

# Chapter XXII

In Chapter XXII, the characters experience a mix of anxiety and uncertainty after sneaking aboard Lester's bus, believing they would head to Salina. As they recount the journey, Lill, one of the companions, reacts with noticeable silence, leaving an air of tension among the group. Reflecting on their predicament, the children express their fears, especially as Bobbi's tattoo ominously repeats, "We're dead."

Lill eventually resigns herself to their circumstances, lamenting her losses, including her job and car. She asserts her authority by outlining a plan to head east towards Lincoln, seeking a motel to ensure their safety on the highways at night. Lill intends to call their parents to inform them of their safety. The narrator feels a heavy responsibility for the adults and acknowledges that getting to Poppa might have to wait until morning, even though it weighs heavily on them.

As time passes, Lill and the children solidify their alliance, promising to call home once they find a safe place. They notice Lill counting her cash and deduce that it should be enough to secure motel rooms, which Lester promptly offers to arrange. Despite his reluctance to join them in a room, he takes Lill's cash and secures their accommodations at the "Lincoln Sleepy 10," a secluded motel.

The atmosphere in the motel is filled with relief for the children as they find it nearly empty. However, the narrator harbors apprehension about being spotted after their image appeared on TV. A brief moment of tension arises when they question if Lester will abandon them, to which he insists he won't leave.

Upon arriving at the second floor, Fish eyes the closed swimming pool, a symbol of childhood freedom that elicits mixed emotions. Lill commands the group, propelling them onwards, but secretly, the narrator confides in Bobbi and Fish about their intent not to call home, leading to whispered exchanges about the plan they've devised to keep their secret from Lill. Amidst the humor and tension, the chapter concludes as they approach their rooms, emphasizing the precarious balance of their decision to journey in the shadows.