

HARRY IN MOROCCO

Just as Harry was easing into a snooze, Khalid dropped down next to him on the couch. “So, Mr. Harry, How do you like Morocco?”

“It's OK, Mr. Khalid. I thought I'd like it and I do. And two more weeks to go.” He sat up, stretched, and lifted his feet off the heavy wooden coffee table that separated them from the rest of the lobby, now filling up with tourists. Some were dressed western style and many in robes. About half the women were wearing headscarves. A little boy, who could have been an American, was jumping on the rugs and peeking into the urns. He ran up to a wall covered with mirrors and stuck out his tongue. His mother was scowling up at a portrait of Mohammed II, the current leader of the country,

“Did you know that this city of Fez is my favorite in all of Morocco?” Khalid said.

“I can see why. Even this lobby feels foreign.”

Khalid frowned. “Perhaps.” He paused and frowned even more. “Did you know the students were laughing at you today? You asked me a thoughtful question about Moroccan history, and they all looked at each other and laughed. They didn't even try to hide it. They laughed out loud. I don't get it.” He had a wide-eyed look. Clearly he wanted Harry to know he was concerned.

Harry shrugged. “Not to worry, Khalid; I know what's going on.” And then he smiled even wider.

“These young people laughed. You should be angry.”

“I'm OK.” Harry patted Khalid on the shoulder. “It's not a big deal.” And, it wasn't a big deal. When he said he knew what was going on, he meant it. The fact was that for most of his life, Harry's parents, his coaches, his teachers, and even his friends all told him that people were laughing at him. And he always told them that it didn't matter. People did not take him seriously because he was not a serious guy. So why should things be different in Morocco?

He was just a little surprised that Khalid had mentioned the subject at all. As tour leader, Khalid guided the group through museums, arranged meals, took care of hotel rooms, and pointed out cash machines. He lectured non stop about all aspects of Morocco He was concerned with the success of the tour, not the feelings of the tourists

Khalid lowered his voice even more, but he stepped up the intensity. “But, Harry, these are intelligent young high school students. They're not like some of the American brats I see bossing around their parents.”

“They're Honors students. That's why they're here in Morocco. They're getting credit for this trip. Next year they'll be going to serious schools. They're smart people with bright futures.”

“And they laugh at you.”

“Maybe they think I'm funny.”

“Do they laugh at you back in the States?” Khalid moved in closer. He seemed intensely interested in what Harry had to say.

“They're not my students back in the States. The students I teach aren't going to Brown or Yale. They aren't going to any colleges.”

“You teach thugs?” Suddenly Khalid was grinning. He obviously liked saying the word. “Thugs. We have thugs in Morocco too. I wouldn't want to teach thugs.”

“ Not thugs. Troublemakers. They make trouble for other people and for themselves. Some people call them 'at risk.' I teach them in the morning, and they work at part-time jobs in the afternoon.” Harry paused and then added, “They would not behave well in Morocco. You'd have to watch them all the time.”

Khalid giggled.” They would probably sneak out and get drunk and smoke hashish. The girls would show their bare tummies. They would crawl into bed with each other.”

“Who knows what they would do?” Harry leered mysteriously. He was having fun.

“How interesting,” Khalid looked away with a dirty smile on his dark face. Harry figured he was imagining more lurid scenes -- perhaps dozens of nude young Americans groping each other on a Berber rug.

Then he abruptly looked back at Harry. “These ‘at risky’ students of yours, they must be difficult for you to handle.”

“ Not really.”

“What if they're bad?”

“I look the other way.”

Khalid frowned.

“I pretend nothing happened.” Harry explained.

“And the problem goes away?” Khalid was incredulous.

“Usually. One time a student came to my class drunk. Instead of calling security, I sent him home in a cab, and that was it.”

“ I see,” Khalid said thoughtfully. “Do those students, the bad ones, do they laugh at you.”

“They laugh at everything.”

Khalid was a short, lean dark man in his late twenties. Two days ago, he had greeted the group of twenty high school juniors and three chaperones at the airport in Casablanca. The first stop was Rabat and now Fez. In a few days, they would be heading south through the Atlas Mountains to the desert and then back west through more mountains to Marrakech.

“ One more question,” Khalid said, “If you don't really know the kids who are traveling with us now, why did the school ask you to be a chaperone?”

“Someone got sick. I owed a favor to our principal. I like to travel. Last year was my first year teaching and I hadn't made any summer plans. That's how we do things in America.”

“Welcome to Morocco, Mr. Harry Thomas. Let's be friends.” He reached over and shook Harry's hand and then held on for a second. “Any problems? We ignore them. That's how we do it?”

“That's how we'll do it. Dinner in a few minutes?” Harry asked as he pulled his hand free.

“In 30 minutes. Mrs. Griffin will have them there.

“You're right about that,”

After dinner, instead of taking the elevator, Thelma Griffin walked upstairs by herself. After all that lamb, she could use a little exercise.

Plus she wanted to be by herself. Burt was getting on her nerves. It always took trips to remind her that she was married to a true bore. What else could an insurance salesman be? Years ago, when they first started these trips, he had been OK. If nothing else, he exuded a corny kind of enthusiasm. He'd laugh and clap his hands. He'd make sure no one got left behind. He would comfort anyone who was homesick. But last year, on the trip to Russia, he had started to slow down. In St. Petersburg, he actually climbed on the wrong bus and went to sleep. Another time, he locked himself out of his hotel room and spent the night in the hall in his underwear. And this year in Morocco he was hopeless. He had already referred to the covered Arab women as "beekeepers." And Khalid was right there to hear it.

But it was Harry she was really thinking about. This young man intrigued her. When she had found out he would be on the trip, she was surprised and a bit angry. He was no better than a coach. But he turned out to be a good choice. With Burt slipping badly, they needed someone young with memory and energy. As a teacher last year -- his first year -- he kept the rough kids amused and she appreciated that. God knows she didn't want to teach those losers.

She had also heard that Harry had spent six years in college, so when she asked him at dinner that night how he happened to become a teacher, she was expecting some clever lying. Surely he would know that Mrs.G was a highly respected member of the Forest High staff. "Teacher of the Year" many times over. But instead of dodging the truth, he calmly told her he had drunk and screwed his way through college. He bragged about his large bong collection. Thanks to rich parents, he

kept coming back. Thanks to ability to read fast and write clever essays, he finally managed to graduate with a major in -- what else -- education. He returned to Chicago and, from out of the blue, he got a call from a friend about the temporary opening working with future dropouts at Forest High. He took the job. Nothing truly bad happened the first month; then the man he had temporarily replaced dropped dead, and Harry was given the job full-time. Already he was helping to plan faculty parties. He bowled on the faculty team. He had no plans ever to teach the smart kids like the ones on the trip. ("I wouldn't know what to do with them.") But she could see that he rather liked them, and even though they regarded him as a bit of a joke, and they enjoyed his company. And why not? He was charming.

Burt would be delighted to have Harry around. (He loved hearing about the bong collection.) They could talk sports together. They could argue about TV and movies. He was right up Burt's alley. They could tell Polish jokes and fart on the elevator. Maybe Burt would sell him a whole life policy.

Thelma got to the room. No Burt. He either had gone to the wrong floor or he was gabbing about something insipid with Khalid. Khalid had made a point of sucking up to Burt, even after the beekeeper remark. He would need a good report at the end of the trip, so why not impress this senile old coot? Plus she could tell that Khalid was a little afraid of her. She had a way of giving orders that men found intimidating. Even the waiters stopped clearing the tables when she made the after dinner announcements. She might be sixty but she still knew how to run things.

She snatched up her briefcase, marched out of the room, and climbed the stairs to the next floor. At the end of the hall were two chairs and a table. This would be a good place to escape. Before she sat down, she looked out the window. The city of Fez -- or at least this part -- seemed to have a little of everything. Men in robes and women with covered heads stood next to men in business suits and women in short skirts and heels.

She sat down and brought out her list of the students. Twenty of them. After each name was a short description connecting the student to the trip. Molly Perkins- photography; Abner Stevens - languages; Jake Goldsmith - History; Lucy Hawkins - Romantic Poetry in Spain; Robby Bailey - the Moors; Ariel Harris- The Moroccan Jews.

Nothing made Thelma happier than looking at these lists. She had led the students to these subjects. That's what teachers should do. They lead, nudge, suggest, urge, -- help young people end up where they belong. She did this better than anyone. And on the trips she did it best of all.

Early in their marriage, she had tried to explain all of this to Burt. Look at these wonderful term papers my students wrote. Let me tell you how I made it happen. But half way through, he yawned and that was it. The fool had no reason to understand what delighted her so much. That was thirty-five years ago. Once she realized he couldn't begin to understand her work -- once that happened -- she was free of him forever. It was the best day of her life.

She had hand picked these young people from the advanced English and history classes. The key word was serious. Serious young

people could see the value of losing themselves in a subject. Serious young people knew that there was more out there than sex and pro football. Through the years she had seen these serious students succeed in the world because they knew what they needed to do. They made the right choices. They came back to school and thanked her.

Then there was this Harry. Thelma smiled and shook her head. So young; so very young; so very dumb. So harmlessly likable. Not the least bit serious. And he never would be. And he never should be. Before the trip she had thought briefly that she would try to persuade him to teach more advanced classes. ("Challenge yourself, Harry.") But now that she had met him and seen what he was all about, she decided to tell him what he should have realized by now: Quit teaching before it's too late. Show the world that handsome face. Charm people that matter. Don't stay in the basement of the school.

Lucy sat on the bed in her hotel room yawning her way through the itinerary of tomorrow's trip to Fez. At first, she was going to ignore it, but then something inside told her this was what she was supposed to do. She was amused and intrigued by her own sense of responsibility. With Khalid and Mrs. G. leading the way and with Mr. Griffin and Mr. Thomas taking up the rear, the students of Forest High would march through the Medina, check out mosques, wander through a cemetery, eat a strange lunch and then go to a rug factory. They'd write furiously in their journals. They'd snap pictures with their digital cameras; some of the ultra dorks would whisper into their pocket tape recorders. Mrs. G. had told them after dinner what an exciting day this would be. "Fez has the

best Medina in all of Morocco.” She reminded them that serious kids like Lucy and the other students on the trip would really appreciate Morocco. “How many young people have the chance to see such a fascinating culture with their own eyes?” And she meant it and that was OK.

Mrs. G. was OK. She was passionate about foreign places. She lived for these adventures. And she was right: Morocco was awfully cool. But still, what Lucy really wanted to do was have some real fun in Morocco. Real fun. Real serious fun. A few years ago, her older brother Ben and his college buddies had bought enough hash in Tangiers to stay stoned all through Morocco. No chance of that on this trip, but maybe she could arrange for some casual sex. For starters, she wouldn't mind finding out what Khalid had under his robe. And then there was Harry. He was only a few years older, and acted five years younger. Lucy had seen him sneaking peeks at her tits. He looked at her and saw a full-bodied woman, not a gawky high school kid like Sonia Larson. (She still wore braces for god's sake). If Lucy planned things just right, she and that man-child could be making love in the Sahara.

Khalid rested in bed in the hotel room. Tomorrow in Fez would be a busy day. Khalid did not know what to make of Harry. He could see that the Griffins needed him on the trip. Mr. Griffin was tired and forgetful. Mrs. Griffin couldn't do it all. Plus she was mean. Someone needed to take responsibility and Harry could do the practical things well. When those young Moroccan men were bothering the girls on the trip, he walked right over and told them to cool it and then he joked with them, and they laughed. He knew just what to do. But he wasn't really a

teacher. He looked and acted too young. He tossed the Frisbee with the students. He even talked about organizing a talent show when they got to Marrakech.

But he wasn't stupid. He asked good questions. He had read a little about Morocco. He was intrigued with the Moulay Ismael's 500 wives and thousands of horses. He would chat with strangers. He was alive and alert and shallow.

And so American. Things didn't bother him. He wasn't weighed down by religion. This is what Khalid wanted himself to be. He would watch Harry and maybe even learn something. He'd take lesson from Harry. He didn't want to lead tours all of his life. He wanted to have some fun.

After dinner, Harry strolled with Nathan and Philip through the neighborhood near the hotel. These two kids hung out together and giggled. True nerds. They actually carried tape recorders. That night they brought along a dictionary of unusual words. As they walked through a large park and then down a wide boulevard, they threw big words Harry's way. "Hey, Mr. Thomas, do you suffer from blennophobia."

"Not any more, Nathan." He had no idea what they were talking about.

"You mean you no longer have a morbid fear of slime."

"What do you take me for? I love slime. You'll have to stop in at my apartment some day."

"Well," Jason joined in "I know you still suffer from taphephobia."

Harry stopped, stared at him and in mock surprise exclaimed, "I've always been afraid of people who tap me on the shoulder. Tap tap. Ugh, Drives me nuts. "

"That's not what it is. Taphephobia is the fear of being buried alive."

"Not any more. In fact I brought a coffin along and that's where I sleep."

Harry liked this bantering. He knew he was quicker than people figured. Plus, he had some affection for these two little guys. They were so smart and vulnerable. They wouldn't last thirty seconds with his kids back in the States. He had heard that Nathan lived alone with a mother, who had lots of money and a rotten personality. Jason he didn't know about.

On the way back to the hotel, they stopped at a cafe, drank cokes, and -- in low whispers-- spotted people who just might be terrorists. (The guy in the djallabah; he's telling that woman in black where he hid the bombs.)

Then they asked Harry about "his" kids. The grease balls. The losers. The sweat hogs. Were they as dangerous as people said? Had they really set off the fire alarm? Was it true someone had taken a crap in the closet? What did they do on weekends? Do you think any will go to prison? Who's the toughest one in there? Are you ever afraid?

Harry knew just what to say. "There's a SWAT team in the bushes, and they're ready to storm my classroom if I push the button under the desk."

Nathan was not distracted. "Well, what about the man who came into your class and took a swing at you?"

Harry shrugged. "That's what did happen. It was my very first day. This girl's dad was drunk. He drove to school and charged into the room. He took a wild swing and missed. We wrestled him down and then called the principal. That was it."

The boys were impressed.

Harry could have added that this drunk gave him instant respect. Who knows what would have happened if this guy had not given him a chance to do something. Afterwards they had all laughed about it. Harry was part of the family.

On way back, Harry grabbed the word book. "Nathan, you're a gongoozeler, and Jason, I've decided you're definitely a pick mote. Nothing more. Nothing less."

Back in the lobby, they said good night. The boys took the elevator upstairs and Harry dropped down on the couch and thought. Dinner had been more of an event than usual. Mrs. G. had asked him about college so suddenly that he didn't know what to say. If he had thought about it, he might not have given his standard smart-ass answer about booze and sex. He wouldn't have mentioned the bongos, although old Burt certainly enjoyed that detail. After all, the lady was 60 years old and running the show. But she asked how he ended up at Forest High, and he had told her. Surprisingly, she seemed to like it or at least she wasn't offended by his frankness. Maybe she found it titillating to be around fuck ups like him.

And Burt ate it up. He was Burt's kind of guy. (They had actually slapped hands!) Last night Burt had told him about his college days at Dartmouth. He had once mooned the head of the French department.

("The old broad loved it.") He claimed that he drank with the guys from Animal House. His wife was tight assed. Khalid was boring. "Why do these guys have these terrible accents?" He wondered if these kids ever missed just staying home and having a good time. He was a fit old boy too. It looked like he'd live forever. He could really throw a Frisbee.

But he might become a pain in the ass.

Harry found one of the joints he had hidden in his suitcase. He stood by the window and blew the smoke outside just as he had in high school. No need for anyone to smell the magic smoke. First joint in a week. He actually smoked much less than in college. Once he even pretended to be stoned when he wasn't. He looked out the window as all the pot things started to happen. The colors brightened and deepened; the sounds lasted longer and he felt a calmness drop over him. But it wasn't all that great. Now what? If he had bothered to think about it at all, he figured he would be one of those older people who kept pot in their life. Not some guy with a ponytail, but a person who knew how to relax. Well maybe not. And how was that supposed to make him feel? He took the joint to the toilet and flushed it down.

Burt sat on the floor in the hall outside his hotel room. He didn't have a key and Thelma was somewhere else. He was not happy. He had become the old guy. He had slipped. He was not to be trusted. Humor the old boy. His best years are behind him. They were all wrong. Dead wrong. He was just as capable as ever. The problem was Thelma. Whatever she said people believed. And for that matter, she had done

some aging herself. She used to be tough; now she's just mean. Khalid is absolutely terrified of her.

The only person she doesn't scare is Harry. And he's an outsider anyway. He'll go back to Forest and hang out with the working kids and the others will go back to the serious school. Was Harry too young and naive not to know how scary his wife was or was he just above it all? Hard to tell.

Burt liked Harry a lot. He was a lot like Harry when he was in his mid twenties. He sold a lot of insurance because he was charming. He could listen. He knew when to smile and when to frown. He could ask the right questions.

The other day, when they were walking back to the bus, he noticed that his shadow and Harry's looked the same. Same height and the same shape. The shadow didn't show the age. He and Harry talked sports. He even told Harry a couple of Polish jokes. Burt was so used to the uptight teachers that worked with Thelma. Now here's this young fellow who seemed so cool and relaxed.

Well, if Harry had taken over his duties, so be it. He could snooze on the bus or listen to a book on tape or just look out the window. Khalid would tell him what to look at. Thelma might like running these trips, but he actually enjoyed them more. He could lose himself in these places. And now he really could. He'd talk to Harry and maybe find a few kids that would listen to him. He could even prepare his remarks for the retirement party. He would be OK after all.

In the Medina, Harry walked in the back with the nerds. They enjoyed pestering him. "Mr. Thomas, what do you think about this? Were you expecting the streets to be this narrow?" Do you think you'd ever have to squeeze against a wall to let an old lady and a donkey by?"

"Nathan, I was well prepared for this trip. You know that."

"We can see how surprised you look. I looked at you the other day when Khalid was talking about the Moulay. You were stunned.

" I don't get stunned."

Last night they had played "Spot the Terrorist," Today they were too caught up in what they were seeing. It had all seemed different to Harry from the very beginning - the mosque in Casablanca, the farms, the Moulay's stables, but this Medina in Fez was something else. He had been dropped into someone else's world. They moved together through the crowded narrow, winding streets. The place was filled with tiny shops. The corners with crowds of young men. They looked at smaller mosques. They visited a synagogue and blacksmith's shop

The nerds had kept up their chatter for a while, but soon shut up and took it all in. Later they came out in a large market. Even more people. Stalls of food, snake charmers.

Khalid made it so simple. He told them what to see, and Harry liked it this way. That's probably why he was enjoying this more than he had expected. Khalid made it easy. Harry liked things easy. That was all. It wasn't like he was going through some big change as far as he could tell. This wasn't anything he'd bother to mention in a letter to a friend.

Burt was surprised. "Who would have known that Morocco has ski resorts?" It was the morning after the day in the Medina. The group had arisen early. Now they were on their way south. Burt sipped on his coffee and squinted across the street at a store selling ski equipment. Behind it rose one of the Atlas Mountains. Harry had read this but didn't quite believe it. either. But this is where they were drinking coffee before climbing back and the bus and heading south into the desert. He checked his list of kids. They were all in the area. He was surprised and quietly pleased with himself that he was so good at keeping track of people. He was more like a border collie than he ever realized.

Would he get tired of Burt? Maybe, but for the moment he enjoyed having a buddy to sit next to and walk beside. He was really a lovable old fool. The old boy certainly liked Harry. He and Thelma had never had kids so he might have seen Harry as a son.

Also by talking with Burt, Harry could stay away from Lucy. She might be an honors student on her way to Columbia, but she looked like trouble. She made Khalid nervous too. She'd stand too close and bounce her tit into his side and look into his eyes and moisten her lips. This will be a real test for our little Moroccan.

Thelma put the post cards in her purse and looked across the cafe to where Burt and Harry were sitting. Father and son. That's what strangers might think. They're talking about sports or sex. Maybe Burt was telling Harry about his girls on the road. Harry's telling Burt about a college drinking contest.

She knew that Burt would have liked a son, but not enough to adopt one - not after it turned out she couldn't have children. Burt would have liked camping with a boy and coaching his little league team. He wouldn't have been so good with a daughter. Girls were too smart for Burt. And Thelma had never been serious about children. Once she decided Burt was a fool, she didn't want to bring him back into her life. Her job was all she really needed.

And she had a few lovers. The father of one her students took a shine to her. He would come in for conferences. They would go out for drinks and then to a motel. That lasted for a while and then it stopped. The principal knew something was up, but he would never say anything to her. And then there was the book salesman. He was young and handsome and stupid. They had a good time for a little while.

Maybe when she talked with Harry, she would tell him about this other life. That would be rich.

The phone made a stridently odd noise. For a second, Harry didn't know where he was. Then he remembered. Erfud. Near the Sahara. A hotel. "Harry, it's Khalid. I know it's 3:00 in the morning, but we have to talk. Please come to the basement. Don't tell anyone. Especially don't tell Mrs. Griffin." Harry pulled on a Grateful Dead sweatshirt and jeans and headed barefoot down the hall. Next to the elevator was a stairway. He walked down two flights and then one more into the basement.

It looked like a basement anywhere. Upstairs was pure Islamic Morocco. Down here it was dank and dark. Buckets and mops, shelves of boxes. There were storage rooms and heating system. Practically

every night his first year in college, he and his buddies would go down to the basement of their dorm to smoke a few joints. It looked just like this place.

“Over here, Harry.” In the far corner stood a badly shaken Khalid. Was he sick? Had he been mugged? He looked smaller than ever. Harry hurried up to him.

He pulled his robe around him and looked up into Harry's eyes pleadingly. Harry had never seen this look before. “We've got a problem, Harry.”

“We?” Harry couldn't help smiling.

“This is serious. Really serious. Last night, after lights out, there was a tap on my door. I thought it was going to be Omar.”

“Omar?”

“An old friend who lives here in Erfud. I thought he had come by to talk.” But it was Lucy.”

“Lucy!”

“The grown-up looking student. The one with the big breasts.”

“I know. I know. What did she want?”

“She was crying. She had a call from her boyfriend back in the States. He was dropping her. She wanted my comfort.”

“Sure she did.”

“We couldn't stay in my room. We walked down to the lobby. People were there so we came down here. She was talking all the time about killing herself. I felt so bad. Then we got here and she threw her arms around me and we started to kiss.”

“Just kiss?”

“This was no ordinary kiss, Harry. This was a big kiss. Tongues and everything”

“But that was it?”

“ Well, not really. She started to undo my robe, and I felt one her breasts, but then we stopped.”

“That's good.”

“Not good. The reason we stopped was that two of the young men from the trip saw us.”

“Oh shit!”

“They were in the back room drinking wine with one of the waiters.”

“Shit! This is bad.”

“No, it's good, Harry. If they tell on me, we'll tell on them. It will be a big secret -- one big secret.” Harry couldn't believe it. Khalid was actually smiling. “Harry, we'll just look the other way. Right?”

“You little prick! What about Lucy?” Harry could imagine her upstairs pouring out her heart to the Griffins.

“Lucy wanted to stay and finish the wine. I sent her upstairs. She promised me she wouldn't say anything. She doesn't want to be sent home.”

“So now what?” Fifteen minutes ago he had been fast asleep. Now he was wide-awake in the middle of something he could never have imagined.

Khalid stepped back and spoke a little louder. “We don't say anything. I've told the boys that I will say nothing if they say nothing. And that will be it.”

“Khalid,” Harry's lip was trembling. “Why did you call me? I don't need to know this?”

“You're the boss, Harry.”

Two weeks later, riding on the bus from Marrakech to the airport, Harry, sitting alone in the back, decided that Khalid had been right after all. The trip had gone on without hitches. And now they were about to fly home.

The morning after the incident in the cellar, Harry had pulled Lucy over in the lobby while the others were getting on the bus. Speaking in an adult voice he barely recognized, he told her what she needed to know. “Khalid explained what you did last night. I should turn you in, but, for the sake of the Griffins, I'm giving you a second chance. Remember we're doing this for the Griffins.” Short and snappy. He had meant it. She frowned and looked down at her feet and muttered an apology. Just then Burt had walked by. He had left something in his room. “Scuze me”, he said ala Steve Martin and hurried off. Lucy sniffled, looked Harry in the eye and nodded. “Message received.”

She kept her promise. For the rest of the time; she had been totally serious about the trip. No flirting. Not with him, not with anyone. No complaining about sleeping in tents in the desert. She hiked up the dunes. She rode a camel. She listened attentively to the lectures and took notes. She snapped hundreds of pictures.

The wine drinkers had been another matter. They were two older students --Ben and Jason. They were obviously good students, or they wouldn't be on the trip. They had big plans for themselves, but they were

kids. It must have been exciting for them to sneak around with a Moroccan waiter. Not a big deal. Nothing like the students Harry was used to. They had an opportunity to do something a little wild and they took it.

Later that afternoon when the group was exploring a rural village with Khalid and Mrs. Griffin leading the way, Harry pulled them aside. “I know what happened. Kids do things like this, but this was really stupid. You've got a second chance. Don't talk to anyone. This is for the sake of the Griffins.” They looked scared when he spoke. They were serious for the rest of the trip. Since then, whenever Harry asked a question, they nodded earnestly.

Now, the trip was practically over. The nerds were in front of Harry playing chess. Burt was sitting alone mumbling. Thelma was studying a book. Khalid and the bus driver were chattering away in Arabic. The students were looking at the last of Morocco. They were still buzzing about the night in the big square of Marrakech. They all snapped pictures of Harry and Burt with snakes wrapped around their necks.

On that fateful night of the kissing and wine drinking, he could have gone back to the room and called Thelma, and that would have been it. Khalid would have been dismissed. A new guide would have appeared and Lucy and the wine drinkers would have been sent home in disgrace. The trip would have gone on, but it would have been a gloomy situation Harry would have switched from a good-natured buddy to a bad ass.

He was relieved.

But even more than relief was the feeling of astonishment, for Harry had been blind-sided by Morocco. He had been stunned -- intrigued in ways he had never expected. He was astonished by the Medina, the Sahara, and the Marrakech Square, but even more by the people. Who was the old guy selling dates in Fez? The man stomping through the vats in the tannery? The idle guy on the corners? The leather-faced sheep herders? The Berber tribesmen? The guys who handled the camels? The snake charmer? What about the guy who called people to prayers? The beggar lady with one arm? The Imman? The old man in the cemetery feeding the eels? And for that matter, who was the bus driver? Who was Khalid?

And now what? He had scribbled down his thoughts in a journal. He had complimented Khalid. He had thanked Mrs. G. But would he go back and tell his beer-drinking buddies? Would he share this with his own at risk students? Would these memories fade away or were they here to stay?

Thelma thought some more about Harry. The young fellow had done a fine job. She needed him to step up after Burt proved worthless. Harry'll never be a real teacher, but he's not so silly. She couldn't take complete credit for it, but she had helped. -- not even his parents, most likely -- had given him real responsibility like this.

Most important of all, Harry had done the right thing to keep quiet about the kissing and drinking. The day after it had happened, Khalid told her and Burt the whole story. Khalid wanted to punish the kids. He thought Harry was wrong to give them a second chance. Khalid

obviously thinks Americans are too wishy washy. So be it. Sometimes you have to do the prudent thing. The lessons would be learned; the program would continue. That's what really mattered. Next year she would sign Harry up for some faculty committees. She would give him a chance to teach some "regular" students. She would tell him about some workshops. He would never be a real teacher, but he had more in him, so why not use it?

Burt was seething Thelma, he finally had to admit, was a bitch. A total bitch. A world class bitch. A bitch inside and out. She could act nice, but when it got down to it, watch out. And Harry'd better watch out. When they got back to the States sure as shit she was going to tell one of those principals about the kissing and the drinking. Word would get out and she'd want to protect herself. She would blame Harry because he was an easy target. A new teacher. A playboy. This is the kind of thing Harry would do. He would be fired and that would be it. She had done this before. She would do it again.

Well, not so fast. He had a plan too. If Thelma accused Harry, Burt would stand up for his friend. If necessary, he would lie for him. He'd look the principal in the eye and say that Harry wanted to tell the truth all along. But "I would not let him. I am responsible. Punish me, but not him. Harry wanted to do the right thing, but my wife and I wouldn't let him. That's the truth." Burt was pleased with that plan. Isn't that what buddies do? Don't they lie for each other?

Now he could take his last nap in Morocco.

Lucy sat near the front of the bus. The others were reliving the last two weeks in Morocco - the camel ride, the dinners, the conversations with Moroccan students, the hike to visit the nomads. Well, she had those memories too; but she had a better one. It's 3:00 AM in a tent on the Sahara; she is looking down at a sleeping Khalid. She touches his shoulder. He awakens and sits up and then grins gratefully as she slowly removes her blouse. Soon they are rolling on the ground. The sex would have been better if he had taken off his Brian Urlacher sweatshirt. But still sex is sex.

Back at her tent that night she told Doris everything --how she had slipped out silently into the night, crawled under the stars, past the camels all the way to Khalid's tent. "It was so wonderfully silent. All I could hear was Mr. Griffin snoring." Then she unzipped the door and slipped inside.

Don't tell anyone now, she had said to Doris. In fifteen years or so you can tell this to another soccer mom or to a friend in your book club. Tell them about your roommate's affair with a young Arab. They'll like that.

As the bus pulled into the Marrakech Airport, Harry looked over at Sonia Larson. Of all the students on the trip she looked the youngest. It was probably the braces. She was cooperative and helpful and quiet. Burt figured she might grow into a librarian. He might be right. Today she was reading *AS I LAY DYING*, and this struck Harry as quite amazing. In American Literature his last year in college, he had been assigned this novel by Faulkner. It was short, but confusing. The point of

view seemed to shift. The characters had names like Dewey Dell. One chapter was only five words long - "My mother is a fish." Harry could follow it for a while, but finally he gave up and bought the Cliffs Notes. It never occurred to him that a normal person could read this book - much less a high school junior. Now here was this kid in braces reading up a storm and underlining like crazy. He wasn't quite sure what to make of that.

The bus pulled up to the small airport. Nothing like what the students were used to in America. Mrs. G. stood up." Let's give Khalid a big hand for being such a great guide. Give yourselves a big hand for being such great travelers. If you have any questions, talk to Mr. Thomas.

Harry, take over."