

Notes on the Hauter Experiment



by Bernice Grohskopf

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Bernice GROHSKOPF

*Tell me where is fancy bred,
Or in the heart or in the head ?*

SHAKESPEARE :
The merchant of Venice

1ST DAY

I don't know how I got here. I don't know where I am or where my parents are. But I'm not frightened at all. I'm not even sure how long I've been here because the daily routine is so much the same it's hard to tell one day from another. We don't call the days by the usual names like Monday and Tuesday. We don't call the days anything. They just go on and on with no weekends. We go to classes every single day. It makes me tired just to think about it, but even so, it's been fun. Everything is interesting, much more than in my school.

This is the first day of my notes. So far, I haven't found anyone to talk to. None of the kids will answer my questions, and when I ask someone where I am, or what is the name of this place, they just shake their heads or shrug their shoulders.

Everything seems to be streamlined, gleaming, noiseless, orderly, and everything is done according to schedule. There's a large TV screen in the cafeteria, sort of like the big screens they have at airports. And it has the daily schedule on it, in clear letters. We see it every morning at breakfast, and all through the halls, every place we go. In all the rooms, there are small screens with the same schedule on it with a red arrow pointing to the period we're up to. It goes like this :

- Breakfast
- Math
- Science
- Recreation
- Midmorning snack
- Composition
- Nature study
- Lunch
- Film on archaeology
- Latin
- Social studies
- Art history
- Music appreciation

And so on. Some days we have more stuff than that. But I have to stop writing now because the blue light is blinking and that means bedtime. There are no loud bells here. No sounds at all. Just the TV screens giving directions, and blinking colored lights that mean different things. We have no clocks here. And so far, I haven't seen any grown-ups.

2ND DAY

I don't know how long I'll have time now for writing. We're all in bed. Most of the kids are reading. Some are still doing homework in bed. One girl is filing her nails. In music class today they played a Chopin prelude. It reminded me of home because I used to play it. At least I played something like it. The one they played was harder than what I played. I think it had more notes. Or maybe I used to drop a few notes. The music came over a speaker system and then a grown-up voice explained things about the music, how the composer did this chord in that key and how music is composed according to laws of harmony and how we must listen for this diminishing something and so on. I didn't understand all of the explanation. Then the music was played again. It was terrific playing, so it must have been someone very famous who practices jillions of hours. My friend Lila Lowenthal, who thinks she is an authority on everything, used to tell me I'd never become a great pianist because I only practiced like about six or seven minutes a week. She said I'd have to practice *six hours a day* to be any good! Anyway, I told her I didn't even want to be a pianist, I wanted to be a writer. And then she made one of her stuck-up bored faces. I'm glad she's not here.

We have no teachers. In all our classes there is a TV screen, or a wall screen, and a voice coming over the speaker system. Maybe that's what those vents are for. I like that much better than having a pesky talking teacher. My Uncle Norman was always telling my mother that education would be improved if they got rid of the teachers. My mother always laughed and told him he's a dreamer. That's because she used to teach first grade. They argue all the time about Uncle Norman's educational theories. But it's good arguing, not fighting the way my father and Uncle Saul do about politics and the stock market.

Anyway, the voices that come over the speakers are soft, just the way my Uncle Norman talks. Very gentle. The voice goes along with whatever is the subject on the screen. We have homework and classwork, and we put our work papers in gadgets on the walls called monitors. It works sort of like a laundry chute, or like the incinerator in Uncle Norman's apartment house. Some of them are like dumbwaiters. The monitor door is on the wall, and when a purple light goes on we can open the door and either put our papers on the shelf or collect our marked papers. The monitors in the shower room are very large chutes for putting our dirty clothes in. They come back on a conveyor, all neatly stacked in alphabetical order, all washed and folded. All my clothes are together, and each piece is marked with my name, EVELYN B. CHESTNUT, in nice block letters. We wear sandals, corduroys or blue jeans, cotton knitted T-shirts and sweaters. Our things don't get dirty here.

The girl in the bed next to mine is named Marcia, and she has terrific black eyebrows, the kind I wish I had, all perfect and neat like a drawing. Her eyelashes are black too, and so is her hair, all nice soft waves. She has the dreamiest eyes, sort of light gray. She doesn't say much, and when I ask her a question, she answers by shrugging her shoulders or lifting her eyebrows and leaning her head away. She isn't exactly friendly. But no one is. There's a tall, beautiful, black girl named Drucy, who seems to be the leader. Everyone seems to treat her as though she were special, but I can't figure out why. A couple of the kids follow her around, but I don't know their names. They hardly ever talk, and they do whatever Drucy does. I can't stand kids like that who are such copycats and have no ideas of their own. I can't tell whether or not Drucy likes them. She seems to feel important. No one talks much or shouts, ever. That's the crazy thing here. The quiet. There's hardly any noise. It would be different if Lila Lowenthal were here. You'd hear her! Our sandals don't make any noise when we walk, and the floors and walls are made of some silent stuff.

All the girls sleep in a big room, with our beds neatly lined up. Next to each bed is a small table with a drawer and two shelves where we can keep things. We have to

make our own beds. Each bed has a different-colored bright quilt to cover it like a spread. And we all have different-colored sheets. The place never seems to get dirty, but somebody must clean it.

The blue light is blinking now. Tomorrow I'll try to write about the other rooms. This whole place is enormous. Two buildings!

3RD DAY

I haven't finished describing the daily routine, but I also want to tell about the rooms. And our fabulous recreation yard. But I won't have time because I think it's late and the blue light will start soon.

In the morning the yellow blinking light lets us know it's time to get out of bed. No bells. No sounds. I still have not seen any grown-ups. When I asked Marcia about it, she shrugged. That's what all the kids do. No one seems to want to talk much. Everyone is obedient to the lights, and the lights are everywhere : in the rooms, in the corridors, outside, in the dining room, in the social room, and the auditorium. Green is for meals, red is time to change classes or go to the next activity, blue is for bedtime. Usually the lights blink on and off, but when it's time for studying, the white light goes on and stays on. You get to know the light system almost the first day and you get used to them. It's a relief not having someone remind me every second of what I'm supposed to do.

I want to finish describing our day. It isn't always the same program. And we have all sorts of stuff besides the usual school stuff. We have anthropology, art history, something called sociology, about how different people behave in different parts of the world. Sometimes we have classes in cooking, except that we don't cook, we just watch on the screen. We have movies on agriculture and on how to make pottery and things like that. I really like it. It's sort of like living inside of an encyclopedia. Uncle Norman is always telling my Mom that kids are ready to be exposed to all fields of learning, and then my mother always says that depends on the individual child. Uncle Norman says a good teacher who loves his subject can introduce it to any reasonably intelligent child. But Uncle Norman says that most of the teachers in public schools hate their subject just a little less than they hate the kids. I don't think that's right about all teachers. Some teachers really like kids and know how to make everything seem interesting and exciting. Some of them are mean, some of them are just plain boring, and some of them seem kind of stupid to me. But it's like my Mom says, « That's life ». Drucy is the one we all watch. I don't know why. The kids who are always with her are like her shadows. Other kids hang around her for a while, and then they don't bother with her. I can't figure it out. Except that maybe she's too smart for them. And she's bossy. There are a couple of cliques, and the kids in each group want to keep everyone else out. My Mom always says that grown-ups act that way too, but they don't make it as obvious as kids because they cover it up. I don't see how you can cover up just plain rudeness. One group thinks they're really « cool », all snobby, like Lila. The other thinks they're « tough ». Big deal. I'm not going to bother with any of them.

4TH DAY

This morning, after math and science, we had midmorning snack as usual in the social room. Clear plastic trays with our milk and cookies came up on a conveyor, just the way they do with our regular meals in the cafeteria. But the social room is different. Not so sterile. It's the most brightly decorated of all the rooms, with bright blue, orange, and yellow leathery couches and arm chairs. The floor is blue, white, and orange squares. Tables for four are white or yellow with blue molded plastic chairs. There are magazine tables, shelves with word games – every single game here is a learning game. Uncle Norman always tells me that learning is fun, like a game. The furniture is arranged in groups of four, like a couch with two chairs on either side and a low table in front, lamp tables on either side of the couch. Everyone loves this room because it's sort of like a special living room for kids, all comfortable and cozy for talking, but the kind that a grown-up wouldn't go into a fit over when you mess it up. I mean, it's just not messable. It's relaxing. No fancy breakable ashtrays or candy dishes or plastic flowers. No prickly cushions to spill stuff on. It's funny – I never spill a thing on washable things. But just sit me on one of those velvety couches and – forget it.

I was sitting at a table with Marcia and a girl named Lenore, who is just the opposite of Marcia in looks, all fine baby ringlets and pale skin sort of sickly looking with worried blue eyes and blue smudges under her eyes. And Karl. He has sort of a thin face with a sharp nose and reddish hair, and he always looks as though he's just been crying or is just about to cry. He has a kind of studious look, but I think that's only because of his glasses. I think he's kind of nervous. He's always tapping his foot. Marcia told me I could have her cookie if I wanted it. If you want an extra anything, that's the only way you can get it because we have this very careful diet with everything measured out just right, and everything balanced, to make us grow, but not too much in the sideways direction, which is my problem. Anyway, it's like a sort of gift when anyone gives you an extra goody, like a cookie or fruit or ice cream. Those are the only sweet things we get. I've never seen a candy bar here. Whoever is running this place is making sure we have healthy minds in healthy bodies. *Mens sana in corpore sano*, we learned in Latin. Well, when Marcia offered me her cookies, I was glad. Not just glad because I wanted another cookie. Glad because it meant she liked me and that made me happy because I certainly couldn't tell from the number of words she's said to me or the number of times she's looked at me. That's the worst part of this place. Sometimes Marcia makes me feel as though I had leprosy. Anyway, after she gave me the cookie, I said, «Thanks a lot. Are you sure you don't want it?» And she said, «I want you to have it». Then I said, «Let's go halves», and she smiled as we tried carefully to break it in exact halves. It's not that easy to break an oatmeal cookie evenly. One half was bigger than the other, so we tried to even the pieces up by breaking off bits of the big piece and I tried to arrange them, jigsaw puzzle style, to measure the evenness, and I guess I was doing it seriously because suddenly Marcia laughed out loud. Everyone in the room turned around to look at her, and she got all red in the face, and I said, looking at her and then Lenore and Karl, «Aren't you supposed to laugh here?» And she looked down, saying nothing, and Lenore said, very softly, «It's just that nobody does».

I looked at each one, and they looked from one to the other and then I said, «How did we get here?»

They gave me that old business of just shrugging and looking bored. Then I started to get annoyed. «Don't you care?» And they gave me a look to indicate I was talking too loud. «Don't you want to get out and see your parents again?»

For a long while they didn't answer, just sat with their eyes looking down. Then Lenore said, very softly so that I could hardly hear her, «There are a few kids trying to escape».

«What do you mean?»

« Some kids are trying to figure out how to get out of here ».

I looked at them one by one and saw how strange their eyes looked. It was the first time, honestly, the first time, I realized that maybe it wasn't that easy to get out.

« Haven't you ever noticed », Karl whispered, leaning forward, almost putting his face in mine, « that all the windows and doors in this place face the center courtyards ? There are no windows or doors leading to the outside of the buildings. *There is no way out* ».

5TH DAY

All day today I felt sick and frightened. Somehow, I guess I didn't really think about it, or I didn't *want* to realize that we're imprisoned here. I've been so excited by all the different things we've been learning, and so relieved to be rid of those teachers we have with their mean remarks. I miss a couple of them, like Miss Sweeney and Mrs. Goldman, because they like kids. And I guess, in a way, I don't mind having a vacation from my parents. And I'm glad to be rid of that snobby Lila Lowenthal for a change. But I didn't think we'd be here forever. I mean, I just accepted being here for now, and that's all. I think kids get sort of used to not asking questions. There are so many questions our parents don't answer, and so many things they make us do without asking us if we want to do them, places they take us that we don't want to go, like when we have to go shopping, or to the dentist, or a museum, or a concert, or when we have to visit *relatives*. Mine are always asking me how's school, and why are my feet so big, and how's the budding author, and when am I getting married, and dumb stuff like that. Kids learn to turn off. I mean, you couldn't stand life if you stayed awake and listened and paid attention all the time. So, lots of times kids learn how to sort of go along with everything and look as though they're paying attention, but they just turn off until it's over. And I guess that's what I was doing here. I was just here, and in a little while I assumed I'd be back home with my parents and my brother Muffy, and the dogs, and visiting Uncle Norman and having good talks with him and listening to him talk with Mom about his Ph.D. thesis. But now that I realize I can't get away, I have the worst case of homesickness, even worse than my first year at camp when Muffy was small. I miss Muffy a lot, Mom and Dad, too, and Uncle Norman, but Muffy more than anyone because he was always the first one to greet me at the door when I came home from school. He got home first because his school is nearer, and he always had some question to ask me the minute I came home. It was usually something Mom couldn't answer that she'd tell him to ask me. One day he asked me, «Evvy, do birds like bubble gum?» That was a long time ago. He was only four then, and he was so cute and worried. He's one of those kids who likes to give little presents and surprises, all wrapped up in his grubby little gift papers that he saves. I suppose he wanted to know about the bubble gum because he was planning to put some out for the birds. I really like that kid. But he's a real pest too, sometimes, especially now with his little-boy vulgarities, and teasing me about my «protrusions». He loves to use big words. One day his third-grade teacher gave the smart kids a whole bunch of hard words they were supposed to use in a sentence. One of the words was «paraphernalia», and Muffy's sentence was, «The man died of paraphernalia». My father laughed so hard he got all red and started to choke. I'd give anything to see Muffy again. And the dogs, Nelson and Blue, I miss them too. But not Lila. All we ever did was fight, even though we were supposed to be «best» friends. But she was always bragging that their car was bigger than ours and had more buttons and stuff to push, and they had more grass around their house, and her mother dressed better than mine and had richer friends, and her father was in a better business and made more money. I don't know why I keep on being her friend. It's hard to shake someone.

Tonight, I climbed into bed a few minutes before everyone else because I felt so tired and sad. I tried to ask Marcia about the kids who are trying to get out, but she just shook her head as if to say she didn't want to talk about it.

Now – what do I do? I really took a good look at the place today as we walked around, and when we were outside in the recreation yard. It's just the way Karl said. The recreation yards are the central courtyards; there are two of them, one inside of each building, and then a sort of garden between the buildings. All the doors and windows lead out to one of the courts or the garden. *There is not a single door or window to the outside.* The passageway seems to go around the whole building, but

one side is just plain wall, except for the air vents, and the other side has doors leading to the rooms. I don't know what to do. Maybe I'll just keep on the lookout to try to figure out which kids are trying to get out. I asked Lenore and Marcia during milk time this morning if they wanted to leave, and Marcia said, after a long while, yes and no. She said that in way she likes it here because it's so easy. You hardly have to think, and you just keep doing things, and the days go by. And she really doesn't want to go back because her mother is one of those people who's always annoyed with everything. And she makes Marcia practice piano for one whole hour after dinner every single night. And when her mother isn't there, her older sister, who is a mean thing, makes her practice. Lenore says she likes it better here because there are lots of kids around. At home, she's always alone because when she comes home from school the apartment is empty and she has to wait until her parents come home from work at 6:00, and she always hears strange sounds. Karl didn't say anything, but I noticed his eyes kept getting red around the rims, and his Adam's apple kept bobbing up and down. But he didn't say a word, just listened, his eyes going from one to the other.

I don't think I have much more time for writing now, so I can't describe the cafeteria. The blue lights will start to blink, but I just want to say that I kind of wonder why I'm here. I mean, if most of the kids here are unhappy at home, what am I doing here? I'm not what you'd consider someone altogether unhappy. Oh, I have little fights with Mom about how messy my room is and leaving my stuff all over the house and forgetting to gather the trash on garbage collection day and eating too many cookies before dinner. I guess the worst part is when she tells me I'm lazy because I don't do my homework until the last minute, and I stay up too late writing in my notebooks. My Mom thinks it's a joke that I want to be a writer. It's not fair. And my father calls me Louisa May Alcott and Virginia Woolf, and whenever I get in one of my moods, he starts to sing «Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf». he gets mad at me because of my marks in Math. And sometimes, I really think he likes my brother better. He laughs when Muff interrupts with his questions and when he spills stuff on the table. But me! I'm supposed to be perfect at all times. Uncle Norman explained to me – he's a school psychologist – that it's because I'm older and my father expects more of me. But all that stuff, I don't really think you'd call that an unhappy home life. That's just *normal unhappiness*. At least, I think most kids have complaints like that, or something like that. Especially us artistic kids whose parents want us to grow up like ordinary people and make money.

I think the kids here are the same as they are everywhere else. All the snobs stick together so they can look down on everyone else. The tough kids, and the ones who think they're tough, stay to themselves.

Today, in the library, I heard strange sorts of whirring, clicking noises. It was the weirdest thing, like the sound of a movie camera. I sort of think I've heard it before without really noticing it. I don't know if the other kids noticed it, and when I looked around, I couldn't tell where it was coming from because it stopped.

There goes the blue light.

6TH DAY

Every day is different, except that we always have math and science first thing. Also we have reading and composition every day. But the rest of the subjects are sprinkled around and we just follow the schedule on the TV bulletin, and watch to see what period we're supposed to be going to. Today we saw a film on earth science, and we learned how the cycle of life works. It really is kind of miraculous how everything works together, like a big orchestra. For instance, there are bugs that lay their eggs in dead trees. Then a fly with a funny name that I can't remember comes along and lays its eggs in the bug's larvae. And then a bird called a pileated woodpecker hears the noises of all this activity going on inside the tree and starts pecking away at the dead tree until it gets pecked to pieces and the tree just crumbles to the ground and the bits of bark start to mingle with the earth. The voice over the speaker told us it takes one thousand years to form *one inch* of soil. A thousand years! It's kind of hard to imagine it takes that long. Anything like that is almost impossible for me to imagine because it's so far from hours and days and years measurements that I know about. I remember a drawing in one of my Uncle Norman's books that shows a bird sharpening its beak on a huge mountaintop, and the caption says that the little bird comes once every *thousand years* to sharpen its beak on top of that mountain. And when the whole mountain is worn down from the bird coming for sharpening – well – that's how long eternity is. I looked at that drawing for the longest time, and every time we go to Uncle Norman's I go to the little room where he keeps his books and look at that drawing and I still can't get that idea of time through my head. My Uncle Norman has jillions of books.

My Mom's always telling him he should get married already, but he laughs at her and says he can't afford a wife until he finishes his Ph.D. thesis. Mom says he cooks like a French chef. But every time we go to Uncle Norman's for dinner, my parents get into a fight afterward. My father always says Uncle Norman's cooking gives him indigestion, and my Mom says that's because it's gourmet cooking. And my father laughs and says, «So how come he's not married if he's such a good cook». That's one of my father's favorite jokes. As a matter of fact, Uncle Norman's not being married is the big joke of the family. Dad always calls him Mom's baby brother. «So, your baby brother is coming to dinner tonight?» Uncle Norman is thirty-two, but Mom thinks of him as her baby brother. I mean, she was six years old when he was born so she always felt much older. But I don't see anything wrong with being thirty-two and not married. It's better than being thirty-two and divorced. Besides, I think my uncle is very fussy about girls. I really like him.

Whenever we have to take a test, the voice instructs us to open the monitor door; sometimes the monitors open like drawers and there is a stack of sheets, each with a name on it. The monitor doors never open until we get instructions, and then a purple light on the door lights up and we get our tests. Just because there's nobody here to watch us and look at us with bulging eyes, accusing us of cheating and making us feel like criminals, nobody ever cheats! The tests are all different: multiple choice, true and false, fill-in, essays, comparisons, stuff like that. When we finish our tests, we're supposed to put them all back on the shelf behind the monitor door. As soon as they're all on the shelf and the monitor door is closed, the purple light goes off and the door locks. Every classroom has the same system, and we get our papers back the same way. When the purple light goes on on the monitor, it's the signal that we can open it. Our papers are always corrected. Not like in school, where the teachers sometimes forget to give them back, or give them back with the mistakes uncorrected. These are all carefully corrected by someone who is really trying to help us learn.

All our mistakes are marked with a dark brown felt marker, and when we need to have something explained, the explanation is there. We never have grades on our

papers, but there's always some criticism along with some praise so we don't feel stupid the way some teachers make us feel. I think some teachers take delight in making slashes and corrections with red markers. Maybe it's because so many teachers have had unhappy childhoods. That's what my Uncle Norman says. He explained to me that many people teach because it makes them feel important and as though they know a lot, but they really don't. A lot of teachers at our school are really smart, but I think Miss Zabriski just puts on that she knows all about math. She always stands there looking at what she wrote on the board and then she erases it, fast, before we catch her. That's why she's so mean. When you don't really know what you're talking about, it makes you irritable. And when you're stupid, like some of the teachers are, you have to make the kids feel even stupider. Anyway, who cares about fractions? I don't even think they're important.

Today we saw a movie in color about how to handle animals. There was a little black scruffy dog in the picture, and I remembered Nelson and the way he hops around when I come home from school, trying not to jump up on me. Daddy says we have to teach him it's wrong to jump on people, and he'll never learn if he's allowed to jump on some and not others. I just wish I could feel Nelson's wet nose on my cheek. Sometimes at night he jumps up on my bed and curls himself into a sort of doughnut, with his nose buried under his tail. He's so cute and happy, but he knows Mom will chase him; you can tell by the way he keeps his eyes all closed and pretend-sleeping, listening for Mom's step so he can jump off before she chases him.

Tomorrow, I'm going to try to find out more about the kids who plan to escape. I seem to be in with Marcia, Lenore, and Karl. I don't much like the snobby kids, and most of the tough kids are boring. My Uncle Norman says the biggest waste is to spend time with trivial people.

7TH DAY

I want to describe the cafeteria, but first I have to tell about the escape kids. I think I know which ones they are. The leader seems to be the black girl named Drucy. I think that's how to spell it. It's short for Drucilla, she told me. She and the kids who are always with her were talking together during outdoor recreation period. They were standing near the highclimbing apparatus, and I was up there pretending not to listen, but as I came down, Drucy said, not really looking at me, « Little pitchers have big ears ». That was a strange thing to say. My grandmother used to say that when I was small, and Drucy sounded so old when she said it, squinting her eyes like an old woman. I was embarrassed and decided to ask her if she and the other kids were trying to get out. I had my mouth open to speak when she put her finger to her lips, shifting her eyes from side to side, just as though she thought we were being watched. I nodded and jumped down, but when I stood near her, she looked at me and shook her head, giving me a funny look as if to say, « We don't want you ». The others looked at one another, sort of scared, but with sneaky, guilty little smiles on their faces. Then Drucy said to me, « You'll want to stay out of trouble », and gave me a shove. « Better do your exercise someplace else ».

So, I just walked off. I noticed Marcia and Lenore watching out of the corners of their eyes, pretending to be absorbed in something. I felt so uncomfortable being watched that way. Whenever I feel someone watching me, I start to walk stiffly, like a puppet ; my arms and legs feel as though they'd been put on backward. It was very silent, and everyone seemed to be watching me. I think that's what makes me uncomfortable here, the air of silence. Nobody answers questions, and everyone is watching everyone else. Drucy and those other kids acted almost as though they were being observed by some great eye. Maybe there is some sort of apparatus here, like the gadgets they have in department stores to catch pickpockets and those people who are always grabbing things off counters, the kleptomaniacs, I think you call them. But I don't see anything that looks like a peephole or a beam or anything like that.

Anyway, later, Marcia and I were in the showers and I asked her, keeping my voice very low, looking over at Drucy, « Is she the one ? » And Marcia nodded.

There are twenty-four kids here, twelve boys and twelve girls. I really don't know most of them. Usually we have our classes together, but sometimes we are instructed to split and go into separate rooms even though we have the same thing in each room. I can't figure out why, except that some classes go better with a smaller group, I guess, and it tells on the TV screen which kids go to which room. When we do that, the kids seem more friendly. I mean, lots of times some kids are nasty just when they're with other kids and giggle together. Today, one of the kids from the snobby group, Ginny, actually talked to me. But when she's with Vera and Sue and those stupid boys, they act as though I had bad breath.

Every night before bed we shower. We take all our clothes off, put them down the laundry chute on our way to the showers, put on disposable slippers, and stand in the individual tile stalls where we shower. Foamy soap comes out of a dispenser. We soap ourselves, then turn on the shower, which comes out of the walls of the tile stall, to rinse us off. Each of us has a huge bath towel to dry off. Then, clean P.J.'s. I really like to look at the way my name is lettered : EVELYN B. CHESTNUT. But hardly anyone ever calls me Evelyn. Mostly Evvy. My little brother, Muffy, likes to tease me sometimes and call me Lady Evelinda. Then I call him Lord Marvinsky because his name is really Marvin. Lila Lowenthal, that stuck-up thing, signs her letters « Lila La Rue ». What a name. I told her *rue* means « street » in French and it's not a good name, « Lila the street ». Then she pooches her mouth at me and calls me « Evelyn Big-Chest Nut ». She's very mean. If she were here now, she'd be giggling with Ginny and Vera and Sue.

I wonder how our things get washed and folded so perfectly. And who marks our papers? Who sends supplies on the conveyor? Who does the cooking? That's a whole other thing I have to describe, how we eat and what we eat and all that. And I have to tell about the library and where we keep our books and where we study.

Some of the kids here are smart, and some aren't – just the way it always is. The ones who are good in one thing aren't so good in another. Without any teachers to talk about and complain about, we don't have much to say. Kids don't talk about anything except teachers, parents, or one another, and the stuff they watch on T.V. Except, of course, the ones who like to exchange the latest research on the facts of life. I found out that two of the kids who trail around after Drucy most of the time are named Stanley and Rhoda. Sort of creepy types who look at one another first before they answer a question, and who are always looking around as though they thought someone was following them. I think they're kind of stupid, and I don't understand why Drucy lets them hang around her. There's another one named Joel, but he sort of floats from group to group. He has a long neck and his hair is clipped very closely. He acts very superior.

I want to describe the cafeteria, but the blue light is blinking.

8TH DAY

Today, we saw a film on Leonardo da Vinci. What a relief after that whole hour we had on osmosis! Leonardo knew how to do absolutely everything. He was fantastic. I liked the early parts where they showed how lonely he was when he was young and how he became so interested in nature and wanted to examine everything. He was so curious about what people looked like on the inside that he could just cut them open and start looking. I mean after they were dead, of course. He'd been talking to a nice old guy, very old, about a hundred years old, and while he was talking to him in the hospital, the old man died. Leonardo just had to find out how he died such a «sweet death», so he cut him open to look inside. That was in the fifteenth century, so in those days people didn't really know what you looked like on the inside. In a way, we're all the same on the inside. I mean everything like our lungs and heart and stomach and intestines are arranged pretty much the same way so that everything will work right. But on the outside of us, we're all different. And where is that part of us that makes us be different from one another, that makes us talk differently and think and act differently and like to do different things and want to study different subjects? Where is that part of us?

Leonardo was very secretive, and he didn't want people peeking in all his notebooks to see what he wrote, so he wrote backward. But that's no big deal because all you need is a mirror to read it. I heard about one man a long time ago who wrote his diary in code. I wish I could make up a code, but it would take me too long to write what I have to write.

I'm getting used to the food. I guess because I'm hungry, so I have to eat it. That's what my father always tells my Mom when I won't eat what she cooks for dinner. «She'll get hungry. Then she'll eat». He always asks how many Oreos I had when I came home from school and gets mad and tells me I'm being sinful when I don't finish what's on my plate, and I should think of all the starving people in the world. He gives me a pain with that line. It doesn't make any sense to me. Just because I eat what's on my plate doesn't suddenly provide the starving people with food. And if I don't finish what's on my plate, it doesn't make them starve more. Actually, my father should take the food that I can't eat and bring it to the starving people. Anyway, here, the food is what Mom calls «Good-for-You». No French fries, soda, Hershey bars, and stuff like that. For dinner, for instance, we'll have tomato juice, broiled chicken, baked potato, green beans; and for dessert we have fresh fruit, oatmeal cookies, ice cream, or pudding. And a glass of milk. Our evening snack in the social room is milk with cookies or a dish of pudding or a bag of nuts. No Oreos, no Yodels, no Devil Dogs. Maybe I'll get nice and skinny here.

Today, Drucy passed me in the cafeteria as we brought our dirty trays to put them in the monitor. She sort of nudged me with her elbow, and I looked up and she winked at me with a tiny sly smile. «Don't you wonder who keeps this place so nice and clean?» she whispered.

«Yeah. Who does?»

«Not me», she said, very snippy like. «I'm not going to be anybody's maid».

Now, what made her say that? Is she trying to get me mad? Or is she trying to be friendly so I can join her little group. I can't figure out what she means. Drucy is very tall and thin and beautiful, with a long thin neck like a model and she walks very straight and proud; softly, like a dancer. She has a grown-up, important way about her that's really sort of frightening. She looks at me as though I had done something wrong and sometimes makes me feel uncomfortable.

The cafeteria is enormous. Very bright. It's always spotless, and all the windows face the courtyard. Everything is clean and shining. The tables are white, chairs different-color molded plastic, and when we come in for meals, everything is in perfect order. The floor is blue and white, very large squares. The way the food comes up is the way the

luggage comes up at the airport. We take our trays and sit at one of the tables for four. Sometimes we push a couple of the tables together, but when we come back in the cafeteria again, they're always back the way they were, in perfect order. The door to the cafeteria doesn't open until it's mealtime. Then, the purple light goes on over the door, and we can open it. The rest of the time, it's locked. There are never any sounds of people in there when the door is locked. That's what's so weird – all the stuff here, everything, is so neat, so just right, it's not even real. I mean the whole place isn't like anything in a real world. Sometimes, I feel as though at night, when we're asleep, automatons emerge and somebody pushes a button and then a motor starts them cleaning and tidying.

We had tuna fish salad for lunch today. Drucy came over to sit with us – Marcia and Lenore and Karl and me. And then Rhoda and Stanley, and Joel, of course. They didn't say much, but Drucy was talking about one-celled animals, of all things. She said, « They don't have any brains. What good are they ? »

Rhoda burst out laughing and said they didn't need any, and then Stanley decided he'd better laugh too. Drucy gave them one of her annoyed looks. Then she went on. « Did you ever think about flies and mosquitoes ? What good are they ? Just like one-celled animals. What's the purpose ? »

I'd never thought about that. Karl looked very serious and thoughtful, rubbing his fingers on his forehead. Then he asked, « Does everything have to have a purpose ? »

Drucy said, « If it doesn't, how can you believe in God ? » And Karl said, « What's that got to do with it ? »

Drucy smirked and insisted that if there's a God he's wise and all-knowing, and he wouldn't make stupid things like flies and mosquitoes and one-celled animals.

That stopped all of us. I'd never even thought of anything like that. You never know what to expect of Drucy. She's really smart. All the while, Joel was sitting there, not saying a word. He gave Drucy a sort of superior look and told her she shouldn't say things like that if she doesn't know what she talking about. « Scientists probably know the answer », he said. « For instance, birds eat insects. Did you ever think of that ? It's all part of the cycle of life », he said importantly.

I could see that Drucy was annoyed. She just tossed her head and wouldn't talk anymore. Some of the stuff we learn in science is interesting, but most of the time it's a big pain. Who cares about binary fission ? Anyway, all that laboratory stuff is like cooking, and I hate the cleaning-up part.

9TH DAY

Last night, for dinner, we had ALL vegetables. Eggplant, all yucky with tomatoes and cheese, green beans, carrots, salad. Milk and rice pudding with raisins. Yuck! I thought I'd throw up when I took a look at that tray. But I ate it anyway. I was so starving it wasn't as bad as I thought it would be.

After dinner we had another hour of study. The TV instructor said to read our literature assignment and make notes on the story. It was «The pearl» by John Steinbeck, and we're supposed to be prepared to write an essay and answer questions about the symbolism of the pearl on a test tomorrow. Usually, each night, we have about an hour of study after dinner; it's generally easy study, like reading or something like that. Math and hard things we have to do earlier. Then, after study hour – I still haven't described our library and desks – we see a movie. Even the movie is related to learning. Nothing just plain funny or scary. Except the other night we saw a movie called *The turn of the screw*, a really creepy story of two kids in a big fancy mansion in England. A new governess comes to work, and the kids scare her half to death. The kids have a way of communicating with the ghosts of the last butler and governess who worked there, and the kids sort of take directions from the ghosts. It's as though the kids are possessed by devils. You can't really figure out if it's the kids or the governess who's off their rocker. The test we had on that movie was all about what we thought it meant to be «possessed». I think it means when you don't really belong to yourself and you let other people possess you – tell you what to do.

I talked with Marcia and Lenore and Karl about how everything here is scheduled and how there isn't anything like goofing off. Karl said he likes it just the way it is because he has the feeling that he's really learning. And then we talked about the way kids are, most of the time, *not* wanting to learn, and trying to get away with doing as little as possible, and putting off doing their work, and bragging that they never cracked a book. And Karl says that's the way it is in lots of schools, if you try to study and get good marks and seem interested in learning, then everyone calls you a «grind» and makes fun of you, and threatens you if you don't give them the answers. He said when he grows up he really wants to be something, like a scientist or a doctor. He said his father is unhappy because he never got to be anything much. He never finished school, and now he hates himself because he hates his job as a shoe salesman and he's always fighting with Karl's mother because she works the cash register in a cafeteria and his father thinks she's always meeting men. So his father drinks to forget his sorrows. Karl says he wants to be something better than that, and the only way to be anything is to learn as much as you can when you're young, and to be smart so you can get a scholarship. Marcia says she likes it here because she's glad to be rid of her mother and her sister, and also she likes not having to decide anything. And Lenore says she loves how clean everything is and not ever having to be alone. I told them that I wanted to be a writer, and Karl asked me what I'd write, would it be in the newspaper or in books. And then I got to thinking that I really don't know. I mean, I just think I'll be a writer and I don't care where my writing will be published. It doesn't really matter, in a way. I just want everyone to read it. Mrs. Goldman, my English teacher, thought my long story called «The land of summer» was terrific, and she gave me an A+, even though she said it was way too long and she thought the Board of Education ought to raise her salary for reading all of it. Thirty-seven hand-written pages! That was my best one so far. It was all about a beautiful land, sort of like Bermuda, or the way I imagine Bermuda, where there are always beautiful flowers and it's always summer, but only because it is the will of the Ruling Goddess. And then she falls in love with a man who comes up out of the sea, but she knows if she marries him he will take away her powers and the land of summer will turn cold. I really worked hard on that story, and it took me forever to copy it

over without mistakes, in good handwriting, to show Mrs. Goldman. She always reads what I write.

But my mother doesn't think I should be a writer. She thinks that writers die of starvation. She tells me to be a teacher because teachers make «good money» and get the whole summer off for vacation and have to work only part of the day, and get all the holidays and a week at Christmas and another week at Easter. Never mind if I don't want to be a teacher. I guess a lot of teachers are teaching because their mothers told them they'd get «good money» and good vacations. Not the ones like Mrs. Goldman and Miss Sweeney. But the ones who are always putting on a movie or something called «Audio-Visual teaching». That's when they go and have a cigarette in the teachers' room, and goof off, as Muffy would say.

I really miss Muffy. Sometimes I think about when we used to just lie down in the living room or in the family room next to the kitchen, on the afternoons when Mom was late coming home from her volunteer work or her art lecture. We'd put our feet up on the couch and eat cupcakes and put records on and talk about make-believe places. Muffy always has the best ideas for special magic machines that transport you to other planets, and gadgets that do miraculous things like special walls with pictures of the past, or life on other galaxies, or chairs you sit on that change you into anyone in the world you want to be. Sometimes when Muffy would start to explain one of his inventions, he'd get so excited and carried away that he'd start jumping up and down like a wild man. Whatever place Muffy invented with me, he'd insist it had no school, but it was always a place where you could swim all the time, or it had a giant olympic swimming pool. He says he'll be a swimming champ when he grows up, and he's always doing things to improve his muscles. He was the best boy swimmer in his age group at camp last summer. Even though he's small for his age, he's fast. It was Muffy who got me going on the idea for «The land of summer». He had good inventions for the marble palace of the Ruling Goddess. You'd push a button and tables would be set and filled with marvelous cakes and ice cream. Whole walls had TV screens with movies, and there were vents to blow out odors to fit the movie. And everyone wore shoes that had hidden ball bearings you could pop out so you could slide from one end of the palace to the other. The trouble with that story was I had to name the goddess Lila because the minute Lila Lowenthal heard about the story, she had to become the main character or she'd never talk to me again. Even so, it's my best story so far. I liked «The far-away girl», about the girl who could wish herself anyplace just by skipping and then she'd get there. But that one was sort of childish, and much too short. Mrs. Goldman told me she liked it better than «The land of summer», because it was easier on her eyesight. Only seventeen pages, and it had fewer characters. But she was smiling when she said it, and smoothed my hair with her hand the way she does when her eyes get gentle.

What's funny here is that no one speaks of home very much. But the kids hardly talk to one another much anyway. Karl always turns away when I say anything except when he's in the mood to talk, and Lenore and Marcia get a funny look, as though they had stomachaches. Most of the other kids, except for Drucy, look right past me, as though I didn't exist. I think being here makes you get sort of «stoned». I mean everyone seems sort of spaced-out to me. Except Drucy. She's always giving me these sly looks. And this morning, I noticed her and the others over in one corner of the cafeteria. They were looking down at something on the floor, all close together, whispering, but the second they saw me watching, they poked one another and walked away. Now, what was that all about? Things like that make me feel uncomfortable and a little scared. I start to wonder what they know that I don't know, or whether there's something everyone knows except me. Then I feel so stupid and small. There's something about Drucy I don't understand. I don't know what it is. It's like being with a very important grown-up person and you don't want to say the wrong thing. She always seems so sure of herself, so – I don't know – not like a child. She's more like a grown-up who knows everything and never is wondering if she's doing the right thing or worrying about what people think of her.

In the cafeteria, when they saw me watching them, I felt so dumb I wished I could have sunk through the floor. The worst part of it was the way Rhoda and Stanley copied the way Drucy looked at me.

Now, I don't know what I'm going to do because I have the feeling something is going on and I want to know, but I don't know how to find out. I don't dare ask any of the other kids, and I won't ask Drucy.

I have to stop now because the blue light is blinking. It's almost as bad as my other telling me to turn my light out. I wish I could write in the dark. Well, anyway, here you don't have to worry about oversleeping and being late for school. They make such a big deal about that at my school, and you have to bring like a whole document to explain what happened.

10TH DAY

Tonight we saw a film called *Daisy Miller*. I'm not so sure I liked the main character. I mean, she was pretty and all that, but I didn't really think she was so innocent and sweet and pure. She seemed kind of spoiled to me, and wanted to do just what *she* wanted and wouldn't listen to anyone. That's why she died in the end. It makes me wonder: when is «doing your own thing» being a free spirit, and when is it being just plain spoiled and willful?

In a way, Daisy reminded me of Lila a little – so impressed with herself and pushing people around. But Lila's worse. She's always telling me about her mother's fancy friends, and bragging that her father is higher class because he's a professional man. But my father told me that people in the real estate business are all crooks. When I told that to Lila, she didn't talk to me for a whole week.

I saw Drucy and her shadows hanging around the same corner in the cafeteria again, so when we had social hour I went over to her and said, right out, but keeping my voice very low, «Do you think they want to keep us here forever?»

She looked at me. Boy, she can give you the most piercing look. And she didn't say a thing for the longest time. Then she said, very sinister, «Who is *they*?»

That really stopped me. «Whoever put us here».

«Do you know who it is?»

«No».

«Do you know why we're here?»

«No».

«Do you want to get out?»

«Sometimes yes, and sometimes no».

«There!» she said with a big smile. «That's it. As long as you feel that way, you may as well stay. You can't do anything when you feel half-and-half about it. The only ones who really want to get out are me, Rhoda, Stanley, and Joel. We have a club. But we don't need any new members. Especially "yes-and-no" members. Get it?»

«In other words, when I say just plain "yes", I can join?»

She nodded, and walked off. Drucy doesn't seem to want to be friends with anyone. It's easy to see why she doesn't like the snobby crowd, but I don't think she really likes Rhoda and Stanley. Joel is one of those kids I can't figure out. He's smart, but he wishes he were tough, even though he isn't. Most kids seem to feel more comfortable when they belong to a group. But if they get in with the wrong kids and try to act like them, it doesn't work. That's being «possessed».

I went over to where Marcia, Lenore, and Karl were sitting. Marcia was looking at me very strangely. «Why were you talking to Drucy?» she asked me.

I laughed and told her she sounded just like my friend Lila Lowenthal who wants to have me all to herself and can't stand it if she sees me even *talking* to another friend. Then I told Marcia that I only wanted to find out about Drucy's escape crew.

«What did she say?»

«She told me that when I really wanted to get out of here, I could join them».

«What did she mean by that?»

«Well, she said lots of the kids sort of halfway wanted to go, and halfway didn't».

Then Karl asked me, «Why do you want to leave? It's much better here. Everything here is easy. We can learn all we want to learn and nobody bugs you or makes fun of you for studying hard, and there are no grown-ups fighting and screaming at one another».

I looked at Karl, wondering how awful I'd feel if I had a father who came home unhappy and drunk, fighting with my mother, and I felt kind of sorry I couldn't invite Karl to live with us. My mother and father fight, but they make jokes even when

they're fighting. Then I realized I couldn't invite him to live with us because I didn't live there anymore anyway.

Lenore said, « But there are grown-ups here. You can tell. We may not see them, but grown-ups run this place. They're all around us ».

« The grown-ups are "they". »

« What does that mean ? » Marcia asked, looking at me suspiciously.

« Well, we're always talking about "they". But who are "*they*" ? That's what Drucy asked me ».

« Yeah, » Marcia said, « but the thing is, whoever "they" are, you never see them. And they don't bug you. So what happens ? Everything runs perfectly. Nobody is bad. Everybody does his work. Everything is fine. It's the grown-ups who make us do dumb things because they're the ones who are so critical. They get on our nerves. They're just *expecting* us to be bad. That's the whole thing. You kind of have this feeling sometimes that if you don't do something bad, they'll be disappointed. My mother is always on my neck, calling me lazy and selfish and ungrateful and stupid and why am I not as smart as my big sister. She *makes* me bad. I just hate her. And I don't care if I never see her again ».

I didn't say a word. That was the whole thing. I mean, that's why most of the kids are half-and-half about leaving. It really *is* easier here without grown-ups bugging us. The kids are pretty good. But something isn't right, and I don't know what it is.

There are a lot of questions I wish someone would answer. Who planned this place ? Who keeps it all gleaming and clean ? Sometimes I feel as though I'm living in the future. Who plans the school program, cooks the food, washes our clothes ? Who are the voices on the TV instructors ? Why are the doors locked ? Why is it built with windows looking only on the courtyard ? Where are « they » ? They could be anyplace they want to be because we're usually all in one place at a time. I mean, where are *they* when we're seeing the evening film, for instance, or when we're having meals in the cafeteria ? We can't get out of the cafeteria until the purple light goes on.

Suppose I tried to stay in the bathroom, for instance, when it's time for the evening film. What would happen ?

11TH DAY

Today, I found a note from Drucy under my pillow when I was smoothing my bed. It said, «The door is always locked when we are in a room».

Why did she write that ?

I noticed Marcia looking over at me as I was reading it, and when I glanced at her she looked away. She is a strange, silent girl, very emotional, I think.

I felt very uneasy all day. Drucy keeps watching me. And that creepy Rhoda who follows her around like a shadow. She looks sort of like a wild gypsy and hardly ever talks. I don't think Drucy even likes her. When we were in the cafeteria, I walked next to Drucy and asked her what she meant by that note.

« Can't you read ? »

« Yes, but I wish you'd explain it so I'm sure ».

« Well, just try to get out of here, now ! Get it ! We are locked in. Wherever we are, we are locked in ! Do you get that ? We are always locked in ».

I walked away feeling pretty stupid. Well, I made up my mind to do what I said I'd do – try to stay in the bathroom. But I have to admit, I'm a little scared to do it alone, scared of what I might run into. But I wouldn't dare to ask Marcia or Lenore or Karl. Besides, whatever we do here, we do it all together. I'm afraid everyone would notice if I stayed behind. How can I work it that I stay in the girls' room while they all go to see the film ?

I feel very tired tonight.

12TH DAY

This morning there was another note under my pillow. I tried to read it without Marcia noticing. But I know she saw me. It said, «Don't try it». That's all it said. Of course it was from Drucy. I tried all day to find a chance to talk with her, but she was slippery and kept avoiding me, so it was no use. After that, I was too scared to do what I had planned. I was afraid that maybe Drucy had already tried it and knew what would happen. When we went to the film, I saw Drucy looking around to be sure I was there, and when she saw me come in she smiled, a little pleased smile, and nodded. She keeps her eye on me. But at the moment, I'm feeling very lonely. Drucy keeps a watch on me, and so does her shadow, Rhoda. Marcia told me she didn't want to talk to me if I joined Drucy and her escape group.

«Why not?»

She shrugged and said it would be like a betrayal.

«Betrayal of what?»

«Of us».

«Who is "us"?»

«All of us who want to stay».

«I don't understand you. It isn't as though we belong to something...»

«That's not it, Ev. It's not a club or a special group in that sense. It's just that all of us, all of us here, except Drucy and her followers, feel a certain way about ever going back. This is *it*. This is better. And we feel a sort of loyalty to this way – to us. It's like joining a party. And if you don't feel this way – well – then – I guess you just don't».

I wasn't sure exactly what she meant. «Marcia, I don't know what "this way" is. I don't even know what the meaning of this whole place is».

Just then three other kids came over and sat down with us, kids from the snobby crowd: Ginny, Vera, and Frank. Whenever Ginny is alone she's friendly, but with the others, she shows off; she's kind of mean, ganging up against someone. Vera is the same way. She's blond and pretty and very vain. My Uncle Norman calls that type «an empty vase». They all sat grinning at us, and then Frank said, «What are you brainy kids up to?»

Marcia gave me a warning look, pulling her eyebrows down to look very stern. Frank smirked at me and said, «Don't get mixed up with Drucy. She's up to no good».

«How do you know?» I asked him.

«Oh, you can tell, the way she glides around here with her head in the air, not talking to anyone».

«I don't think you can tell anything, Frank». I gave him a very cold look, and he shrugged, waited for a few minutes, then gave a kind of signal to the others and they got up and walked away. I went on talking to Marcia as though they hadn't ever been with us.

«Well, anyway, I don't know what I'm going to do. I mean, I'm not joining Drucy – not yet, I guess. I just wish I could understand why we're here and how long we're supposed to stay. And, why are we imprisoned?»

«I don't feel as though I'm imprisoned».

«Marcia, don't you understand? We can't get out of here. There are no doors or windows except those facing the courtyards. We can't see anyplace but this place. The hallways are passageways around the building, with solid walls on one side, doors into the rooms on the other. There is absolutely no way of escape. When you can't get out of a place, you're a prisoner».

Marcia looked at me and shook her head. «Evvy, I was more of a prisoner at home where I could have walked out of the door any time I wanted to. But I couldn't really escape. Kids can't do that. I mean, where was I supposed to go? No money. No place to live. Oh, I know there are kids who have done it, the ones who disappear

and then their parents are searching all over for them. But who wants to get into that kind of mess? Terrible things have happened to those kids because in order to get along they have to take up with anyone. That's not for me. I'm not sleeping with rats in somebody's basement. *Here*, we're safe. We have everything we want. Everything we could possibly need. And we're learning all the time. Every minute of the day is filled with interesting stuff. We get good things to eat. There are no grown-ups to bug us and criticize us and make us feel dumb and useless. No big sisters to tease us and look down on us. No teachers to scare the daylights out of us. No chores to do. What more could you want? »

Maybe Marcia is right. After all, what more do I want? I have everything here. I don't have to clean up my room. The food is okay, once you get used to it. And really, who cares about Caravelle bars and Oreos. And Muffy is really a pest, the way he puts his grubby fingers all over my things and makes fun of my poetry. No mother to bug me about doing my homework and telling me not to be such a good-for-nothing dreamer. No father to tease me with his dumb jokes about Virginia Woolf. I don't have to visit relatives or write thank-you notes for their presents. I don't even have to fight with Lila Lowenthal about who is richer or more talented. I'm learning more than I ever learned in school. I don't have to wait my turn for the bathroom. And when I'm in there, nobody is banging on the door telling me to hurry up. And nobody forever yelling at me to turn my light out.

13TH DAY

If you ask me, I think math is the stupidist thing in the world. I can't stand those problems that go : « George and Harry have to fill twenty sacks of potatoes in two days ». « George and Harry are going to California ; one is traveling by plane and stopping in Chicago », and on and on about how many hours and how many potatoes, and it's all so useless. I'm just sick and tired of George and Harry and their potatoes.

And another thing I can't stand is *Johnny Tremain*. Who cares about a boy who lived so long ago ? Well – now maybe that's a dumb thing to say. I mean, if you read about people living way back, you learn that they've always had troubles, even before drugs and television. I suppose that's why we have to learn history. But I could do without having to memorize dates. That's really a drag.

We had something fantastic today – drawing. A painting was shown on the big TV wall-instructor. A voice talked about space and forms and how there has to be a relationship between forms within a given space ; the proportion of shapes along with darks and lights also function to balance spatial forms in relationship to one another. At the same time that the voice was talking, we saw different paintings, some were modern and some were very old. They showed the painting in color ; next to it, in black and white, the painting was reduced to the basic forms as they related to one another. It was the same as the painting, but just plain shapes. All the while they showed the painting with the black-and-white spatial arrangement, music was playing in the background as the voice pointed out what we were to observe. Then the voice said that music also uses a mathematical principal of harmony of relationships of sounds and chords. I'm not sure I'm explaining it because I'm not sure I understand it all, but it made sense while I was looking and listening. After that, we had to use some plastic blocks that had been taped together and placed on trays. They came up on the monitor, and we were to make a spatial arrangement with the blocks and then a drawing of them with charcoal.

Drucy kept looking over at me and winking and then she came over and asked me in a whisper if I'd decided to join her and the other kids. I said I didn't think so, not now. And she looked annoyed and asked me why not. And I told her I decided maybe it wasn't so bad here. Why leave ?

« But we're prisoners ! »

« I realize that, but that depends on how you look at it. I don't really feel like a prisoner ».

« We can't get out, can we ? »

« Not that I know of ».

« Well, that means it's a prison, doesn't it ? »

« Yes, if you want to see it that way ».

She looked at me, annoyed, sort of exasperated, and I was beginning to think that maybe what she wanted to do was to get as many kids on her escape crew as possible so that she would at least have a chance in numbers. « Tell me, Drucy », I said, « have you ever really tried to get out ? »

At first she didn't answer, and I kept watching her until, almost reluctantly, she nodded.

« And what happened ? »

« All I can say is, don't try it. That's why I warned you in my note ».

« I'm not planning to now, but why not ? »

« Because something funny happened, and it was awful ».

« Really funny ? What do you mean ? »

« I mean weird. I just can't explain it ».

« Why not ? »

« I just can't. That's all. But I warn you, don't try it ».

« Well, you're making me so curious, maybe I *will* try ».

She leaned closer to me and whispered, «I tried one night to stay in the toilet while the kids were at the evening movie. You know how private those cylinders are where they have the toilet seats. Well, I stayed in one and waited for the kids to leave, hoping they wouldn't notice I wasn't with them until the door to the auditorium was locked. I figured I'd slip around and try to do some investigating – see who's around while we're in the auditorium».

She looked around her to be sure no one was listening. The kids were gathering their blocks and triangles and beginning to put their drawings in the monitor. I saw Ginny and Vera watching us.

«What happened?»

«I'm not sure, Ev. I smelled something funny in the air – it was sort of familiar, only worse than anything I've ever smelled before, sort of sickening like sweaty old sneakers, and it made me want to throw up. But then when I tried to move, I swear, I couldn't move».

«You actually couldn't move?»

«It was like in a dream, when your legs are so heavy they feel paralyzed».

I looked at her and I could tell she wasn't making it up. «For how long?»

She shook her head. «I don't know. It was crazy, like being put to sleep standing up with my eyes open. And when I came to my senses, there I was, in the cylinder, and I could hear the kids and then it was time for going to bed and I joined them».

«Did any of the kids notice?»

«Yeah. A couple of them asked what happened, and I said I was in the girl's room and that was that. Boy, was I scared!»

«Then why do you keep trying to escape. I mean, if that happened, aren't you afraid something worse would happen?»

«Evvy, it made me boiling mad. I figure maybe if I can get enough kids with me that it couldn't happen to all of us».

«But you don't really know».

«I guess I don't».

«Drucy, do you like it here?»

«It's not bad. Some parts of it are even pretty good».

«Then why don't you want to stay?»

«I just don't like the idea».

«The idea of what?»

«Of being kept in a place I can't get out of. Living where everything seems unreal».

«Do you like it here better than at home?»

«Yeah. In some ways».

«Then why leave?»

«I told you this is a prison. I don't like prisons. I don't like being controlled».

«Look at it this way. You like it here. You don't like it at home. Why not stay and enjoy it?»

«I guess it gives me the creeps to be here. I don't understand why I'm here, or how I got here. I feel as though I'm being used for some kind of a... experiment. Besides, I hate prisons». She was thoughtful for a few seconds, then added quietly, «I visited my brother in a prison. Do you know what it's like?»

«No. But I think I can imagine».

«Well, you can't. You just can't». And she walked off. She was angry with me.

Ginny and Vera came over then. I wish I wouldn't feel so uncomfortable with those two. Whenever they're together, they're like Siamese twins, like glued to each other for support. Ginny said, «What were you talking about with Drucy?» She looked at me with those turned-up cat's eyes and I asked her why she wanted to know. She smiled, looking very superior, and slid her eyes around to glance at Vera. Then Vera said, «You don't have to be friends with her». I told them I'd be friends with anyone I liked.

One good thing about this place is we all wear practically the exact same thing so nobody is looking you up and down to examine your wardrobe.

14TH DAY

This afternoon we had drama. The class started out with a lecture on the structure of a play and all about something called Aristotelian theory and unity of time, place, and action. I bet old Lila Lowenthal, the great actress, never even heard of that! She's always telling me she's going to be an actress. What a joke! With that high, skinny behind of hers, she looks more like a giraffe.

Anyway, after the lecture about theory they showed a play called *A doll's house*, by Henrik Ibsen. I knew about that play because Uncle Norman told me. It's not about a real doll's house. It's about a woman named Nora whose husband is a conceited jerk and he treats her as though she were an idiot child. He calls her his «skylark» and orders her around just to make himself feel big. Finally, in the end, Nora realizes she's been nothing but his doll and she just walks out. That was a hundred years ago, way before women's lib. It was a good play, but I think there was too much talking.

I wonder if Ibsen was a good speller. I think grown-ups make too much fuss about spelling and it doesn't matter one bit if you don't know how to spell.

I can't remember if I described the recreation yards. We have to wear play clothes for all outdoor periods. It's a one-piece zip-in thing, like a jump suit. The boys wear the same thing. They're very loose and comfortable and easy to get in and out of, and if you don't want to wear anything underneath it doesn't matter. They're all different colors and we wear them only one time and then put them down the laundry chute. There are many different colors, and when they come up clean I always try to get a red one because that's my favorite color. Sometimes I get a bright blue, and I like that too. But I hate it when the only one left is forest green or brown. There are two recreation yards – the central courtyards of the two buildings. The other yard between the two buildings is the garden, and is for walking or sitting and talking. I have figured out the whole place now, and I'm trying to draw a good diagram of where everything is. The boys usually stay in what we call «their» courtyard, even though they're exactly the same. We both have a baseball diamond marked off, tennis courts, and all sorts of stuff, every kind of apparatus, jump ropes, balls, badminton, basketballs, climbing apparatus, acrobatic stuff, and a trampoline built into the ground. Usually we have two gym periods a day.

Today, Drucy wouldn't even look at me.

I've been thinking a lot about what we talked about, and really, I'm not so altogether positive that I do want to stay here. I mean, even though I like it and all the stuff we learn is good and the way everything is run, and no grown-ups and teachers and no Lila Lowenthal showing off and so on. Even so, it's not exactly *normal*. I can't describe it. For one thing, it's really weird that we never know what time it is. Except that each day runs like a clock so we sort of fit into that idea. The other thing is the way the kids are all so quiet. Hardly anyone talks, they don't even get annoyed with each other. And every once in a while, I almost wish I could hear my mother yelling at me, or my father and Uncle Saul talking loud at each other at the dinner table. And I wish I could talk with my Uncle Norman. He's the greatest one to talk to. I can tell him about almost anything, like things my mother just doesn't understand. Once when I was supposed to be Persephone in the spring play and I was all excited because I was going to dance in a kind of floaty chiffon thing, the teacher changed her mind and decided to give the part to Elaine Brodsky because her marks were better than mine. She's so fat and clumsy and I was so mad I thought I was going to commit suicide. Uncle Norman knew just how I felt, and he said the teacher was wrong and the part should have been given for ability because it had nothing to do with marks. My mother's always taking sides with the teacher, but Uncle Norman really knows what it's like to be a kid. He seems to know everything, but sometimes I'm not sure all of his ideas are so good. I like it when he tells me about them anyway.

Today, Drucy smiled at me and winked and at the same time she kind of glanced over at Stanley and Joel who were sitting at another table at lunch. I noticed they're hardly ever with her now. Mostly they're with the boys, and I think it's because they got tired of being bossed around. Anyway, I think they were just with Drucy for the fun of it, to see what she was going to do. They don't really want to escape. Or maybe – they're planning to try something on their own.

15TH DAY

Another note under my pillow. It said, «Do you want to stay here FOREVER ? » That was all. Marcia saw me read it and she said, «Evvy», and looked at me with those sad gray eyes. «I hope you don't leave».

I told her I didn't think I would – at least not right away, but that I'd been thinking it over a lot and when you really think it over carefully, this isn't exactly the place you'd want to spend your whole life.

«As far as I'm concerned, it's great. Nobody picks on me here, or makes me feel stupid».

I didn't know how to answer. It's okay for her. But sometimes, like last night before I fell asleep, I remembered a lot of the good things about being home. Like when just Uncle Norman comes for dinner, without our having to have Uncle Saul and Aunt Bertie. He and my mother talk a lot about his ideas and about his Ph.D. thesis that he writes all the time. And my father listens and smokes his cigar and squints his eyes at the smoke, and sometimes when Uncle Norman and Mom get going on big words, Daddy makes his eyes get very big and he looks at Muffy and wags his head back and forth like a dummy to pretend he's so surprised at such words.

Sometimes Aunt Bertie and Uncle Saul come too, and then my father gets all tense and there's almost always a fight between Uncle Saul and my father, waving their cigars at each other about the stock market. Aunt Bertie always talks to me as though she were sorry for me, with that funny crooning voice some adults put on for kids to make the kids feel all small and dumb. She has one kid, my cousin Steve, and my Uncle Norman says he's a mess because Bertie doesn't know the first thing about kids. She just cares about herself and her social life. I hardly ever have seen Steve, anyway, so I can't tell. He used to go to a fancy prep school away someplace in New Jersey, and then he was in a fancy college, and then he disappeared. My Mom said Aunt Bertie couldn't stand having Steve around so she used to send him away to school, and in summer she'd send him to camp. Now, they don't know where he is, but they're afraid he's become a Jesus freak. Whenever Aunt Bertie sits down in our chairs, she does it carefully, as though she were afraid of getting her dress dirty.

But that's only the worst part. Family arguments, I mean. And, in a way, I kind of miss those too. Everybody here is so quiet, so – kind of *unalive*. And I miss Muffy. The other night in bed I was remembering him and his collection of odd facts, the things you couldn't imagine anyone would care about, and the way he memorizes all those nutty statistics. He can tell you about the woman who has the tiniest waist measurement, and the man with the biggest feet on record, and the person who had the hiccups for the longest time, and what the fattest man eats every day. Stuff like that. He gets it all out of a paperback book Uncle Norman brought one time, and Muffy just pores over that grubby book, all soft and gray from him looking at it for hours, studying it. He lies on the floor on his stomach, his face all frowned up, and then all of a sudden, he shouts out, all excited, «Hey, want to know how long the longest time is that anyone stayed under water ? » And whatever I'm doing, I have to stop and hear about it. And the other thing I remembered was how Muffy named our dogs. It was after he read some book that told the names of George Washington's favorite horses – Nelson and Blue. Muffy was so nuts about those names that he made us change the dogs' names. Muffy said our dogs were so marvelous they should have special names. All dogs were called «Prince» and «Spots» and we should call ours by special names. Mom said it would make the dogs neurotic to change their names, so Muffy told her he once read someplace that dogs don't really know their names, that is, they can't hear anything except the vowel sound and that's what they respond to. And also, the sound of your voice. So, whenever Muff gets like that, all serious about a fact he thinks he knows, Mom always laughs and says to him, «All right, Professor». So, we all agreed to remember to call Prince, Nelson, and to call Spots,

Blue. I told him the vowels weren't the same, but that didn't bother Muff. It was very confusing at first, but Muffy kept correcting us and he'd try to train the dogs, calling them over and over by their new names until he drove us all nuts. What's so funny is that Prince, I mean Nelson, looks sort of like a small shaggy, dusty gray mop, and he has these dark, round little eyes, and when Muffy would keep saying to him, «Here, Nelson!» the poor little dog just sat looking at him, his head tilted to one side, his dark little eyes so serious, wondering what Muffy was talking about. Blue is skinny, with very flat smooth fur and jumpy and happy and frisky. And when someone asks us «Why do you call him "Blue"? He's not blue», Muffy explains seriously that he's named after one of George Washington's favorite horses.

Muffy got on that George Washington kick after our trip to Washington and Mount Vernon. Uncle Norman is always telling Mom it's good to stimulate the minds of young people by exposing them to the reality of every aspect of life, to let them «taste the world» is the way Uncle Norman puts it. So, that put the bug in Mom's head. She and Uncle Norman were talking about kids learning all about the foundations of our country. My father was ready to hit the ceiling because he gets annoyed at Uncle Norman, sometimes, and all his theories. My father tells my mother, all the time, «Your brother Norman should only have as much money as he has theories. Then we'd all be rich». But I really miss my Uncle Norman.

Today, I heard Drucy telling Rhoda to flake off, and then Joel came over and said to Drucy, «You think you're big stuff, don't you?» Drucy didn't answer, she just smiled, sort of calm and amused, and then walked away, holding herself straight. It's the first time I heard anybody say anything like that to anybody here. Rhoda and Joel started to whisper, and I heard Rhoda say, «She knows something she won't tell».

16TH DAY

Today was really wild. Now, I'm all confused and excited, and I don't have much time to write. But I'll try to get it all down. Drucy hasn't been talking to me much. Just kind of watching me and giving me the eye. But this morning, at breakfast, she said, very softly – I could hardly hear her – sort of in a teasing way, with a funny smile, « Have you ever noticed us over in the corner of the cafeteria ? » I nodded, and she said, « Well, when you get the chance, try to notice the floor over there. But make sure nobody is watching you ».

Well, that had me all curious. I couldn't figure out a way to do it without being obvious and having Marcia ask me what are you doing and all that. At lunch I couldn't go prancing around that spot, but I kept looking over there and trying to figure out how to wander over. Finally, at dinner, I had the chance, and just sort of casually wandered over. It was very strange. At first, I didn't see what she was talking about. I mean, the floor is made up of just those very large linoleum squares, very big ones. Alternating dark blue and white, like a giant checkerboard. And then, when I leaned down and looked more closely, I saw a slight space between one square and another, like a crack. Then, when I put my foot on it, it felt loose, ever so slightly, like a loose board ! Boy, I was scared. I guess I expected a hand to reach up and grab me. I walked away, and my heart was thumping and thumping. It looked to me as though the whole square had a crack around it, as though the whole thing could lift right out ! Like a trap door, I mean ! Just like those creepy TV stories. I wanted so much to talk with someone about it, to try to get over being scared. And I was so excited. But I didn't dare say a word to anyone. Then, tonight, at the movie, I went over to Drucy and asked her what was that square supposed to be. And all she said was, « Wouldn't you like to know ! » Then she didn't say anything, but I could tell, the way her face looked, that she wasn't being mean. Later, in the midst of the movie, she whispered, « You're smart, Evvy. Don't tell anyone about it yet ».

17TH DAY

Except for Drucy, I haven't talked to a single soul about my discovery. Now that I've looked at it again, and stepped on it, I'm sure it's what I think it is. I can't figure out why Drucy told me to look there, and *then* refused to talk about it. But that's the way Drucy is. I wonder why nobody else has found it. Now that I know it's there, it seems so obvious to me. Did Drucy lead me there just to tease me with the idea that there may be a way out. I don't know.

Anyway, I had a long talk with Marcia today. It's the most she's ever talked with me. She told me about how her life is at home. Her mother is one of those «busy» ladies who gets all involved in charity and social stuff and bridge parties and she's never home when Marcia comes home from school. The maid is always there, a sort of stupid girl who likes to listen to awful music and watches soap operas and reads the most disgusting magazines all full of evil things, and Marcia can't stand her because she's so dumb and vain. When Marcia's mother comes home she's all tired out and irritable from being pleasant and charming to her friends and from helping the world. Then she yells at Marcia for not doing her homework. Marcia says her sister Felice is the same way, all smiles and charm when company comes and full of bright and witty remarks. But at the dinner table with just the family she scarcely bothers to talk. Marcia says her father usually comes home late, eats dinner without saying a word to anyone, reads the paper afterward while he smokes his cigar. And that's it.

Just imagine it. I'd go nutty. I know lots of times my father bothers me with his dumb jokes about my writing and how they're going to have to move out if I keep filling up the house with so many notebooks. And he's always telling me I'll never make a nickel and I should go to secretarial school so I can earn my living while I study for something important like law. And things like that. But at least he talks to me, and even when he teases me about being a writer, he smiles and I know he likes me. And when he read my long story «The land of summer», he kept shaking his head as though he couldn't believe it, and telling Mom I had a real imagination and maybe I should write for TV. Maybe he doesn't like me as much as he likes Muffy, but I've kind of learned to put up with that. Marcia told me she thinks her father hates her because he wanted his second child to be a boy. Can you imagine that! It's not her fault that she turned out to be a girl. It made me wonder how it is for most kids. I mean, most of us get annoyed with our parents because they're bossy and say «no» most of the time to everything we really want. And the unfair thing is that they expect us to get good marks, and to help at home, and to take music lessons, and practice, AND keep our rooms as neat as a filing cabinet. And in addition to all that, they expect us to do great things in school so that they can see our name in the school paper for being in a play or giving a speech. It's only because they want to brag to their friends and all the relatives. And *then*, after all that, they have the nerve to tell us how much *they* do for us. Honestly, it's exhausting to be a kid!

Well, I guess that's just the way they are. But even though I get mad at Mom sometimes, I never hate her. I don't see how you can live with anyone you hate. And Muff – oh, he's a pest, like most boys, and what makes me furious is when he pokes around my writing and looks in my notebooks. I still haven't found a place to hide them that he hasn't discovered. Once I thought I had found the most terrific place – in the bottom of my bathroom hamper that I'm supposed to empty once a week. Muff never found them there. And then, one Thursday we had that new cleaning lady who took all the stuff out of my hamper and then she asked my mother was she supposed to wash them books with the laundry, or separate. My Mom thought that was so funny she told everyone! And once when Muff got hold of my poetry notebook he started to read my long poem about «The winding river», ALOUD to his friends. I really hated him that day. I hated him for hours. But he's a good kid and he's always wanting to share his good stuff with me, like when he has a Yodel or a

Caravelle bar or jelly beans, he always makes sure I have half. Then he tells me, when I thank him a lot, that brothers are supposed to take care of their sisters. That's what my father tells him. But I never noticed that my father takes care of Aunt Bertie, even though she *is* his sister.

When we went into the cafeteria tonight, Drucy and I thought we could smell something funny, sort of like cigar smoke. Could that be our imagination? Nobody else seemed to notice it, so we didn't say anything. Every time I glance over in the direction of where that loose block is, I get all goose bumps and my heart starts to thunder.

18TH DAY

We saw a film on how they make violins. Honestly, the things I've never even thought about! I mean, who ever bothered to think about how a violin was made. They always sort of seemed attached to the violinist's arm. But all sorts of things are terribly important, like the varnish that's used and stuff you'd think wouldn't matter at all. The reason the very old instruments sound better is supposed to be because of the varnish. They told us all sorts of things like how the viols were the ancestors of violins, and after describing how they're made, we saw a whole chamber orchestra play. Twenty-two people all playing at one time, sawing away, keeping together! I counted them. Tomorrow we're supposed to learn about harpsichords.

In the cafeteria I went over to the place again and sort of casually walked over the square. It moved, ever so slightly, and the crack was barely visible. I think that either the whole square lifts out, or there might be hidden hinges. But that's all I could tell. I didn't want to be too obvious. Drucy was watching me. I really don't know what to do. She won't tell me anything, and I don't dare tell Marcia and Lenore and Karl. Lenore said today she's never going to leave, and Karl said he wouldn't either. I can't make up my mind. Just when I start to miss Muffy and get to thinking about my Mom and how sometimes she's really nice, I remember Lila Lowenthal. While I'm here, I can forget about her. And the other thing I remember is Miss Zabriski telling me how dumb I am in arithmetic. So, when I start remembering them, and the big fights whenever Aunt Bertie and Uncle Saul come over, then I decide maybe I'll wait to make up my mind. They leave you alone here. No one calls you lazy or stupid. No one tells you to work harder, to be more helpful, or neater, or to stop dawdling, or to stop chewing gum, or to stop eating cookies before dinner. Sometimes, I really wonder how any kid could feel good about himself with parents and teachers, everyone, telling us how no-good we are. Nobody ever thinks about telling us we're okay, or that we do something *right*. Even some of the librarians look at us as though we're all culprits ready to rip up all the books. It's awful to have to feel guilty all the time, because if you're not doing something wrong, they're waiting for you to. Honestly, sometimes I think I'm getting an inferiority complex. And with Lila bragging all over the place, telling me I'm a second-class citizen, well, it doesn't help. I figured out that I used to like Lila because I was impressed by her. I was sort of proud to have a friend who was rich. In the first place, she isn't really rich, she just puts on to be rich. In the second place, she's not really a friend. I mean, nobody who tries to make you feel like a poor relation is a true friend. Her mother looks at me as though I were on welfare. What a snob she is! She always smells of stale perfume.

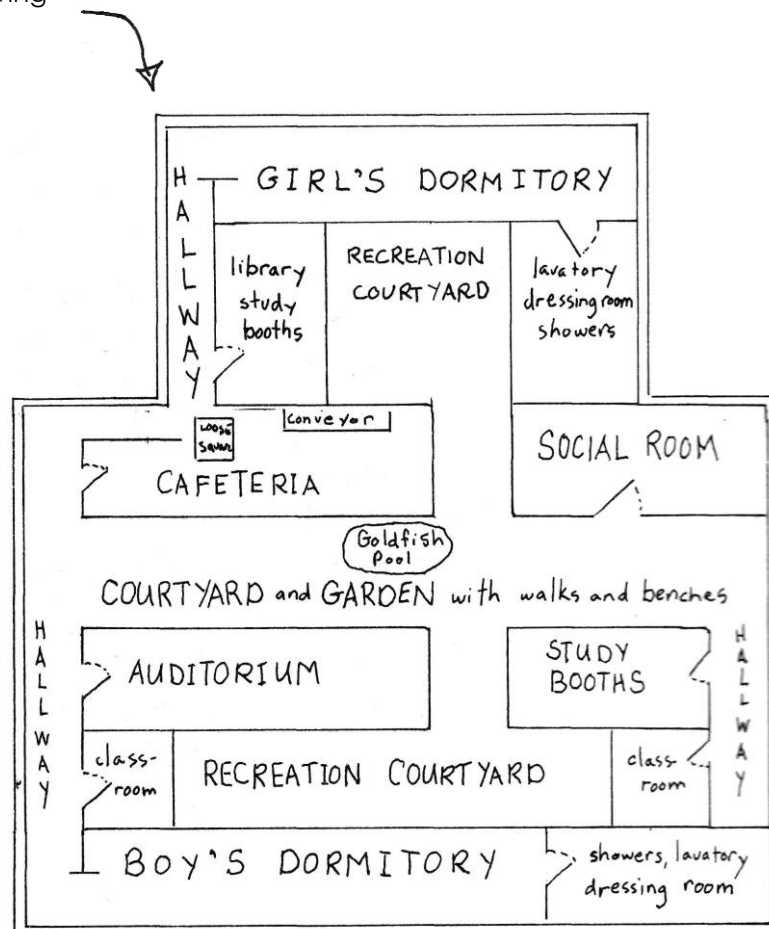
I want to make a drawing of this place, like a map, just in case I need it. That big square must lift out and lead someplace.

19TH DAY

I finally figured out the construction of this place, and after a lot of work, I've drawn a plan of it. I may not have everything exactly right according to scale, but it's very difficult to do this sort of thing. I mean, I get kind of mixed up when I'm actually *in* the place and not flying over it. It's hard to get the exact proportions. I'd have to take a yardstick and measure each room to get the whole drawing perfect. But I think I have a good general picture. It's very cleverly worked out. The boys' dorm and showers are on one side of one building; ours are on the other side of the other building. Everything is spacious, light, comfortable. Even the chairs in the library are terrific, sort of contour jobs that exactly fit your fanny. And they don't have any rough edges. It's kind of like the world of the future. We each have our own little study booth where we can keep our books and notebooks and stuff. In addition to the study booths in the library, there is another study room in the other building. Two classrooms are in the other building. I love to walk through the big garden that separates the two buildings. I just love that courtyard. It's like a miniature park with neatly clipped shrubbery, and paths with beautiful flowers. And there are benches to sit on, and a small pool in the center with goldfish and water lilies. It's my favorite place because it reminds me of pictures of palace gardens. Whoever designed this place really wanted everything beautiful. When I'm sitting in that garden, reading, I never want to leave this place.

Drucy gets me mad. She's so - I don't know - so secretive. I know she's up to something. But no one dares to speak up. There's something funny here that makes everyone kind of quiet. Not at ease. As though we were being watched.

Here's my drawing



20TH DAY

There was an undercurrent today. Something brewing, and for the first time I realized that Drucy has been trying to pass the word around that she's planning to have a meeting. First of all, everyone seemed more tense and quiet. I couldn't figure out why. Then Karl, at social hour, said to me, « Are you going ? » kind of under his breath.

« Going where ? »

« To the meeting ? »

« What meeting ? »

« Drucy's ».

Well, that stopped me completely. In the first place, we're always together anyway. I mean there's nothing to « go » to. We're already there. « What do you mean, Karl ? Since when did Drucy decide to have a meeting ? »

« Haven't you heard ? I thought Marcia told you. Drucy's been passing the word around that she's having a meeting in the courtyard during recreation period ».

« What kind of a meeting ? »

Karl shrugged and clammed up because just then Marcia and Lenore came over to sit with us. We all felt uncomfortable, and kind of looked away from one another and didn't say anything for a while. I felt exactly the way I used to feel at home when Uncle Norman would come into the room as Aunt Bertie was whispering to Mom about some « gorgeous girl » she wanted to introduce him to. Everyone would be quiet, and Uncle Norman would look at them, kind of guilty because he knew they'd been talking about him. He hated it when they bothered him about getting married. Especially when they'd tell him he'd be bald already before he'd find a girl.

Anyway, I could tell Marcia and Lenore knew what we'd been talking about. We were all eating apples, and they sat for a few minutes looking at their apples and then Marcia took a loud bite of her apple and started chewing noisily. The whole room seemed so still and tense, and I had the feeling we were being watched. It was so tense in that room that I wanted to jump out of my skin. But I didn't dare say anything.

During study hour I was so worried I couldn't concentrate. That's the first time that's happened here. Whenever we're in the library I feel sort of like a cow in my stall. I mean, we're all lined up in these little booths, sitting at our desks with our backs facing the passage way. And we can't see another because we're each inside a partition. Uncle Norman always used to tell me that one of the many problems in classrooms and study halls is distractions. Kids somehow keep each other from learning. He always tells me learning is one of life's greatest pleasures, one of life's gifts. He thinks it's the greatest sin to deny that gift. I always like it when he talks that way because he gets such a nice light in his eyes, like sparkles inside his eyes. My father tells me I'm a big dreamer like my Uncle Norman, but I don't see anything wrong in being like him. My father says Uncle Norman will never be rich because he's a dreamer. But we're not rich either. Uncle Saul is. He imports and exports things and makes all kinds of money so Aunt Bertie can wear very showy jewelry. Uncle Norman can't stand her.

I hope I find out more about the meeting tomorrow.

21ST DAY

Drucy sat next to me at the movie, something she hardly ever does, and asked me, not looking at me, if I'd heard about the meeting. I told her not really.

«What does that mean, "not really"? Either you did or you didn't».

«I mean, I just heard you wanted to have a meeting, but I didn't hear why or when or anything about it».

«The kids are being very careful because – well – remember I told you about what happened to me in the bathroom that time I tried to hide to see if I could find out what goes on? Well, it turns out, I wasn't the only one who's tried. A few of the kids have had that happen».

Then she didn't say anything and just looked at me with her important look, her head lifted slightly, her eyes kind of measuring me, waiting. Somehow, that scared me half to death. I don't know why, but I just couldn't stand the thought of anything like that happening to me. «How do you know?»

«It got around after I started to talk about having a meeting to plan an escape. One of the kids told me what happened to him and how he was trying to figure the place out and if there was a way out».

«That's just one kid. Who was it?»

«Well, several told me. I don't want to tell their names».

«Do you think it would happen to all of us if we have a meeting?»

The movie had started, and the kids were telling us to keep quiet. Drucy just shrugged in answer to my question. Then she glanced around out of the sides of her eyes. «If it does, I have another plan».

22ND DAY

The whole place is beginning to give me the creeps. I can scarcely enjoy the good stuff we're learning – especially today when we had a terrific class in art history. They were telling all about the French Impressionists and how they started to paint in a different way because they began to see a different way. That is, they tried to paint the way something *looked* to them, their own immediate impression, instead of trying to make the scene or object look exactly real in every detail. And they became interested in the importance of light and how light moved and vibrated and how colors are changed by light and shadow. They started to paint in France. A painter named Monet did a painting of the sunrise called *Impression* way back in 1863, and then a group of painters began to paint that way. But the crazy thing is that at first the critics thought they were terrible, mostly, I guess because they didn't understand what the artists were trying to do. But then after some more painters began to paint that way, musicians, I mean composers, and poets tried that same technique in music and poetry. The idea was, partly, that whoever was listening to the music or reading the poetry or looking at the painting had to – in a way – participate because the artist was suggesting ideas.

I think that's terrific.

Anyway, Drucy was trying to get the word around that tomorrow she'll try to have the meeting during recreation period. The word kept going around all day, and after I had heard that bit of news several times, I found a note under my pillow tonight saying that the meeting is cancelled! I looked up at Marcia and she smiled and nodded, and when I asked her why, she shrugged. Now I'm getting all curious and wondering what's happening. Last night, I had the most horrible dream. I'm not sure I can remember all of it, but we were walking around in a kind of labyrinth, Drucy and I, banging on doors that wouldn't open, running back and forth, losing each other, calling to one another and not finding each other. Then I got into a panic and thought I'd never get out and I'd be running along those passageways for the rest of my whole life. And then I saw, lined up along the passage, all the kids, perfectly lined up like soldiers, with their heads all facing the same direction and their eyes just staring. And then a red light started to blink and all the kids lifted one foot up and then put it down.

I woke up all perspired, my heart thumping, and I couldn't get back to sleep, but just lay in the dark all tired and groggy as though I'd been drugged, listening to the kids breathing, wondering if I'd be here for the rest of my life and never see Muffy again or Mom and Dad. I thought about Uncle Norman and how much fun it is to go to the movies with him and Muff and have sodas after, while we talked about the movie. And the crazy thing is, I began to think about Lila Lowenthal and how we used to sit in her living room after school, eating her mother's chewy gumdrops that she kept in a glass jar on the coffee table. Lila and I used to talk about how it would be when we were grown and married and she'd be a famous actress and I'd be a famous writer, and we'd both be interviewed on the same TV show. And then I remembered my English teacher, Mrs. Goldman, and how nice she is to me and how she always tells me I'm a born writer, and then I started to cry, for the first time in ages and ages.

Tomorrow, I'm going to try to talk with Drucy.

23RD DAY

Today we had the best class so far. It was poetry writing class, and I was so excited that I think if I had flapped my arms I would have flown around the room. First, the TV screen showed a poem that someone was reading aloud. The first poem was called «This is just to say», written by William Carlos Williams. It was supposed to be a confession by someone who ate some plums that were in the icebox even though he knew they were being saved. The poem ends with an apology, but he's not really sorry because the plums were so delicious.

After that, we were supposed to write our own poem about something we had done that we weren't supposed to do but were not really sorry about. I decided to write about something I *didn't* do and wasn't sorry about. Here's mine :

TO MY ARITHMETIC TEACHER

*Your high nose
Will sniff high
And strong
When you do not find my homework today.
Dear Miss Zabriski,
I know your eyes
Will squint in anger,
And
I beg your pardon, I guess.
But, tell me – Miss Z –
If you could write a poem,
Would you teach arithmetic ?*

The next poem the instructor read was called «God's grandeur», by Gerard Manley Hopkins. It was terrific ! It was all about how beautiful the world is. Here's mine :

SUMMER

*The sky stretches clean shining blue
Like freshly starched linen.
Sun bright-diamonds the leaves
Glittering green.
One daisy
Then another, and another, and – There !
Many others bend with wind's gentle command,
And I hear – so clear – bird song.*

The next poem was by Robert Herrick, a poet who wrote in the seventeenth century. It was called «Delight in disorder», and he told how he liked things better when they're not so perfect. Then we were supposed to write and tell how we feel about things that are all precision. This was my hardest poem to write. Mine has no title :

*Perfect rows
Are ice cubes
Locked in a tray.
Clean white walls
Have no music.
A day of perfect order
Is marble*

*With no laughter.
I am grin-creased.
And I know
That a lumpy old couch is best for jumping.*

That class was so much fun. Afterward, I wanted just to write and write one poem after another. I wanted to write about my room at home. My mother and father helped me paint it last summer. It's sort of pale apple green, and we found nice white curtains at the discount place. Even though my room is usually a mess, with half my clothes on my chair, and my books all over the place, it's the nicest room. On my desk I have a big photo of Uncle Norman and Muffy and me when we were at the beach. On the little table next to my bed I have my radio and my favorite books. I don't dare keep my latest notebook there. I have to keep that behind my record albums or in my drawer, under my sweaters. The old ones are locked up in my father's old suitcase in the back of my closet.

I suppose that's one good thing about this place. Nobody tries to look in my notebooks. And I can write all I want. That makes up for some of the stupid stuff we have, like today we had to learn about molds, of all things. The only thing we ever learned in biology that I thought was really great was about photosynthesis. I think that's fantastic. I even like that word. When I learn stuff like that, I think nature is better than anything. It's certainly a lot better than arithmetic. When I ask my Uncle Norman why I have to learn whole bunches of stuff I'm sure I'll never need to know, he gives me a whole serious lecture about being rounded and educated. Well, maybe. Still no further word about the meeting.

24TH DAY

Today it happened.

There was a dancing class for the first time. The TV instructor directed us to move chairs and desks to the side of the room. Then we started warm-ups, like bending, stretching, sitting on the floor and touching our foreheads to our knees. The sort of thing my Mom is always trying to do and telling me I should start doing now, while I'm young. But she always makes me feel self-conscious about it. I mean, I have a kind of broad beam and my stomach bulges a little, but the doctor always says everything will even up when I'm a little older. Anyway, the instructor's voice told us exactly what to do, and instead of an actual person on the screen, there was a figure drawing demonstrating the movements. We were all groaning and grunting, except for Drucy. She could do all the things easily. She just moved as though she were a flower in the wind, all easy. She's tall with a long neck and a long thin body, and she seemed to know we were all watching her, so her movements got better, and by just watching her and not the TV figure, we all found it easier. She had such a nice look on her face, very smooth and grown up and - I don't know how to describe it, but her eyes were quiet. Her face looked like someone who had just discovered something beautiful, or like a person remembering joy, all quiet and happy.

The class seemed to last for the usual amount of time, and we were all facing Drucy by the time the class ended and the red light started to blink. Drucy saw the light and looked at us sitting on the floor. We were all out of breath. The expression on her face suddenly changed, and her eyes got all deep and serious and you could tell she was going to say something important. So we sat very still, all expectant, and Drucy leaned forward and said in a loud whisper, «Listen kids. If we stick together, we can get out of here».

No one said a word. We just looked at one another, hardly moving our heads. I began to shake inside, wondering whether that stuff, whatever it was, would start to paralyze all of us. Then Drucy said, still talking in a loud whisper, «I have an idea. After dinner tonight.» She stopped. I remember the room was dead still as the kids leaned forward to hear her. That's when it happened! I can hardly describe it now without getting all sick and sweaty from the memory. The TV monitor wall started to flash a jillion bright blinking lights and colors, like a bad dream that makes you feel all dizzy. I remember a terrible noise, the shrill noise of metal scraping on metal, like the shrieking of the subway. And the smell! Oh it was awful. Like an outhouse. I don't even want to remember it.

I don't know how long it lasted. And nobody will talk about it now. I think it happened today, but we got so confused. Nobody knew how long we'd been sitting there with the noise and the smell and flashing lights. At some point, everything got quiet and the smell went away and the lights stopped and we just all got up to go to the next class. But everyone was very shaky, and we've all been extremely quiet. Hardly anyone is talking, even in the social room and the cafeteria, where mostly everyone talks a little. The place is just like a funeral parlor. Everyone is acting very obedient. Now, we know we're being watched every second.

25TH DAY

I don't know how to describe today. I mean, it was good as far as all the different things we're learning and all that. We had a movie about the origin of man. It was all about the recent discoveries that lead some scientists to believe man's ancestors may go back *three million years*. It made me realize, once again, the stuff I don't know anything about – as though it didn't exist at all. Things are going on all the time – *all over*. Sometimes I get to thinking about that. I mean, how right this very minute there's someone in the world who is getting a haircut, someone on a train, someone sick, someone having a baby – all over people doing things that I don't know about and they don't know about me.

Anyway, the movie was mostly diagrams and drawings of skulls and photos of anthropologists working in Africa. These scientists believe our ancestors were walking around *three million years ago*. How can I imagine that much time when I find it hard to imagine just back to my grandmother? I find it impossible to imagine back to the Civil War. Ancient Greece is supposed to be a little more than two thousand years ago, and that's forever! When you get to Ancient Egypt – forget it! Who can imagine such a space of time!

It made me think about Uncle Norman and how he gets a worried look on his face and rubs his beard and tells me how important it is for young people to be awakened to the wonderful world. Uncle Norman likes me to tell him about my school because he's writing this very important book that's been taking him years and years to write. All about his theories. It's called a dissertation, and he gets mad when my father asks him when he's going to finish it. But he likes to tell me about it and discuss his different ideas. It makes me feel grown up when he tells me, and then he asks me my opinion. I have to admit, even though I still think some of his ideas are great, I don't know if all of them are. I mean he really doesn't like teachers. But I like some of mine. And I know they work hard. Even the mean ones work hard. They have to stand up and talk all day and correct papers all night and plan for lessons. I suppose that makes some of them act mean. Especially when kids are mean.

Today, everything was kind of sad here, with all the kids acting tired as though they'd been drugged. It gives me a creepy feeling when I think I'm being watched. Especially when we don't know when that awful stuff will happen to make us get all shook up. Drucy hasn't said a word to anyone. She really looks mad. Sort of seething. I'm waiting to find out what her other plan is. Now she knows we can't all try to escape together. Most of the kids stay away from her, except for Rhoda who just hangs around. Today I saw Vera and Ginny sitting with Joel. I don't get it. He was never part of that crowd. They never let anyone in because they think they're so great. They're *not* great. They just make themselves think so by making fun of everyone else and looking down on everyone.

I'm very sleepy tonight, and I'm scared.

26TH DAY

Even though I write what day I think it is, I'm really not sure anymore. I'm not sure I've been keeping track. That experience has changed everything for me. I used to think I liked it here, but now I don't think I want to stay. I mean, I can't stand the idea of living with some unseen controller.

Today, we had another dancing class, and even though we still all watched Drucy, and not the TV screen, Drucy didn't seem to be so happy about it. But she was the best one and knew how to do all the movements. I asked her about that when we were out in the recreation yard, and she said that she wanted more than anything to be a dancer. She said she can do the things dancers do without any difficulty. She knew she'd be good if she only had lessons, but her family couldn't afford it. So I asked her if there was a scholarship for that sort of school, or some kind of fund. My Uncle Norman is always talking about stuff like that, like providing opportunities for talented young people who sometimes don't even know they're talented. It's another one of his favorite topics, and he's always telling my father that we ought to worry less about underdeveloped nations and look to our own young people in the United States who are never given a chance to develop their talents. Uncle Norman has a theory that crime rate would be reduced if there was more effort to develop and direct the abilities of young people. He calls it America's cultural impoverishment. He says he's writing about that in his book and also he says the other major cause of crime is TV. He gets all worked up because he says when they show news it's mostly violence and crime. My Uncle Norman has millions of good ideas. But I'm not so sure they're *all* good. Like my Mom says, he's not realistic. I know what she means.

Anyway, Drucy was all sad. I mean not only about the dancing, but about the escape, and I asked her what she planned to do. She looked at me in her scary way, measuring me with a kind of sharp look like an old lady who doesn't trust you. She looked at me for a long while and didn't say a single word. Just kept looking at me. Then she said, «Evvy, I have a plan and I'm going to need help. First, I've got to shake Rhoda. Understand?» I nodded, feeling kind of scared, wondering if whoever or whatever it is that watches us was going to start making Drucy and me sick and dizzy. But Drucy didn't seem to be afraid. She said, «I have to work it out», and then she narrowed her eyes, squinting off in a distance. «I'm not sure how it will work, but when I get it all planned, and get rid of Rhoda, I'll give you a sign».

I asked her what I could do to help in the meantime and she said, «Just be careful not to let anyone see us talking together too much».

Wow! What a creepy feeling that gave me. Like living behind the Iron Curtain. I think I'm beginning to imagine things. Like that smell of cigar smoke. And last night, I could swear I heard strange noises, like someone cleaning a floor – chairs scraping and things like that. Then, this morning, the cafeteria floor looked all polished to me.

27TH DAY

Things seem to be getting back to normal today. I mean, most of the kids seemed less groggy, and somehow, I didn't feel as sad. Maybe what Drucy said perked me up. But how is she going to shake Rhoda? She's one of those weird kids I never understand. Half the time I think she hates me, but I think she just acts that way with everyone. Sort of sullen and always looking a little guilty. And she talks in single syllables and has a way of making me feel uncomfortable. I don't think she's very smart. Her homework papers always come back filled with corrections and marks and comments. She's just not very happy and I don't know why, but I think she feels it's the whole world's fault. She trails Drucy like a shadow, and Drucy really kind of likes it. But she gets annoyed. I don't think she treats Rhoda very nicely, anyway.

This afternoon we had an interesting class. Sort of a lecture telling about some of the earliest women's libbers like Sappho who was a woman poet way back in Greece, six hundred years before Christ! She wrote beautiful love poems and was married to a rich man and she had a daughter. And then there was another woman writer, a Japanese woman named Lady Murasaki, who lived in the eleventh century. After her husband died, she worked for the emperor's court and she wrote a long novel, five volumes long. And another famous woman was Eleanor of Aquitaine who first married Louis VII of France, and then, just like that, she decided she didn't like him and married Henry II of England, who was about fourteen years younger than she was. Imagine a woman who decided she didn't like being married to one king and married another! That was in the twelfth century. And in the fifteenth century there was Christine de Pisan, another woman who was a writer. I wish my father were here so I could tell him about those lady writers. Christine wrote poems and lots of stuff and was one of the first women to earn her living by writing. (And my Mom is always telling me I'll starve if I'm a writer!) She was married when she was *fifteen years old*, and then when she was only about twenty-five, her husband died and there she was in France with three little children and she had to find some way to support them. I looked her up in the library after the class, but I didn't find much except something in the encyclopedia. No books by her or about her. But I think it's interesting that the women who did things, long ago, were usually writers. I wonder if that was because it was the easiest thing for a woman to do. I mean you could always be a writer even if you were pregnant or had babies to take care of because you didn't have to go anyplace or have any equipment. All you need to be a writer is a pencil and a piece of paper and something to lean on.

I like all the different things we learn, but I miss having teachers. Even the mean teachers who give me a pain. Because they look at you when they say things, and you can talk with them. And I miss it like when we have a class with my English teacher and we all get into a good discussion about a book or a story. We talk about the characters and why they did certain things. Everybody in the class has a different opinion, even though when you're reading the book you can't imagine any other idea but your own. And I like it when Mrs. Goldman talks about my stories and my poems. When you're learning, it's nice to have someone's eyes to look into and looking into yours.

When Uncle Norman gets on the subject of women's lib, he and my Mom almost always get into an argument. He says women should have risen up hundreds of years ago and he can't understand why they've put up with being considered second-rate. I wonder if he knows about all those women we learned about today. He must know because he knows just about everything. He tells my Mom she ought to use her skills – she used to be a teacher – that she should stop laying the role of housewife because she is wasting herself. And then she gets all mad and says, «So what if I enjoy being a housewife! I *like* taking care of my children and my home. I *like* to cook and talk with my friends. It makes me happy. Just because it's not fashionable, I shouldn't like

it ? I like to help at the clinic three times a week. I like to go to a matinee once in a while. I like going to lectures at the museum ». She laughs at him and tells him she feels liberated because each day she has the privilege of doing exactly what she pleases. « How many people have such a privilege ? » She tells him if she had to go out every day to a job, *that* would be slavery. Then she gets all worked up and tells him that *men* are the slaves. They *have* to make the money. Women can enjoy. And she points to her silver teapot and says to Uncle Norman, « Does it make me stupid if I like to see my silver polished. I can polish my teapot in the morning and go to a museum in the afternoon. Can you do that ? » And Uncle Norman throws up his hands and says, « You win ».

Drucy asked me today if I'd noticed the cafeteria floor had been cleaned and polished, and I said yes, and that I even think I heard the sounds at night. She widened her eyes at me and asked me when, and I told her. Then, very softly, so that I could hardly hear her, she said someone had left the can of wax right near the loose square. It was there in the morning, and then it wasn't there at lunch. I hadn't noticed.

28TH DAY

Drucy seems to be working things out, but I just wish I knew what was going on. I notice she turns away whenever Rhoda talks to her, and Drucy sidles away and gives her an annoyed look. Now Rhoda just stays by herself or hangs around with Stanley and some of the tough kids and looks at Drucy with that sullen, curious look as though she didn't understand.

Today Drucy told me to keep any bits of scotch tape I come across and to be on the lookout for a long-handled tool. I asked her why, and she put her finger over her lips. When she talks to me now, she sort of stands near me, talking out of the side of her mouth so that no one can tell. It really gives me the creeps. I feel as though I'm playing in a spy movie. Where am I going to find a «long-handled tool»? And the only time I've ever seen any tape around here was when we had that assignment in art to draw shapes and relationships with those plastic blocks; the blocks were taped together. But I didn't save that. Well, I'll keep my eyes open. Whenever I try to talk with her about anything, she says, under her breath, without moving her lips, «Watch out!» It nearly gives me a heart attack.

Marcia and Lenore and Karl and I sat together again at social time, but I guess they've noticed something because today Karl said to me, «What's up?» and I said, «What do you mean?»

«You're acting funny».

«In what way?»

«I don't think you like us».

«That's silly. Of course I like you».

«Even so, we think you're not happy here».

I didn't know what to say. Then, I decided it would be best to tell the truth. That is, only as much as I could tell them without them getting suspicious. So, I told them that I wished I were home, that I missed my Mom and Dad, and my brother Muffy, and the dogs, and my teachers and even the fights with my friend Lila Lowenthal. I told them I missed real life. Marcia shrugged and turned her head away, closing her eyes in annoyance. Karl and Lenore just stared at me. Then Karl said that the best part of the whole place was the great stuff we learned. He said it gave him the feeling that the world and knowledge were limitless and the more he could learn, the better. Besides, here the dumb kids don't tease him for getting good marks.

«But do you like the way this place is – I don't know how to describe it – this perfect order all the time. Nothing is dirty, nothing is out of place, nothing goes wrong, everyone acts perfectly. It's not like normal life».

«Yeah, I know», Lenore muttered and turned to Marcia who said, «Most things here are good».

«What I really don't like», I said, «is the feeling that we're being controlled. You know, like programmed».

«You really think so?» Karl asked.

«Well, remember what happened at the dancing class?»

They didn't say anything, just nodded their heads and looked blank.

«It's like somebody had an idea – an experiment for a perfect school with all ideal conditions, everything perfect and lots of subjects and no distractions, and nobody yelling at you, and nothing to do all day but learn».

«Must be somebody who's nuts». Lenore laughed.

«My Mom say they are nuts».

«Who? What are you talking about?»

«The people, scientists, sort of, who say you can tell everything about people by the way they behave. They observe what people do and they know all about you and they say if you change the environment and stuff, you can change what they do».

Marcia looked at me, her eyes wide. «You mean you think we're really in an experiment ? »

I nodded, and they all looked at me as though I were nuts.

Later, at the movie – we saw a documentary film about dolphins and how they communicate with men and each other – Drucy sat next to me. She sat up very straight and said to me out of the side of her mouth, «Don't drink your milk tonight ».

« Why not ? »

« I'll explain later ».

Well, I didn't drink it. I told Karl I couldn't drink it because we'd had spaghetti for dinner and I was still too full. So he drank mine. Now, I wonder. Because usually, each night as I'm writing in my notebook, I feel all nice and soft and groggy. Now, I don't. The blue light is blinking and I feel wide awake. I think the milk has been drugged, and Drucy knew it all along.

29TH DAY

Well, I couldn't wait to write here today. Last night, after the lights went out and everyone was asleep, I couldn't fall asleep. My eyes were wide open, and the room seemed so quiet with just the sounds of the kids breathing. Somehow, sounds of someone breathing deeply make a room seem even quieter. I don't know how long I lay there, listening, hearing little snores and movements, and rustling whenever someone turned over in bed. I felt lonely and worried, worried in a way I've never felt before, wondering if I'd ever see my family again. And then I began to think about a class we had yesterday. The instructor talked about the search for meaning in life, the search for meaning in *our own* lives. To find meaning in our lives we must first know ourselves. The assignment had been to read three short books : *Rasselas*, *Siddharta*, and *The empty mirror*. Each was about a person who had set out on a journey to find the meaning and purpose of life, to find his own true self. Well, even though sometimes they were a little bit boring in parts, they made me think. It was interesting because *Rasselas* was written by an Englishman in the eighteenth century, *Siddharta* by a German in the early twentieth century, and *The empty mirror* was just written by a Dutchman. So, people just go on searching. Later we all talked about the books and told what we thought our purpose in life was. Some kids just wanted to make a lot of money, or be a doctor, or live in a big house, or be famous, and stuff like that. And I thought about my goal, I mean, to be a writer, and I wondered if that's a good goal. My Uncle Norman says that the finest goal is to serve mankind. Does a writer serve mankind ? Uncle Norman says the root of society's problems is our inferior educational system and the greed for money. But my mother tells him that society has always had problems and that everybody has a different theory about the root of them. Anyway, I was lying in bed, thinking, when I heard some movement at the other end of the room, like someone getting out of bed, and I opened my eyes very wide, but I couldn't see a thing. I was listening as hard as I could, and heard a sort of shuffling. Then, something touched my arm, and I must have jumped a mile.

« Evvy, it's me, Drucy ».

« Oh, golly ! You scared me half to death ».

« Listen ». She was kneeling by my bed, whispering softly. « Just answer my questions. Don't talk too much. Do you want to help me try to get out of here ? »

« Yes. But... »

« Sh ! Don't talk. I think I know how to get out. That place in the cafeteria, remember, I told you, where there's a loose block ? I think that's probably a way out ».

« How do you know ? Suppose it isn't ? »

« I'm only guessing. I'm pretty sure that the whole block lifts out. There has to be a way for people to get in and out of this place to clean up. And that has to be it. Remember that can of wax ? »

« Suppose we get caught ? »

« We have to take the chance. Are you willing ? »

I didn't dare say no. « What do you want me to do ? »

« We have to get into the cafeteria at night ».

« I thought it was locked ».

« It is. But my brother showed me how to tape a lock so it won't catch ».

« I haven't any tape. Have you ? »

« Remember those pieces of masking tape that were on the plastic blocks when we had that art assignment ? Well, I saved them. I kept the pieces taped under my mattress. My brother told me when you're in prison you learn how to save things like that in case you ever need them ».

I couldn't help but admire Drucy for having kept the tape, and for having figured a way to keep it so that no one could possibly find it.

«Now, listen carefully», she said. «Tomorrow, I'm going to use one piece to tape the lock on the door to this room, and another piece for the door to the cafeteria. It's going to be very tricky to place the tape so that no one notices me. I'll need your help. I can do it quickly as we leave this room to go to dinner. When you see me make a sign with my head – I'll lift it as though I were looking at the ceiling – you make sure nobody lingers and I'll do it quickly after everyone has left the room. Then, I'll do the same thing in the cafeteria. You just keep an eye on me for signals».

«Okay».

«We have to find something to use to pry up the block. There's an open seam all around it. I can't think of anything except a knife – one of the table knives in the cafeteria. Could you manage to keep your knife?»

«I couldn't carry it around with me, Drucy. The kids would notice».

«I know. Maybe you could hide it in the cafeteria».

«I'll try. But I don't know where».

«I think the best place is against the wall, near where the conveyor comes up. There's a narrow space where no one would notice».

«You hope!»

We were both quiet for a few seconds, listening, to be sure nobody was awake, or making any sounds. I could feel my heart beating very fast and thought I could hear Drucy's. My throat felt so dry I could hardly swallow. I wanted to ask her if I should bring a ruler in case the knife didn't work, but decided to bring one anyway. Finally, I asked, «When do we do this?»

«Tomorrow night».

Oh, I was scared. I tried to swallow. Drucy said, «Tomorrow night, be sure you don't drink the milk».

«It's drugged, isn't it? That's why we're awake now».

«Right».

My heart sank. And my mind was in such a jumble of questions, wondering what we'd do if we ran into anyone. Then Drucy said, «The important thing is, not a word to anyone. We've got to do this alone».

«But, if we get out, what about helping the others?»

«We'll worry about that later – if! We have to move fast, and two can move faster than a whole group. And remember, keep low, just in case. See you tomorrow night. Soon as everyone is asleep, I'll come over to your bed. I'll take care of the tape. You take care of the knife. Good-night».

I didn't know what she meant by «keep low, just in case», and I kept trying to figure it out. Did she mean keep my voice low? Or my body. It took me the longest time to fall asleep. I just lay there staring at the darkness, and when I finally dropped off to sleep it must have been almost morning. I guess I got through the day, but I don't know how. It was very difficult to act natural with Marcia and Karl and Lenore. I must have seemed nervous because my mind was on how to get hold of a knife. I even looked in the garden to see if I could find a tool of some sort, but there wasn't a thing, and even if I saw something, how could I get it into the cafeteria? Well, anyway, I managed to slide the knife off my tray, held it against my arm as we walked out, and then I leaned down to pretend to fix my sandal and dropped it at a place on the floor against the wall. It was easy when Drucy placed the tape. She put it over the opening where the lock catches, but with the tape there, the lock couldn't go all the way. I remembered to bring my ruler, so everything is set, I hope. I had to tell Marcia and Lenore that I felt a little sick to my stomach and that's why I couldn't drink my milk. They gave me the funniest look, but they shared it. Now, I can hear Marcia snoring already and the blue light hasn't even begun.

There it goes now! I'm so scared.

OUR ESCAPE

It's all over. The tape worked. I waited in bed, in the darkness, for Drucy to come and give me the signal. At first, it seemed to me the room would never quiet down. The kids were restless, turning over, and sighing and grunting. I was afraid Drucy would be so impatient that she'd get up too soon and blow the whole thing. But she didn't, of course. After a while, everything was quiet, just sounds of steady breathing and weird little wheezings. That went on for so long that I began to wonder if Drucy had fallen asleep. I couldn't keep my mind on a single thing. All I could think of was what I'd do if, after we managed to lift that big square in the cafeteria, we saw someone looking up at us. And all sorts of terrible, hideous, mad-looking faces began to form in my mind; I had flashes of remembering all the goofy fright movies I'd seen on TV when Muff and I sat together in Daddy's Barcalounger, squeezing each other's hands. I was getting myself so scared that I decided I'd better try to think of something else. So, I tried to count. That got so boring. Then I tried to remember the names of all the states in the United States. Finally, I heard a faint rustling, and I knew it had to be Drucy getting out of bed.

I sat up on my bed and waited. I had the ruler in my hand. Then I felt her reach out and touch me. I could barely make out her face. I started to follow her, holding on to her fingertips lightly. She signaled me, with pressure on my shoulder, to crouch down, though I didn't know why. As we reached the door, our grip on each other's fingers tightened and we both held our breath. We slipped through without making a sound and, still crouching, crept along the hall to the cafeteria. It seemed like a mile. We were quiet as mice.

The cafeteria was dim, but not dark; we scurried over to the place where the loose block was and knelt down, almost as though we were going to say our prayers. For a few minutes, I guess we did. Then, I tried to slip the ruler in the space to pry the block up, but it didn't work. Drucy got impatient and grabbed it from me and I groped around the floor until I found the knife and then every time she'd get the block wedged up just a little, I'd grab it with my fingers and try to hold it and wedge the knife in. But it kept slipping down again. We kept working, but we were too nervous and excited and frightened to do anything right and we were beginning to get on each other's nerves, blaming each other without saying a word, just giving looks of fury. But, at last, we got a good hold and lifted the whole square out. It was much lighter than I'd expected, as though it were made of cork. We put it down silently. My heart was going so fast and loud, I thought I was going to split. I was so scared, expecting something awful to reach up and grab us.

The big surprise was that when we looked down, it wasn't dark, but very bright. All shining and clean, just like everything else in the place, with a bright green carpeted staircase leading down. For a few minutes we just looked down, kneeling at the opening, wondering which one should go down first. I was wondering if we should both go down and try to pull the block back in place. Then Drucy whispered that we should both go down, and not bother about the block, but just leave it open.

Drucy went first, creeping carefully down the carpeted stairway, me behind her, my heart thumping like a thousand horses. At the bottom of the staircase we both looked back up at the same time. It looked so weird, that big square opening into the darkness.

At the bottom of the steps was a narrow white hallway and a white door without any handle. We both looked at it, then I saw Drucy take a deep breath, compress her lips together and close her eyes as she very gently pushed. There was no sound. Cautiously, we poked our heads in first and looked into a huge, gleaming kitchen. It was like one of those shining laboratories in a science-fiction movie, with everything bright chrome and stainless steel and white tile or glass. The ceiling was all glass panels with lights behind them so it was like sunshine when we stepped in.

We moved slowly into the room and stood for a while, looking around, I don't know for how long, taking in all the glass-enclosed shelves with dishes and glasses and stacks of plastic trays. I noticed the conveyor that brought our trays up to the cafeteria. After a while, Drucy started to move toward another door at the end of the kitchen. As I tiptoed behind Drucy, I kept thinking of how we always had used the word «they» when we talked about the mysterious people behind all that was happening upstairs, and now I was wondering when we were going to meet «they». What door were they behind?

As Drucy pushed the door open, we again leaned our heads in to look first before we moved. This room looked like a sort of fancy conference room, not as big as the kitchen. It looked like the kind of room they have in the movies when there's an important business meeting with big executives. This room also had a ceiling with all glass and lights and there was a big oval shining table with seven blue leather chairs around it. Drucy and I looked at one another, then looked back at the empty chairs, wondering who sat in them, and when. On one wall there were bookshelves filled with books that had all the same bindings, sort of blue leather with gold letters. Then we noticed a book on the table in front of the chair at the far end of the table and we tiptoed over to it. On the blue leather cover, in gold letters it said:

THE HAUTER EXPERIMENT

Drucy touched the book, then lifted the cover to the first page. All it said was: *The Hauter experiment* by Franz Bruno Hauter. She turned the page and we started to read:

A timeless world of perfect order, free of all fear or anxiety. There will be no pressure of time. The students will not know the meaning of time, hours of the day or days of the week or months of the year. All possibility of worry, concern for the future, will be eliminated. They will live in a perfectly ordered, controlled routine, a completely predictable life alternating between hours of study and learning, recreation, rest, physical exercise, and sleep. All physical needs, i.e., laundry, cooking, etc. will be taken care of for them in ways that will cause them the least possible concern. An air-filter system, in constant operation, will keep the air germ-free, thus there will be no disease.

The most important aspect of the experiment is a controlled atmosphere in which every waking minute is spent in learning. Every activity, including games and physical recreation, incorporates a learning experience. The students will be constantly exposed to only the finest ideas and ideals, always in an atmosphere of calm, free of authority or tyranny, free of arbitrary rules or orders given peremptorily. (See chapters III, IV, V, for curriculum details).

Interspersed with periods of physical and mental relaxation, the students will be stimulated intellectually. They will be gradually freed of conventional values as new values take over. The entire atmosphere will be conducive to learning, relaxation, self-respect, and calm. A modern, bright, comfortable, clean, environment will be created, directly opposite to the gloomy world of the public school. The learning experience will be valued for itself and will not require any element of competition. The students will be exposed to only the very best in every field of life and thought.

BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION

Standard operating procedures

(See chapter VI for measures to be taken in emergency).

At that point Drucy looked at me, her eyes wide in amazement. I realized I'd been holding my breath almost all the while we'd been reading. For a few minutes we listened for sounds, then we read on:

Standard operating procedures :

- *Each evening, 2 cc's of Formula BB60 in the milk to assure sound sleep.*
- *At breakfast, 2 cc's of Formula MD73 for maximum learning ability.*
- *At each meal, 1 cc of Formula Q to maintain calm, reduce anxiety.*

With the above measures, plus a carefully scheduled day, it will be possible to maintain complete control. Through the observation monitors, it will be possible to keep strict check.

Drucy turned to me and whispered, «Those things that looked like air vents».
For the first time I realized that those so-called air vents high along the walls were actually viewers. That must have been why Drucy told me to keep low. I was so impressed by Drucy's courage and intelligence, and I watched as she swiftly turned to the chapter that described measures to be taken in emergency. I was afraid we didn't have much more time. My mind was all swirling. No wonder the kids didn't talk much. We were drugged all the time !

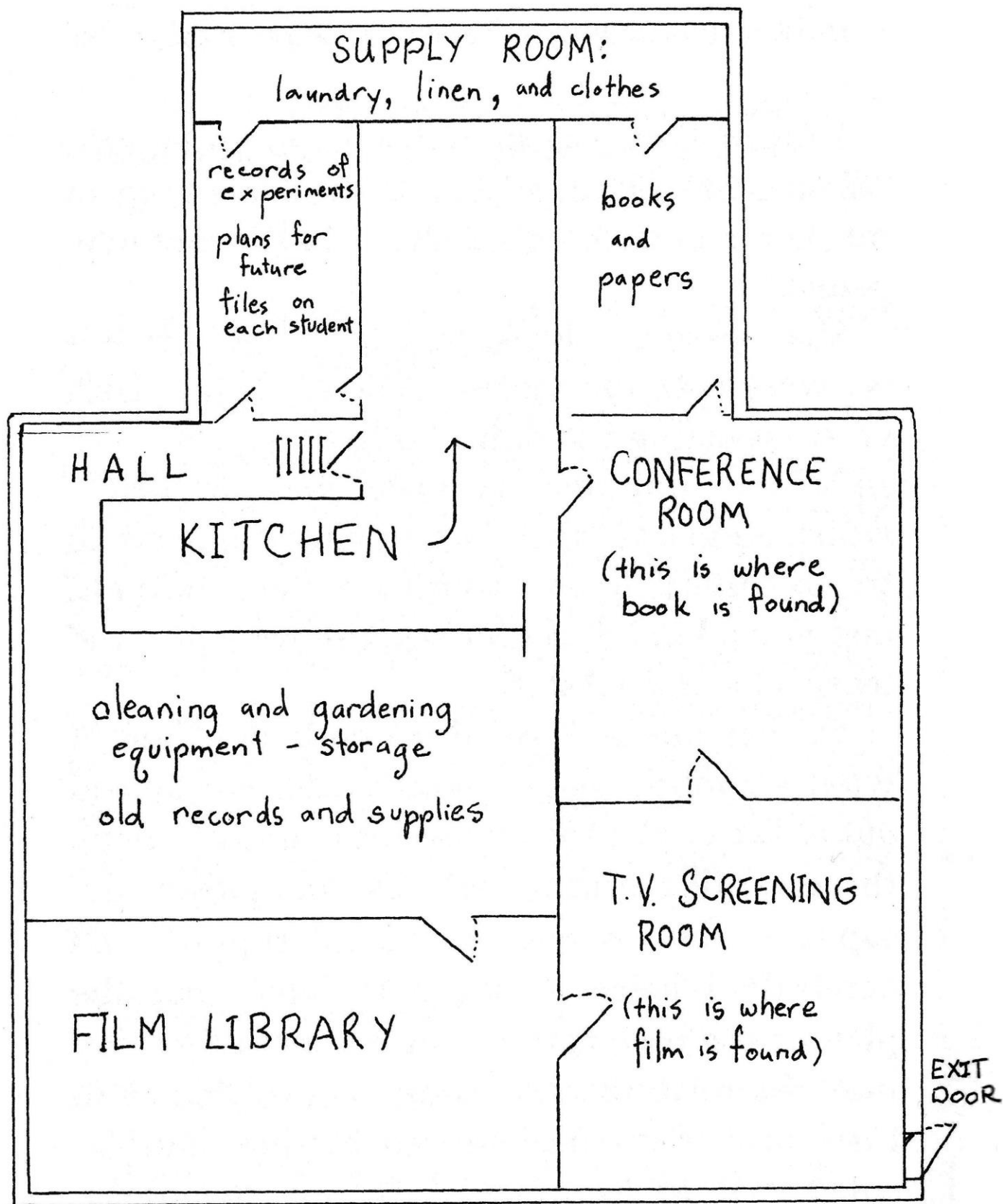
EMERGENCY MEASURES

If a student appears to be preparing a rebellion, or if there is any attempt to organize an escape, there will be released into the air through the miniature air-purifying jets, a vapor mixed with RN 208 in the area where the offender is. This anesthetizing agent will cause temporary paralysis, confused thinking, and temporary partial loss of memory. All senses will be shocked, blinding lights, shrill sounds, offensive odors, will cause the nervous system to be temporarily unbalanced.

I heard Drucy gasp and whisper to herself, «Holy cow ! That's it ! » And she looked up at me, her eyes wide with fury. «That's what happened».

She closed the book, and for a few seconds we were both too shaken to do anything, both of us expecting the same thing to happen to us right that minute. My mind was in such a whirl. Anger at «they» for having the nerve to try to control us as though we were animals, and yet, a kind of regret because we really did learn a lot of good stuff.

At that moment we were both so afraid of what we might yet encounter that we tiptoed out of the conference room into another room, this one filled with schoolbooks and papers and supplies, shelves and shelves of supplies, all carefully labeled. I began to figure out the plan of the underground as we moved swiftly into the next room, a long room filled with linen and towels and all our clothes, and decided it must be underneath our dormitory. Everything was in such perfect order, like a diagram of colored squares and rectangles.



UNDERGROUND PLAN

We were both getting more and more nervous, so we hurried into the next room where we saw a whole wall of shining stainless steel drawers like file drawers. There was nothing else in it, and as we walked in, we saw that each drawer had one of our names on it. Drucy went right over to the drawer with her name and tried to open it, but it was locked. We tried a few others. I saw my name. But they were all locked. Some of them were labeled, «Future plans in art history»; «Experiment in parallel study of science, literature, art, music»; «Introduction to concepts in philosophy»; «Discussion of cyclic theory of history»; and stuff like that.

Drucy poked me and motioned that we had better hurry. When we pushed the door, we found ourselves back in the kitchen. I was confused for a second, and then I got the picture. So far, we hadn't found a way out. We went from the kitchen into a large storeroom with cleaning equipment and from there, into a room that seemed to be a film library with tapes and cassettes stored. By this time we were hurrying, and when we came to the next room we were amazed to see a big fancy TV screen and seven leather chairs. There were cameras all around. I was terrified at that moment, expecting to see someone. Then Drucy went over to the TV and switched it on. It was a picture of US! All of us, out in the recreation yard. It got us both so shook up, Drucy switched it off right away.

The room was dimmer than the others, but we both spotted, at the same time, a great big heavy door, the kind of big exit door they have in school. We looked at one another, and I wondered for a moment if we ought to find our way back so we could get the other kids. Drucy gave the door a push, and it didn't budge. Then I tried with her, pushing the heavy lever at the same time and then slowly it opened, just a tiny crack, and we could see light and sky.

«We've got to go back and get the rest of the kids», I whispered.

«Why?»

«We can't leave them».

«We'll get help first».

So we both pushed, as hard as we could, and as the door opened, we heard a shrill, screaming bell, terribly loud, like the fire drill bell. We found ourselves in bright sunlight, and when we ran up some stairs we were in what looked like a big schoolyard. And then we ran and ran as fast as we could while the bell kept ringing.

1ST DAY – BACK HOME

Would you believe it ! When I came home the whole family treated me as though it were just me coming home from school on any other day. Just ordinary. Muffy was in the kitchen with Mom. After Nelson and Blue calmed down and stopped jumping all over me, I sat down at the table with Muff and he pushed over a piece of his Devil Dog and said, «Hi, Evvy. You're late today. I saved you some of my Devil Dog».

I could hardly eat that gooey thing because I felt as though it'd been so long since I'd eaten anything like that, and Muffy asked me why ? What happened that I didn't like Devil Dogs anymore. So I told Muff and Mom all about what happened and where I've been, and *everything* about «The Hauter experiment». Well, you should have seen my Mom's face ! And you should have heard her, before I even finished telling. She got so mad at me, and she screamed at me :

«So, that's what you've been doing every night when you were supposed to be sleeping. Making up another one of your crazy stories ! When are you going to stop making up crazy stories ! Evelyn B. Nussbaum, what am I going to do with you !»

Well, I don't know how many times I've told Mom my name isn't Evelyn B. Nussbaum. I've changed it to Evelyn B. Chestnut. But whenever I remind her, she laughs at me and says, «Just make it Evelyn NUT !» Actually, I haven't changed my name. I translated Nussbaum. Not an exact translation because then it would be Nuttree and I couldn't have a name like Nuttree. I think Evelyn B. Chestnut sounds like a famous writer. After I told Lila what I had changed my name to, she said hers was going to be Lila La Rue. Isn't that ridiculous ! La Rue.

2ND DAY – BACK HOME

Lila was waiting for me in front of her house this morning. She was coming out of her front door just as I passed her house, as though she'd been peeking down the street, watching for me. It was raining, and she was wearing her movie-star, tight-fitting, white patent boots. You should have seen the look she gave my old boots, as though they were monstrous, diseased growths on my feet.

« Why are you so dressed up ? » I asked her.

« Wouldn't you like to know ».

I really didn't care, so I didn't say anything. Then she said, « I saw you yesterday – running through the schoolyard just as the 4:30 bell was ringing. What were you running so fast for ? And what were you doing with Drucy ? »

« Wouldn't you like to know ».

« And what were you doing there until the very last bell ? »

« Wouldn't you like to know ».

« Oh, never mind ». She tossed her head away. Then she asked me if I was going to see the spring play at school, *Life with father*.

I told her yes, and she said she'd watched some of the rehearsals and it stinks. But she was going anyway, even though that dopey Karl had the lead just because he had red hair and his voice is changing. She said she could have been in it but her mother wouldn't let her because it took too much time from her schoolwork and her dancing lessons. « That's why Lenore got the part », she told me, her voice all prissy like. « But really, Lenore's too skinny and pale ». Then she said, mincing her head around as though she were trying to relocate her neck in its socket, « Want to go with me ? »

I started to ask her how come she's not going with Ginny and Vera and that crowd since she thinks they're so great and she's so eager to get in with them. But I decided to be polite, and all I said was, « Thanks for asking, but I'm going with Drucy and Marcia ». I thought that would be a good way to let her know I don't consider her my best friend anymore. Or even my friend. She squinted her eyes at me and leaned her head out of her neck like a turtle, and shrieked, « Drucy ! Since when are you friends with her ? »

You'd think she owned me, the way she acted. So I decided to tell her all about « The Hauter experiment » and all that happened to us and how she wasn't there and how we escaped and everything, and she opened her eyes very wide at me in her actress way, making them look all bulgy like hard-boiled eggs, and she pulled her head back, stepping away and looking at me as though I smelled bad. Then she said, in her phony English accent, « My dear child ! I do believe you've gone completely mad ! »

What a friend ! The only time she ever likes my stories is when she's in them. Like in « The land of summer » where she owned a marble villa and had forty-seven servants. It's funny that she loved that story and didn't think I'd gone mad at all. That story took me only about two weeks to write, and Lila liked it only because she had the most important part. But I think this one about « The Hauter experiment » is much better and not so childish and much more exciting and important, almost like science-fiction. It took me longer to write and I had to work much harder on it than on any other and I got some help from Uncle Norman. He took the longest time reading it, and he kept frowning and nodding his head.

But now, well, I'm thinking about my next one. Maybe I'll write something that takes place in another century, way back, like maybe Sappho in ancient Greece, or maybe something in Shakespeare's time. I could do something like « A day in the life of William Shakespeare », or maybe, « My life with Leonardo da Vinci ». But I'm leaving Lila out of it.