

ON THE RUN

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She was tired. Weeks had passed with no change. She had realized it would take time to make new friends, adjust to a new area, but she had retained her vision of a charged academic atmosphere, vibrant with discussion, new ideas, and controversy.

Last week, overcoming her fear of talking in class, she had raised her hand.

"I think Dreiser is portraying the conscience of a criminal in Paul. Paul seems to have the amorality and inability to perceive a situation from others' viewpoints that—"

"Criminal! One theft does not justify the label of a thief! I feel you are missing the point entirely. He's a victim of chance. Let's look at another point in the story."

"I honestly feel . . .," surfaced in her mind but never exploded as the teacher continued his lecture. She felt as if a bird of anger lay within her, wanting to fly out and beat its wings against that professor's brick-walled mind. Worse, was the thought that this was only one more example of the one-sidedness, the "cram-down-their-throats-your-opinion-as-fact" syndrome of all her classes.

Two days ago, Dr. Browne had handed back their geography exams. She questioned the D given her for a small red check on the fifth-page margin. The class snickered. He rewrote the essay on the board differently than on the test day, as ambiguously worded as ever. Why hadn't she listened to Mary's advice and dropped the class?

"Browne? Let me tell you, it's not how you do on his tests. You have to talk to him, sit up front, wear a dress occasionally."

"Brown nosing, that's brown nosing. I won't do that!"

"But you have to. No one does well on the tests. He doesn't read them. Ask Linda, anyone who's had him—I pursued him, acted sort of innocently seductive, said I had to get a B. I made C's in the class but he gave me a B. If you don't want to do that forget it."

But she had not really believed this possible. Other students would contest Dr. Browne's arbitrary grades. He would be forced to play fair. Only her classmates seemed to regard her agitation as funny and pointless. Ron in the next seat whispered,

"Forget it. The whole geography department stinks. I don't care

anymore.”

Now she sat in Modern Civilization chewing her Bic pen, twisting occasionally, looking up with a start when Dr. Schwartz brought up the evils of technology,

“Just look at technology. What has it accomplished? They’ve sent men to the moon, they’ve walked on the moon and found an environment hostile to human life. So they had to keep the men in a life-supporting womb, tied to their spacecraft by an umbilical cord. When people are born they are enclosed in just such a womb and tied to their mother by just such an umbilical cord. Now how far has technology brought us? No farther than the day we were born.”

What in the hell did he expect of them? To swallow this, the most illogical garbage she had ever heard?

She didn’t feel sick though, until she looked over the intent wave of faces. Where were the radical students she had hoped to admire and emulate? Kids who would challenge. Kids who were skeptical. She had hoped to identify with a group of kids who thought for themselves, were ready to change the evils about society that confounded her. At least a protest or two? She sighed.

Then she stood up and walked out. Breathing with difficulty, she descended the hallowed steps of the academic institution she was growing to hate. Hunched over on a flaking bench, her all-too-familiar daydream brought escape for a minute:

She takes off her pink sweater and gray pants and slips into jeans, an army jacket and t-shirt.

Twenty minutes later she closes the front door, suitcase in hand. She catches the city bus to Carlisle’s Greyhound station, where the first in the long line of buses she knows are necessary to take her to San Francisco awaits her.

She’ll find peace, Flower Children, freaks, long hair and blue shades, people who hate the way things are as much as she does. . .

It won’t work. She smiles sadly. How ironic that she wasn’t born ten years earlier when at least she could have joined people who tried, and people who still cared.