussion turned out to be because he has to be responsible for the bus nowadays, which through discussion turned to the planning of a pop opera for the Friday project presentation; in which Denis deliberately violates tour leader orders by having bus go right where he was to go left (suggested by Tracy Cummings) and later reads mockingly from the courier manual. The opera, interestingly enough, planned by those who did not go to the opera, is essentially the life of the bus dramatized and surrealized.

#### "Life Among the L-People"

The Scene: The bus played by chairs with coat racks substituting for the luggage racks. Put bags up there, cameras.

The Cast: The kids sitting wherever they usually sit. Find this out from Ideal Bus Seating Chart. Collect this as soon as possible. (Good ploy for getting the chart.)

Scene 1: Everybody boards the bus, improvising getting on. The back of the bus group

gets on last after everybody else.  
They are dressed in Pink Pajamas.  
The bus starts (get tape of the bus  
sounds).

- Scene 2: The back of the bus girls fall asleep  
after singing the Pink Pajama song  
in a bedtime style.
- Scene 3: They start to dream surrealistically  
(ask Denis how to implement) about  
life on the bus. Maybe Desmond could  
be narrator. Vital to have everybody  
in the group playing a role. Erica  
could dream about a cake, and so on.
- Scene 4: Into something about the couples on  
the bus: Erica and Karl; Taylor and  
Joy. Maybe they are talking to each  
other in the middle of a very low  
something official, maybe Denis and  
I talking low to the group.
- Scene 5: Denis being a "courier," switching  
back and forth with Denis being  
"Denis."
- Scene 6: Omar stopping the bus to take pictures,  
Leslie saying "Oh how beautiful" in  
that accent, stuff like that.
- Scene 7: Spoof on mapping on the bus, Adjective  
Checklisting the audience. I'd rather  
the audience Checklisted the performance.  
No ending so far. Have to get rest of  
group together to work on this.

I sat on the edge of the bed tapping the sheets together. Bob  
had had a great evening. I lit a cigarette and said through the smoke:

"So I've been in a bad mood lately?" I squinted to keep the  
smoke out of my eyes. Bob said nothing. "I guess I have at that." I  
took a drag on the cigarette. "The play sounds great. Dino would have  
a cow if we put it on. It would be all over. If he ever knew that I was  
reading the courier manual to the kids he'd have a fit." I mocked his  
voice: 'No one, especially never the T C's, especially the students, is

ever to read what is in this book.' I mean, when he finds out — whew! Bam! All over."

"We had fun," Bob said.

"That's obvious," I said. "Who would play Odin?"

"Bob Watson."

"Oh, he'd love it." I clapped my hands together. I looked over the stuff he'd written. "Tracy Cummings has a real sense of humor."

"They all do. They all like the opera idea."

"Where did it come from?" I asked.

"Out of the air. I don't remember who first said the word. The back of the bus people are really alive. Candy Fisher has really come out of her shell since getting drunk in Innsbruck and Wanda is a real live wire."

I finished getting undressed and wound the alarm clock. I didn't set it. The next day were more lectures. I needed the sleep more than I needed them. So did Bob. It had been a long day.

Just like every day in Europe.

\* \* \*

The next day dawned bright and early but I didn't see it. I was asleep. The light activated my rods and cones for the first time around ten o'clock. I yawned and rolled over. I pulled up the blind a little and peaked outside. Nothing much seemed to have happened in my absence. The sun was still in the sky. The building hadn't moved. I swung my legs over the edge of the bed and reached for a cigarette. What a way to start a day. I reached up and tossed my crowning glory and smoked silently in the half-dark. I stubbed my butt and padded off to the john to shower and shave and get the body ready to face one more day. It was the 20th of July. I was twenty-six.

I was sitting there on the edge of my bed feeding myself the day's second cigarette wondering when I was going to stop smoking. I was beginning to feel less like a campground of the Mongolian horde and more like myself. Bob came in looking bright and chipper.

"I suppose all the coffee's gone?" I asked.

"Long ago," Bob said.

"I guess I can make it to lunch." I yawned.

"What's on the courier schedule today?" Bob asked.

"Fregene Beach. I hope I don't have to take a bus. I just do not feel like it today. I feel like lying in the sun, except I didn't bring my trunks, except I don't own any to have brung. Strike that last. I don't use words like 'brung.'"

Bob smiled. We were just a couple of kids. Except that we both felt a million years old on this trip. There was a commotion at the window. I'd already pulled the blind all the way up and light streamed into the room. Something else did now too. Something that made me feel a lot younger. Mostly it was the fact that they were there at all, but it was also the smiles on their faces. They had a cake. They had presents. I loved them.

We had a birthday party in the window. I got a card with a map of Europe on it showing all the cities on the tour. Across the map it said: BONNE ANNIVERSAIRE! FELIZ CUMPLEANOS! APPY-HAY IRTHDAY-BAY! BUON ANNIVERSARIO! Inside it said: NO MATTER WHAT LANGUAGE ONE SAYS IT—THE MEANING IS THE SAME: HAPPY BIRTHDAY! Beneath that were the kids signatures scrawled at different angles. Some had messages: "Confusius say: On birthday everybody one year older," or "Good luck with your book'?" or "The greatest map maker there is." Jane had written the last. I couldn't tell if she meant me or her. And that morning I didn't care. There were bottles of soda and five bottles of beer for me with ribbons around their necks and from Joy Gray a finger nail file with the note: "Something to smooth your wrinkles away with." There was even a Group L Flag. We all stood around talking and laughing and there was the obligatory rendition of "Happy Birthday" and the blowing out of the candles and the eating of the cake from paper napkins. I climbed through the window after a while to join them. I opened a beer. It was Italian beer from the vending machine in the main hall. It wasn't something you'd write home about, but it wasn't bad.

After a while the kids started to drift away trailing "Happy Birthdays" behind them like dust blowing over a distant horizon. Sven and Taylor hung around for a while and while the four of us chatted, I had a second beer. It was getting warm. I was fascinated. It tasted better warm. I strolled along the walk that went around the building. An

overhang of the building cast deep shadows over it. Outside, the sunlight was like a wall. In a bay between two buttresses Cliff Jaeckel was giving his kids an extra lecture. Obviously he didn't feel the tour lectures were quite enough. I leaned against a buttress and finished my beer listening to his pleasant voice. He was making a moral point about the art of seeing. Then it was time for lunch. The kids drifted off and Cliff and I chatted. I strolled leisurely back to the room and leaned on the window sill, looking at Bob sitting on his bed smiling at nothing.

"Time for lunch," I said. We went to eat.

As usual we sat with Phyllis and Joy and Taylor and Ann. As usual I ate most of Phyllis' lunch in addition to my own. Not that it was worth eating, but it was all there was. Somebody started talking about Porter Portman and Taylor told us how he made his bed. It seems it took him fifteen minutes and when he was done you could bounce a marble on his blankets. Funny thing was, he wouldn't sit on his own bed after that. Might mess it up.

After lunch I went with Taylor to see Porter's bed. There were five people in the room and it had the smell five people make when they live together in a small space. The blinds were mostly drawn and the light in the room was murky. Porter lay on Taylor's bed reading military model magazines under the bed lamp. A stack of them lay beside him. Sven and Karl and David lay on their own beds, each in its individual disarray. Suitcases were open on the floor, a couple pushed half-way under the beds. An ashtray overflowed on the window sill. Sven was in bed with a bad cold. Karl smoked, staring through the crack left beneath the blind. David read under his lamp, half-dressed.

Outside it was sunny and warm and a breeze moved through the grasses of the grounds. I looked at Porter's bed. It made me think of a painting by Mondrian—all right angles—with colors by Whistler—all grays and whites. The top of the sheet that showed over the blanket looked freshly ironed. So did the pillow case that covered the square pillow. How he took the curves out of that was a mystery. The gray blanket was without wrinkle and the corners where it disappeared under the mattress were perfect squares. I took a quarter from my pocket and dropped it on the bed. It came back to my hand. A sprung steel bed for a sprung steel boy with a sprung steel mind. I sat down on the bed.

Porter lowered his magazine carefully. "You're sitting on my bed," he said.

"So I am." I looked up at him. "It's the only one unoccupied in the room."

"That's because it's the only one made. If these dingbats would make their beds I wouldn't sit on them either. I'm just trying to teach them a lesson."

"Oh? What lesson is that?"

"One they'll learn in the Army if they don't learn it from me."

David put down his book and looked at me. "You should have heard what he was saying last night..." That tore it. The fight commenced. It was morals and loyalty and obedience-but-to-what for fifteen minutes. Porter at least provided them with something to talk about. I looked at my watch and hustled up to the courier meeting. I stopped on the way to ease a beer out of the vending machine. Nice vending machine. I patted it. They should put these in student unions in America. Make a fortune.

The meeting was short and snappy. Only enough kids for two bus loads had signed up for Fregene Beach. Two couriers wanted to go. I'd been on office duty yesterday, so this afternoon was free. So was this evening. Dino kept looking at his watch. Finally he muttered something nasty and said:

"We were supposed to go over the route for the Capri field trip this afternoon but Marco has not arrived. We'll have to do it this evening. Another meeting, then, at 7:30." We all groaned, but mine was real. Out in the hallway as I headed to my room I heard the piercing voice of Vittoria Palazzo. That reminded me to pick up another beer. I did.

Bob and I spent the afternoon catching up on our notes about the kids, about the trip, about the social organization and mapping progress. All the kids were out in the world. Omar and Bill were riding around on a scooter taking pictures. Cliff and Taylor and Joy were out trying to buy a guitar for Taylor. Betty Baker, Claire Mayo, Miss Bloch and some others were at the beach. Giocanda and Monroe were sunbathing in the interior courtyard. Jencks and Watson were probably out shopping for clothes. Johnson was probably hanging around the office waiting for a call from the boyfriend she'd picked up in England. The rest were out somewhere. Anywhere. Out. We sat in our room and made lists and drank beer. Sun streamed through the open window. The hall door was propped open and a brisk breeze moved through the room. It was a lazy quiet afternoon. The only sound was the sound of the machine giving up its beer. We did a lot of work.

About 5:00 we were working on one of our subgroups. It consisted of four kids who moved as pairs, as though connected by bonds



of flesh. Betty Baker and Claire Mayo were one pair. Rhoda Noyes and Susan Lincoln were the other. We figured that they buffered each other against the environment, their pairness building a wall that kept the outside at a comfortable distance. Suddenly the room was darkened and we looked up. Betty and Claire stood in the window, watching us write.

"What are you doing?" Claire asked.

"As a matter of fact, we're writing about you." I smiled and worked on my bottle of beer.

"You'll get drunk if you drink like that," she said.

"I haven't been drunk in a year and a half," I said. I laughed. "Of course I haven't been drinking for a year and a half either. Do you think I'm drunk?"

"You don't sound it." Pause. "Can we read what you're writing?"

Bob and I looked at each other. It was a moment frozen in time as clear as distilled water. It was a decision we should have argued about for months. Instead we said together, "Sure." I gave them the forms. They traded forms and read some more.

"I don't have a fat face," Betty said. I shrugged. Claire looked at her with something like a smile on her face. Her hair was wet and her smile was cute.

Claire said: "You say, 'What do you talk about with Betty?' You just don't know her. She talks all the time. She does blush a lot though. Don't mind us, you're mostly right about everything you say."

Just then Susan Lincoln and Rhoda Noyes appeared at the window.

"Whatcha doing?" Rhoda asked.

"Reading what Bob and Denis wrote about us," Claire said.

"Oh! Can we read ours too?" Rhoda asked. I didn't even have to search for them. They were right there in front of me. They both read with care, a pink glow spreading gradually across Rhoda's face. Susan just smiled quietly to herself. Tremors in her long back said she was laughing, but not out loud. Rhoda looked up.

"I am a tease." She looked at Bob. "But I don't bite." She climbed in through the window and sat down on Bob's bed. The six of us talked for half an hour, maybe longer. It was our first real contact with this quartet. We tried to guess what Susan wanted to be. I said a nurse, Bob said a doctor. She said a librarian, and smiling, maybe a physical therapist. Betty said she wanted to be a Phys. Ed. teacher with a minor in history. Both she and Claire go to a girls' school.

In our notes we'd called them shy:

"We're experienced, you know," Claire said.

I raised my eyebrows. "What do you mean by that?"

Betty looked at me. "Not that! I mean we both dare to go down dark alleys."

Rhoda said, "We should be keeping notes about you."

"Yeah?" I said. We didn't fall out of our seats, but we joggled. That would be data!

"What would you say about us?" Bob asked.

"I'd say that I hate it when Denis lets his glasses fall down his nose. So do Vanessa and Janine." She laughed. Susan smiled. I lifted a beer bottle to my lips. It was empty. So was I. It was time for dinner. Bob and Rhoda and I walked down together. I stopped at the vending machine to spend a little money. I had some supper with my beer.

After that things got hazier and hazier and more and more golden, the golden haze of alcohol. I went to the courier meeting with a bottle in my hand. Then I went to the Piper Club Discoteque with the group. Bob and I and Taylor and Joy and a T-C from another group sat at a table and watched the lights. Everybody danced but me. I drank beer. I drank beer until I got the 1500 Lira bill for the first round. That made me mad. I went to the bar and started drinking rum. That was cheaper than beer at the table. Cliff Jaeckel was there with me. I was drunk. I pounded on the bar for service. The noise and the heat inside got to me and I went out into the night. I lay down beside a fountain in the street and looked at the sky. I fondled the paving stones. Nice paving stones. Nice street. I patted the street. I walked into a joint and bought four huge cans of beer and sat beside the fountain drinking them. I shouted to the sky:

"You can't do this to me!" and I threw a full can of beer up

into the night. The beer poured from the opening in a gold arc. That was funny. I started laughing and my laugh ran around the empty square like the patter of rat feet in garbage cans. I heard that sound and hated it. I kicked viciously at another can of beer. It rattled off into the street skidding and skittering like my stomach. I fell to my knees and pounded on the street.

"I HATE YOU I HATE YOU I HATE YOU I HATE YOU." Tears fell off my face and mixed with the blood from my torn hand. I vomited. Lunch and dinner and beer and rum gushed on the street. Green bile glinted meanly. I retched till my stomach and throat were raw and then I retched some more. I crawled on my hands and knees to the fountain and hung over the side like a drowned dog. I cursed long and silently. This is what it comes to in the end: a sick body alone on an empty street. Thoughts came and went in the rooms of my mind like prospective tenants. None stayed long enough to talk to. It wasn't nice up there. The thoughts fled. I stood up and wiped at my face with my hand. I missed my own face. I took my right hand with my left and reached into a pocket for my handkerchief. I pulled it out carefully and slowly. I never did anything more difficult. Still holding my own hand I wiped my face and pushed at my hair. I looked down the street to the discoteque. I dropped my handkerchief on the street.

Thought deserted me entirely. My mind took a vacation. My body didn't. It went right on without its mind.

\* \* \*

I sat up sharply and grabbed the alarm clock. Ten-thirty. Ten-thirty when? I pulled the blinds slightly and saw daylight outside. The light hurt my eyes and I dropped the blinds. The sides of my stomach hurt and my throat was raw as though I'd smoked too many cigarettes. I lay back in bed and considered the situation.

Ten-thirty!? The Pope! I jumped up. That was a dumb move. My head whirled. I sat back down and it began to come back to me. I looked at Bob's bed. He was gone but a note was pinned to his pillow. I got up carefully and walked across to his bed. The note said: "Gone to Castelo Gondolfo. Will tell you what happened when I get back." Suddenly I felt very sick, not body-sick, mind-sick. I was afraid. "Will tell you what happened." The words held menace. What happened. That meant something happened. What? I reached for a cigarette. I drew the smoke into my lungs and tried to remember but I remembered nothing. I smoked in silence. Nothing stirred outside my room. The dorms seemed deserted. By the time I'd washed and dressed I was feeling better. My head no longer bothered me. I cracked the blinds. The light

was nice. I raised them and fresh air entered the room. I gulped it down. Old no hang-over kid. That's one of the worthless virtues. You only know you're it after you get drunk. Things like that aren't worth too much.

A knock sounded on the door. Someone besides me was alive.

"Denisio? Would you like some lunch?"

"I'll be with you in a minute," I shouted.

"I'll be in the office.

I smoked another cigarette quickly, then headed to the office.

Dino was pushing papers around. "We have to go out to eat. I'll be ready in a second." He didn't look at me. He didn't look at me once we were in the car. He didn't say anything either. His eyes were hidden behind dark glasses. We sat down on opposite sides of a table outside beneath an arbor. It was a nice restaurant. The guys across from us were mixing wine and Coke. My stomach churned. Dino ordered for both of us.

"Wine?" he asked looking at me for the first time.

"No thanks," I said. He put his napkin in his lap and gazed at me across the table.

"Well, Denisio, what happened?"

"What happened?" I asked.

"You don't remember?"

"I don't remember."

"Well," he said, "you got drunk. Very drunk. You made a spectacle of yourself in front of the entire unit.

"What happened, Dino?"

"You got drunk and made a spectacle of yourself in front of the entire unit.

"Yeah, but what happened?"

"You'll have to ask Bob that."

"Well, if you won't tell me what happened, maybe you'll tell me what happens." He paused while the waiter placed soup in front of us. He watched me to see if I could eat it. I did.

"Denisio, I have decided, and I hope you will go along with me. You are leaving for Paris as soon as possible. There you will wait for the group to catch up with you. We will put you in a hotel. You will have no contact with the kids or T-C's. You cannot be seen by any member of the group again. When they come to Paris you will rejoin them. We will be putting Group L into a separate dorm. We could send you straight home, but you are doing so good work that I think you should finish the Project." He stopped and looked at me. "But the entire unit is watching me. They will want to know what the leader is doing about it when a courier is breaking the rules. I am sending you away."

I looked at him. I struggled to remember what had happened to cause so severe an excommunication. "Dino, please, tell me what happened."

"I told you already. That is enough for me." He sighed. "Nobody told me you were a drunk."

"I'm not," I said. "I just can't drink. Whenever I do, I drink too much. For a year and a half I've had nothing to drink at all."

"And why last night?"

I looked at my hands. "I don't know why last night," I said softly.

"You were speaking often of your wife," he said just as soft. "This is a hard job. Being a courier is almost impossible. To be running a special project too, is too much. They should have never asked you to be a courier. Maybe next year you will come with us again and your wife will come too. Maybe next year you will not be getting drunk."

He smiled. I smiled back. Inside I knew one thing. There would be no next year with a summer tour. Dino drove me back to the dorms.

"Stay inside your room," was his parting comment.

I headed down the halls to my room. Bob Watson appeared in the door to his room. He waved me into the room and said, "How you

feeling?" He moved some clothes off the bed and gestured me to sit down. So I wasn't a leper.

"What happened last night, Bob?" I asked.

"Nothing." His voice was flat.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I didn't even know you were drunk until you came up on the stage to dance with Marina. You're not a bad dancer. But you fell down, and I helped you up and it was obvious you were drunk. You went and sat down but you kept on wanting to dance. Bob wouldn't let you. Then we all left. Cliff and Bob and I helped you onto the bus. I don't think anyone else knew you were drunk. Bob and I hustled you around back, but somebody, I think it was the Unit Director, had already told Dino. He found Bob but he never saw you. You wanted to go out and talk about Ingrid and we walked you up by the mansion and you puked a lot. You slugged me." He smiled ruefully.

"I'm sorry," I said. I'm always sorry later. "Who else knew I was drunk?"

"Well, Des knew, and then Taylor, Sven, Karl and David. Porter knew too. You were singing some crazy Spanish song about palm trees growing and Puerto Rico."

Yeah. I'd been there before. Always sing "Guantanamera" when you're drunk. It's a rule.

"Dino says I made a spectacle of myself in front of the entire wave. You sure that's all that knew? He's sending me off to Paris tonight or tomorrow."

"The ---- he is. I ought to know. I don't think any of our T-C's except Cliff know and most of the girls don't. No one from another group knows. He's stupid."

"Yea, but he's Dino. Why aren't you on the bus?"

"You should ask? I was up all night with you."

"Ah ----, I am sorry, Bob."

"Don't be. You were funny." He paused. "Taylor was up too. He didn't go to see the Pope either. He's in his room. Go ask him."

I did. The room was dim. Sven was lying in bed sleeping with his arms across his eyes. His cold was so bad he hadn't gone to see the Pope either. I sat on the edge of the bed and bummed a Kool.

We talked quietly, not to wake Sven. I got the same story here that I'd gotten from Watson: I'd babbled, talked about my wife, and sung some crazy Spanish song. After a while I asked to see the new guitar that he'd bought yesterday. It was as lovely as a baby's complexion and just as smooth. I did the only thing I can do with a guitar — picked out the first seven notes to "Fly Me To The Moon." Taylor took the guitar lightly out of my hands. He looked over to Sven. Sven's eyes looked out from under his arm.

"Go ahead. You play sweet," he said. Taylor ran his fingers lightly over the strings. He wasn't one of these guys who can play five chords and thinks that's guitar. He could play. He wandered through some sounds that fit together without ever being anything you knew. Then very softly he began to sing:

"Though your brother's bound and gagged,  
And they've chained him to a chair,  
Won't you please come to Chicago just to sing;  
In a land that's known as free,  
How can such a thing be fair  
Won't you please come to Chicago,  
For the help that we can bring...

We can change the world,  
Rearrange the world,  
It's dying—  
If you believe in justice.  
It's dying—  
If you believe in freedom.  
It's dying.  
Let a man live his own life.  
It's dying.  
Rules and regulations, who needs them?  
Oh, throw them out the door..."

"What's that?" I asked when he'd stopped.

"It's a Graham Nash song I heard on the radio."

"So why'd you play it for me, Taylor?"

"'Cause it's about someting you believe in: a world without

rules and regulations. He makes it sound nice."

"But you don't believe him?"

"I'm thinking about it." He played quietly until the buses hit the parking lot outside. I sat up quickly when I heard them.

"I'd better go." I got off my back and turned to the door.

Taylor said, "You need a new pair of shoes."

"I know it. But I can't afford a pair just now."

"I've got two. Take one of mine. I've been wearing these sneakers since the trip began. Take my others." He pulled them out of the closet and tossed them on the floor. They were leather bootlets. I looked at him. He meant it. I took mine off and put his on. They fit. I smiled;

"Thanks," and then I left the room.

\* \* \*

Bob had nothing new to tell me except one thing: Dino wanted me to run the map session that night and explain the situation to the group. Then Dino thought he might show up and answer unanswered questions. That was fine with me. I walked down to the map room with the pencils and the Environmental A's and the map blanks and tracing paper. The map room was as empty as my stomach. I stood in the door of the map room and looked at the cafeteria. A burning desire to eat there consumed me. Just then Taylor and Joy came into sight. I called gently to them and they came over.

"How's for bringing me my dinner in here?" I asked.

"Okay," Taylor said. Joy smiled at me and I smiled back.

I sat down behind the desk in the room. The late afternoon sun was falling softly through the windows onto the floor. I walked over to the window smoking and looked into the kitchen across the way. The chatter of cooking was low and soothing and filled with the aroma of home. I turned as Taylor came into the room with my dinner on a tray:

"Breakfast is served," he said as he put the tray on the desk with a flourish. I started eating. As I ate the group began to pile into



the room. Soon I was eating to an audience of over thirty. I'd never done that before. The sensation was odd. Thirty pairs of eyes watched my fork go from my plate to my mouth. I put on my best manners and ate with care. By the time I'd finished most of Group K was in the room too. I wiped my mouth daintily and getting out a cigarette, sat casually on the front edge of the desk.

"Dr. Beck will be taking Group K to do the maps in another room. Before you go, however, I wonder if I might ask you a question?" I paused to allow someone to say no. No one did. "How many of you are aware that I was thoroughly and totally drunk last night?"

One T-C raised her hand — the one that had been sitting at our table. I nodded and thanked them and Bob took them away. I turned to Group L:

"How many of you were aware that I was drunk last night?" Thirteen kids raised their hands. Only one T-C, Cliff Jaekel. Miss Bloch said she knew something was up from the way the kids acted this morning, but she had no idea. Mrs. Needham had no idea at all.

"Well, because I made a spectacle of myself in front of the entire wave last night, Dino is sending me to Paris tomorrow—" I never finished that sentence. There were cries of protest, angry noises, sounds of dismay and chagrin. There was a great confusion of shoutings and no sense. Courses of action were discussed. I was asked to leave the room. I did. I sat out in the hallway, against the vending machine that sold beer. I rubbed my hand on the smooth enamel surface. It wasn't the machine's fault. It was all mine. Bob reappeared and disappeared into the room. The volume of noise grew. Dino appeared and entered the room.

The man came to refill the beer machine. He had his little boy with him. They smiled and chattered and looked at me. I must have looked like I just lost my best friend, because he offered me a free beer. I thanked him but said no thanks. Long red rays of light crawled along the tiled floor of the hall in a vain attempt to hold onto the day. I looked along them into the sun. It sat on the edge of the world, bigger than an orange. The day was ending. So was the trip, the project and my chances at a dissertation. I stood up and dropped a coin into the Coke machine. With the Coke cold in my hand I walked into the cafeteria, into the light of the setting sun. In the back of the room a group of kids were banging music out of an old piano, singing and laughing. The room was exploding with the color of the setting sun. I walked to a table by the glass wall. I walked and I walked and I walked to the table hearing that music and watching the sun swell in size. It was a scene from a movie,

shot with a telephoto lens in Super Panavision with stereophonic sound and in slow motion. In the movie Bridget Bardot would be waiting for me at the table, waiting to make it all up. In real life no one was waiting for me at the table. I pulled out a chair and sat down watching the sun set.

"Well, I guess you're leaving." It was a funny voice mixed of some undefined sadness and a lot of glee. I looked up. It was Porter Portman. He was having trouble meeting my eyes. After the trip was all over he wrote me a letter to tell me how he was the one who'd run to Dino with the news that I was drunk, and the news that he'd always hated me. I didn't know that then. All I knew was he was having trouble meeting my eyes. He had nothing else to say and left. I turned back to the sun. Only half of it remained above the horizon.

"Well, I guess you're leaving." It was a funny voice mixed with some undefined sadness and a great deal of righteous satisfaction. I looked up. It was Agatha Jones. She had trouble meeting my eyes. I guess she saw the devil reflected in them and didn't like what she saw. I sighed and turned back to the window. The vultures are always the first to feast on dead meat. Long after, when just the bones are left, the cavalry arrives to raise a quiet grave. In my mind I saw John Wayne walking among the ruins of a smoldering home, stooping to pick up a doll.

"He wouldn't listen." It was Phyllis Gordon. Nybia and Joy and Taylor and Watson and Vittoria and Marina and Lana and Janine followed. They looked dejected, as though their best had been in vain. It was a little Chicago all over again. All the faces were red in the light of the setting sun. And then the fingers of red slid off the tables and down from the walls and the sun dropped into another world and Phyllis said:

"Why don't we have a vigil? We can carry candles and sit in Dino's office." That appealed to Watson, Taylor and Nybia.

I left and went to bed to lie down and give my head a rest. Bob came in to the room to say they were having a vigil and the group would assemble on the roof in half an hour. I looked at the clock. It seemed a long time from now. I climbed through the window and leaned in at Betty and Claire's. They were talking about me. They turned and looked at me:

"We just want you to know we're on your side. But we're not going to the vigil. We think that Dino has made up his mind and that it will just make things worse." Claire added defiantly: "And it's not because we're afraid of Miss Bloch."

"I never thought it was," I said. It was growing dark and I could barely see them in the shadows of the room. I turned and walked on. "We're on your side," came floating at my back through the darkness. It was the same story for Susan and Rhoda. We're on your side.

I took my time getting to the roof. It was dark and most of Group L was already there along with lots of kids from other groups too. What had been a private drunk was now unit politics. Bob and Cliff were in the center of the crowd discussing punishment versus salvation. Every now and then Vittoria's voice would pierce the blackness reminding us of the drug episode in Innsbruck. "She stayed once she promised to behave. Why can't Denis?"

I sighed and lit a cigarette. The crowd opened and I was sitting in the center of it. The smoke hung like a curtain before me. "What am I supposed to say? That I'm sorry? Well, I'm sorry, but not about what happened last night. I'm sorry that I can't say that I'm sorry. Being sorry is a waste of time. Last night happened. I can still feel it in my sides where they ache from vomiting. I hurt. I know better than anyone that it happened. It happened for a lot of reasons, reasons buried in my past and reasons like I'm tired and worn out." I paused. I drew on my cigarette.

"I don't think that I have to tell you that I don't believe in rules and regulations. If you've been on my bus then you know that I've broken most of the rules already. I haven't played the tour tapes if you didn't want to hear them; I've let you use the mike; I've read the courier manual to you; we stopped for sick kids when we weren't supposed to; now I've gone and gotten drunk and I wasn't supposed to do that either. I didn't hurt anyone except myself. Even if I had, it doesn't help to send me away now. How would that help? Afraid I might do it again? Any one of you might do the same thing or worse. I think I should be allowed to stay and finish what I started."

Someone said "Right on!" but Cliff Jaeckel escalated: "And if you'd murdered someone...I suppose you should too."

"Nobody murdered anybody, Cliff. Why try to make it something it wasn't? You think every time somebody crosses the line—your line—you've got to punish them?"

"But if you don't punish people, things'll just keep on getting worse."

"What are you afraid of, Cliff? That if there wasn't punishment lurking around the corner, that you'd run off and kill someone?"

"I might." His voice was as solid as his chin. You'd need a chisel to make a dent in either.

"Well, have a little trust in others if you can't trust yourself. The way of the rule hasn't worked for two thousand years—"

"You're reaching for the stars, Denis—"

"You're damn right I'm reaching for the stars," I shouted, "and the day I stop reaching for the stars is the day I'll go out and get drunk permanently! What kind of life are you living where you're not trying to do the impossible? That's not life! That's security and it stinks—"

"Calm down, Denis." Bob's hand was on my arm and it pulled it out of the sky. He went on: "The question is a simple one. Do we agree that Denis ought to stay and that Dino ought to be given a chance to change his mind?"

There was a chorus of yeses and we went downstairs and stood around in front of Dino's dark office. It was the night of the T-C party up at the mansion. Dino was up there smiling and pouring drinks and being polite. Cliff appeared out of the darkness. He had a Coke for me and said he'd go up and get Dino.

Dino came wearing a slightly deferential smile left over from the T-C party, but under that his face was strained. It was the color of bread dough and had the texture of course sandpaper. As he came striding down the hall he looked around him. He didn't like what he saw. He came up to where Bob and I were standing and spoke.

"I am very disappointed that you Denisio, and you too Roberto, are not growing up into the situation." His eyes traveled around the group. "And the rest of Group L as well."

We moved to a lounge decorated with pictures of the Pope. The kids sat holding their white pillows on sofas of red leather, on the yellow carpet, on cushions scattered around. The first thing Dino did was to make sure that the kids from the other groups knew that they couldn't talk. This was a Group L matter. I wanted to point out to him that once it was a matter for Denis Wood. It was the kids' fight though. I sat in the background. It was kind of hard to figure Dino. This meeting wasn't on his schedule and seemed to annoy him the way aborted meetings annoyed him—more than just about anything. Yet as he settled into the simple moral arguments dear to what he called his heart, he was having a ball. It was Miltonic. The summer tour was the Universe and Dino was its God.

The Courier Manual was his Word and his Word was with us. In fact, it was all over us. I was Satan and the Kids were Fallen Angels. At first Dino was the Fatherly God, trying to convert and save the fallen with infallible wisdom and advice—wisdom and advice potent enough to affect even them. It affected them the same way an aspirin tablet effects a heart-attack victim. Every five minutes Vittoria Pallazo would say:

"But I don't see why this is any different from what happened in Innsbruck. And you gave her a second chance. Why can't Denis have a second chance?" Vittoria's voice was the kind that shatters glass. It shattered Dino. He'd look at her and say:

"Because Denis is not any longer a fifteen year old girl." Each time he'd say it someone would snicker:

"And I hope he never was." Dino's face would blotch and his eyes would search for the offender, darting about the room through the cloud of cigarette smoke hanging around his face.

You could time your watch by it. Vittoria's voice would rise and Dino would flinch. He just got more and more polite.

"Because, Miss Pallazo, Denis is not any longer being a fifteen year old girl." Each time he lost a little more control of his English. After an hour of this Dino understood that reason wouldn't buy a ham sandwich that night. He fell back hard on his position of power. His final remarks had effect, but endeared him to the group with all the attachment of a scorpion:

"I am very sorry to have to be taking this position, but it is obvious that you are not listening to reason. I am so far being very patient with you all—for Denis' sake—but now I am not being any more patient. If this meeting is continuing for one more minute I will be changing my mind about allowing Denis to rejoin Group L in Paris and instead will be sending him home to the States tomorrow."

The audience was over.

It was all over. The group would be leaving for Capri in a few hours, at 4:00 A.M. to be exact. We gave the bus seating chart blanks to Taylor and Janine. At 3:30 we went out and hung around the buses. There was something in the air as though the unit was about to embark on a Mission Impossible. Leaving at night is like that: there's an element of excitement and high enterprise that disappears in the light of the sun. The parking lot was dark except for the light from the buses that fell wanly on the asphalt. I stood at the door of the bus and said good-bye to the kids

as they got on. The light came through the door of the bus casting deep shadows on their faces as they turned to me. Some of the girls approached slowly, as if afraid to say good-bye, quickly kissed me on the cheek, then hurried aboard.

"See you in Paris," said Wanda Pierce, "This is worse than saying good-bye to my boyfriend." In her hurry to get on, she tripped on the steps. She looked back at me, her face in shadow, her hair high-lighted, glinting with metallic specks in the yellow light.

"See you in Paris," she whispered.

After everyone was aboard I got on and used the mike for the last time. I had a lot I wanted to say. A hush settled on the group like leaves dropping in the fall. I said:

"Bye-bye. See you in Paris."

Bob and I sat on the bumper of a bus that was was staying behind and waved as the bus passed us. Faces were pressed against the windows, hands cupped to the glass against interior reflections. The lights snapped out and we watched the red tail-lights vanish around the curve in the driveway. We followed the sound of the buses to the road and the low growl as they picked up speed and headed away. Then we heard the sound of insects in the night. Ashes from my cigarette sparkled redly as they scattered on the ground. We got up and went to bed.

That night I left for Paris.