

On the Road



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JACK KEROUAC

Born in 1922 in Lowell, Massachusetts, Jack Kerouac grew up in a Catholic household and eventually earned a football scholarship to Columbia University. He soon dropped out of college, though, and became friends with some of the people who would become associated with the Beat movement, including Allen Ginsberg. (The Beats formed a kind of loose literary movement centered around rejecting societal norms and freely indulging in alcohol, drugs, and sexual liberty.) Kerouac joined the Merchant Marine service and even served briefly in the Navy, before writing his first novel in 1942. He lived with his family in New York, where he published his first novel, *The Town and the City*, to little acclaim in 1950. Kerouac then began working towards a new project and, in 1951, sat down to write *On The Road* in a brief three-week period of spontaneous writing. He had a difficult time finding a publisher for the book because of its racy content, but the novel was finally published in 1957. A now-famous *New York Times* review championed it as a masterpiece and the essential novel of the Beat Generation. As Kerouac now became a popular, acclaimed author, he continued to write, including *The Dharma Bums* (probably his most famous novel after *On The Road*). Jack Kerouac didn't just chronicle, but lived the Beat lifestyle, and ended up dying in 1969 of liver damage related to his longstanding drinking habit.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Published in the 1950s, the novel takes place in the late 1940s. This postwar period was one of relative calm and prosperity for the United States, but also one of increasing conformity in society. *On The Road* crystallized a growing dissatisfaction with the comfortable status quo felt by many young Americans in the period before the social upheaval of the 1960s.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

On The Road is the central novel of the Beat movement, and forms the prose counterpoint to "Howl," the quintessential Beat poem written by Kerouac's friend Allen Ginsberg. As a story of journeys, the novel can also be seen as a postmodern rewriting of such classic literature of journeying as [The Odyssey](#), Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and the *Canterbury Tales*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *On The Road*

- **When Written:** Late 1940s to 1951
- **Where Written:** New York City
- **When Published:** 1957
- **Literary Period:** The Beat Movement
- **Genre:** Novel
- **Setting:** Various locations across the United States (especially New York, Denver, San Francisco, Chicago, Virginia, New Orleans, Los Angeles), Mexico.
- **Climax:** In Part Four, Sal travels with Dean to Mexico on one last crazy trip. Dean abandons Sal while Sal he is sick with a fever.
- **Antagonist:** There is no one antagonist throughout the entire novel. At times, the police are the antagonists for Sal, Dean, and their friends.

EXTRA CREDIT

On The Scroll. While Kerouac spent much time brainstorming and planning ideas for *On The Road*, when he finally sat down to write the novel, he wrote the whole thing in three weeks on one long, continuous scroll he made by attaching sheets of typewriter paper. The long, unpunctuated, unedited scroll survives to this day, and a transcribed version of this original draft of the novel was even published in 2007.



PLOT SUMMARY

Sal Paradise recalls when he first met Dean Moriarty, who came to New York City from Colorado with his new wife Marylou and asked Sal to teach him how to write. Sal was struck by Dean's mad enthusiasm for life, and the two became friends, as Dean also got to know Sal's close friend Carlo Marx. Not long after, Dean and Carlo journeyed out west. Sal had an urge to follow them west and get out on the **road**, so he saved up some money and took a bus to Chicago, heading for his friend Remi Boncoeur in San Francisco. From Chicago, he started hitchhiking west, eating apple pie and ice cream wherever he stopped. As he continued catching buses and hitchhiking, he met a fellow traveler named Eddie and the two started to travel together. Sal gave Eddie a wool shirt when it started raining, and then Eddie left Sal behind when they encountered a farmer's trailer with only room for one passenger. Sal hitched a ride with a truck that was picking up all sorts of vagrants in its flatbed. When the truck stopped somewhere, Sal bought a bottle of whiskey and shared it with his fellow hitchhikers. He loved the ride, which took him all the way to Cheyenne. He and another passenger from the truck, Montana Slim, went to bars, drank, and met some girls. Slim took off the next day and Sal hitched rides to Denver.

His first night in Denver, Sal stayed with his friend Chad King, unable to find Dean or Carlo. He then moved in with another friend, a writer named Roland Major, and finally heard from Dean and Carlo, who had become close friends and would “communicate with absolute honesty” every day while sitting opposite each other on a bed, high on Benzedrine. Sal learns that Dean is simultaneously seeing Marylou and another woman named Camille. Sal, Dean, and Carlo went out partying together in Denver. Sal got a call from Eddie, who happened to be in Denver, too. He went to a huge party with his friends and then went to Carlo’s house and heard Carlo read some of his poetry. Dean announced that he was set to divorce Marylou and marry Camille. Sal watched as Carlo and Dean sat on Carlo’s bed all night and talked, sharing all their thoughts honestly.

Sal went on a trip with some friends to a nearby mountain town, where they stayed in an abandoned miner’s house, threw a great big party, got drunk, and went all over town causing trouble. When Sal got back to Denver, he had an urge to travel to San Francisco. Before he left, though, Dean fixed him up with a woman named Rita Bettencourt, who Sal slept with. Sal wrote to his aunt for more money and then bought a bus ticket to San Francisco. He said goodbye to all his friends but couldn’t find Dean before he left.

In San Francisco, Sal found Remi Boncoeur’s place (a shack) and climbed in through the window. He met Remi’s woman, Lee Ann. Sal stayed with Remi and Remi had him write a screenplay for Hollywood. Sal eventually decided he needed a job, so Remi set him up with his own job, working as a guard at a nearby barracks that housed construction workers about to go overseas. Sal felt odd in this quasi-policeman role and drank with the rowdy workers he was supposed to be keeping in line. He and Remi were not liked by the more disciplinarian other guards, and when they were on duty by themselves they broke into the barracks cafeteria and stole food. Remi and Lee Ann’s relationship began to deteriorate. Sal accompanied both of them to the horse races, where Remi lost all his money and got angry. He and Lee Ann continued to fight and Lee Ann kicked Remi out of their shack. Remi asked Lee Ann and Sal for one last favor: he wanted them to go to dinner with his stepfather and him, so that his stepfather would think Remi was doing well. Sal and Lee Ann agreed, but the dinner turned out to be a disaster. Sal ran into Roland Major at the restaurant and the two got drunk and embarrassed Remi. The next morning, Sal decided to leave San Francisco. Before going, he climbed up a nearby mountain and looked out over “the great raw bulge and bulk of my American continent.”

Sal left San Francisco and got on a bus to Los Angeles. On the bus, he sat next to an attractive Mexican woman named Teresa. The two hit it off, and decided to stay in the same hotel room in L.A. In Los Angeles, Sal worried that Teresa might be a hustler, and Teresa ironically also thought that Sal might be a pimp.

After they argued and cleared things up, they slept together and stayed together in L.A. for about two weeks. They planned to hitchhike to New York, but ended up deciding to work in rural California to save money for bus tickets instead. Teresa took Sal to her hometown, where he met her brother Rickey, who promised to help Sal make money selling manure to farmers. All Rickey really did, though, was drink. Sal found a job picking cotton and lived with Teresa for a while in a tent. He began to feel that he should return to New York, though, and wrote his aunt for more money, so that he could buy a bus ticket. He said goodbye to Teresa, hitchhiked to L.A., and got on a bus bound for Pittsburgh. On the bus, he “necked all the way to Indianapolis” with a girl. After arriving in Pittsburgh, Sal met an old hobo he called The Ghost of the Susquehanna who was wandering around, saying he was going to “Canady.” Sal says that the Ghost taught him that there was American wilderness in the east as well as the west. Sal hitchhiked to New York, starving hungry and without money. He panhandled for bus fare and finally got back to his aunt’s house in New Jersey.

Sal stayed at home for about a year, attending school on the G.I. bill and finishing his book. He went to visit his brother in Virginia and wrote to Dean to tell him where he’d be. To his surprise, Dean drove up to his brother’s house with Marylou and someone named Ed Dunkel. Dean fills Sal in on his life: he was living with Camille in San Francisco (and had a daughter with her) but felt a sudden urge to journey east. He took off with his friend from work, Ed, and Ed’s girlfriend Galatea. Galatea insisted on being married before she joined the trip, so Ed married her. But, Dean and Ed got fed up with Galatea and ditched her in a random hotel. In Denver, Dean reconnected with Marylou and the two decided to get back together. Dean, Marylou, and Ed then drove all the way to Sal’s brother’s house. Sal went around for a drive with Dean, Marylou, and Ed, and got the urge to go out on the **road** again. Sal and his friends drove some furniture that needed transporting north from Sal’s brother’s house to his aunt’s place in New Jersey. At his aunt’s house, Sal got a call from a friend named Old Bull Lee in New Orleans, who said that someone named Galatea came to him looking for Ed Dunkel. Sal spoke to Galatea and told her that they’d pick her back up on the way west. Sal also got a call from Camille, looking for Dean. Dean and Sal drove back down to Virginia to get more furniture and to drive Sal’s aunt back to New Jersey. On the way, Dean kept spouting his strange ideas about God, philosophy, and the world. On the way back to New Jersey, Dean got stopped by a policeman and Sal’s aunt had to pay for his speeding ticket.

Around New Year’s Eve, Sal and his friends went out in New York, partying and drinking for a whole weekend. Marylou flirted with Sal and told him that Dean was probably going to go back to Camille, so they should go live together in San Francisco. Sal and Dean went to hear a jazz pianist play, and Dean said that the pianist was God. After the weekend of fun,

Sal returned to his aunt's house and decided to take "one more magnificent trip to the West Coast." Before he went west, he and his friends stayed at Carlo's apartment in the city for a while. Carlo warned them that their wandering lives on the **road** would soon fall apart. One day, Dean asked Sal to sleep with Marylou while he looked on. Marylou agreed, but Sal couldn't go through with it and told Marylou to wait until they were "lovers in San Francisco." Dean and Marylou got into a fight that turned physical, and Sal decided it was time to go on the **road** again.

The group drove south, arriving in DC on the morning of Truman's second inauguration. Ed sped past a policeman, so they were pulled over and questioned. As they drove further south, they picked up some hitchhikers, and eventually made it to New Orleans, where they found Old Bull Lee's house. Bull lived with his wife Jane and their two children. Bull and Jane were heavy drug users. Sal and his friends stayed with Bull, going out in New Orleans, drinking, and taking different drugs. Bull shared some of his conspiracy theories about the government with Sal and then had him try a homemade machine called an "orgone accumulator," that supposedly accumulated orgones, "vibratory atmospheric atoms of the life-principle." Bull and Sal lost some money at the horse races, neglecting to bet on a horse named Big Pop, whose name reminded Sal of his father. Sal decided it was time to leave New Orleans, so he drove off toward California with Dean and Marylou. They stopped at a grocery store where Sal stole some food for the trip. They drove across Texas, and at one point Dean stopped, took off all his clothes, and ran around outside. He encouraged Sal and Marylou to lose their clothes, and the three drove for a while all three naked in the front seat. After they stopped in El Paso, Marylou told Sal that she was sure Dean was going to leave her. The group drove to Tucson, where Sal had a friend, Hal Hingham, who would loan him money. Hal had moved to Tucson to spend time working on his writing, but was bored there now. After he got the money, Sal took off with Dean and Marylou. They picked up a hitchhiker on their way to San Francisco and when they got there Dean ditched Marylou and Sal to go find Camille. Marylou stayed with Dean for a couple of days before going off with a nightclub owner. Sal thought Marylou was a whore for this. He wandered around the city, deliriously hungry, until Dean finally found him and took him to stay with Camille and him. Sal "goofed around" with Dean for a while, going out in San Francisco and seeing different jazz acts, but soon felt like it was time for him to go home. The night before he left, he went out with Dean and Marylou.

After some time at home, Sal tried to settle down in Denver with a job, but became restless. A rich girl he knew gave him a hundred dollar bill and told him to take a trip to San Francisco, so he did and went straight to Dean. Dean welcomed Sal into his home, but Camille became frustrated at Dean returning to

his old ways with friends and thought Dean would leave her again. Dean told Sal about how he had stalked Marylou for a while and, after smoking too much uncured marijuana, barged into Marylou's apartment with a gun, asking her to shoot him. Camille and Dean got into a big fight and Camille kicked him out of the house. Seeing what a sorry state Dean was in, Sal suggested they travel to New York and then San Francisco. Before leaving they went around San Francisco with some friends, including Galatea, who scolded Dean for leaving Camille and going off on the **road** so that Camille had to look after their children. Sal and Dean had a crazy night out on the town, drinking and going to see jazz performances, and then hit the **road** the next day. They hitched a ride with "a tall, thin fag" who propositioned Dean and Sal in a hotel room to no avail. Once they arrived in Denver, Dean and Sal got into a fight when Dean made a comment about Sal getting older. They quickly made up, though, and went to stay with Frankie, a woman Sal knew from when he lived in Denver alone. Frankie lived alone with her children, including a thirteen year-old daughter named Janet, who Dean was infatuated with. Dean and Sal had a good time in Denver, going out drinking, and Dean stole several cars. They went to the Denver travel bureau and found a Cadillac that needed to be driven to its owner in Chicago, so they agreed to drive it, taking along two college-aged Irish men as passengers. Dean sped so fast that he broke the car's speedometer and at one point slid in some mud, getting the car stuck in a ditch. Dean decided to stop at his friend Ed Wall's ranch on the way to Chicago. Dean drove dangerously all the way to Chicago, speeding and weaving in and out of traffic. At one point, he rear-ended a car. When Sal and Dean got to Chicago, they drove around and had a good night listening to some jazz performances. They returned the Cadillac to its owner and got on a bus to Detroit, where they found a man who agreed to drive them to New York. Back in New York, it wasn't long before Dean met a woman named Inez, divorced Camille, and married Inez. A few months after this, Camille gave birth to Dean's second child, and a few months later Inez gave birth, as well.

When spring came, Sal decided that he needed to leave New York. He hung out with Dean some more before leaving him behind in New York with Inez, and then went west to Denver, where he reconnected with some old friends. He planned to drive south to Mexico, but just as he was planning to leave with Stan Shephard, he learned that Dean was on his way to Denver. Dean had "gone mad again" and he, Sal, and a big group of their old friends (including Ed and Galatea) went out partying in Denver. Then, Dean, Sal, and Stan decided to drive to Mexico. As Stan was leaving his house, his grandfather begged him not to leave, and Sal realized that Stan was fleeing his grandfather. They drove south and shared stories until they finally reached the border and crossed into Mexico at three in the morning. The group exchanged their money for pesos, bought some beer and cigarettes, and were extremely excited to be in this

different country. At a gas station, they met someone named Victor, who promised to get them marijuana and prostitutes. They went to Victor's house, where they smoked a gigantic joint of marijuana and spent over 300 pesos at a brothel, sleeping with a bunch of different women. They got back on the **road** and drove through a dense jungle toward Mexico City. They got through the jungle and passed by a community of "mountain Indians," whom Dean admired and pondered for their primitiveness. They finally arrived in Mexico City and had a great time, until Sal got feverishly ill. He became delirious and came to just as Dean was telling him that he was leaving to go back to New York.

After he recovered, Sal went back to New York, where he met and fell in love with a girl named Laura. Dean had married Inez but then gone back to live with Camille in San Francisco. Sal and Laura planned to go to San Francisco, so Sal wrote Dean to tell him this. Dean then showed up unexpectedly in New York. Dean tried to convince Inez to join him in San Francisco, where he would split his time between Camille and her, but she refused. The night Dean was leaving to go back west, Sal and Laura were going to a concert with Remi Boncoeur, who happened to be in town. Dean asked for a ride to the train station, but Remi refused to let Dean in the car, so Sal left Dean behind, the last time he saw him. Sal says that whenever the sun goes down, he thinks of America and its sprawling lands, and especially of Dean Moriarty.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Sal Paradise – The protagonist and narrator of the novel. Sal is a young writer living with his aunt in New Jersey, who gets swept up by the mad eccentricity and excitement of Dean. He follows Dean out west and ends up loving the **road**, going on a series of Beat adventures all across America. Sal takes time in between his long trips to finish a book, which he is able to sell to publishers for some money. He spends much of the novel pursuing and following Dean, with whom he is fascinated and develops an intense friendship. Sal is taken with the wandering, free, countercultural lifestyle that Dean epitomizes and it is through his adoring eyes as narrator that we see Dean and the other bums, criminals, and hooligans he spends so much of his time with. But, at the end of the novel, Sal appears to have settled down with Laura and to have left the part of his life on the **road** behind.

Dean Moriarty – Having grown up with an alcoholic father and spent time growing up in and out of jail and reform school, Dean comes to New York at the beginning of the novel to learn how to write and be an intellectual. He is the catalyst that sends Sal on the **road**. Dean is madly enthusiastic about everything, and always willing to have a good time or go on a long trip with

friends. He is a womanizer, who falls in love with women all over the country—and marries three (Marylou, Camille, and Inez). His own freedom is of utmost importance to Dean, but his obsession with his own freedom to move around and go on the **road** means that he neglects his responsibilities as a husband and (eventually) as a father. He abandons all three of his wives at various moments, failing to consider their feelings at all. Sal first idolizes Dean as an interesting madman and a kind of old western hero, and then sees him as a close friend and brother-figure, but by the end of the novel Dean is presented as a lonely, tragic character, almost doomed to wander the **road** by himself.

Carlo Marx – A poet and friend of Sal in New York, who Dean meets in Part One and quickly becomes friends with. Dean and Carlo go west before Sal does, and in Denver they maintain an intensely close friendship. In Part Two, Carlo seems to be somewhat fed up with Sal and Dean's vagabond, wandering lives. Carlo's name plays on its similarity to that of Karl Marx (the philosopher and critic of capitalism who founded Marxism), emphasizing Carlo's countercultural, anti-capitalist stance. Carlo is often read as representing Kerouac's friend and fellow Beat Allen Ginsberg, himself a famous Beat poet.

Sal's Aunt – Sal lives with his aunt in Paterson, New Jersey. He keeps returning there after his wild journeys west, because his aunt offers a stable household (with food) where he can settle down for a short period of time before hitting the **road** again. Sal's aunt represents to some degree the stable, traditional America life that Sal, Dean, and their friends reject. She is also an aspect of Sal's privilege, which allows him to journey around freely: whenever he is in trouble, he can write to her for more money, and whenever he is sick of the **road**, he can stay at her house for as long as he wants.

Remi Boncoeur – An old friend of Sal from prep school. Sal originally heads out west to go see Remi in San Francisco. When he finally gets there, he lives with Remi and Lee Ann for a while and works with Remi as a guard at a nearby barracks. Remi and Sal have a falling out before Sal leaves, but they reunite in New York at the end of the novel.

Eddie – Sal meets Eddie, a fellow hitchhiker, on his first trip out west. They become friends and Sal lends him a shirt, but Eddie is quick to leave Sal behind when a farmer drives by with room for only one passenger. Nonetheless, Sal and Eddie reconnect in Denver, where Sal gets his shirt back.

Camille – Dean's second wife and the mother of two of his daughters. Like his other wives, Dean abandons Camille repeatedly in order to go on the **road**, but it is Camille who he appears to end up with at the end of the novel (ironically, just after divorcing her to marry Inez). At the end of Part Three, Camille gets fed up with Dean and throws him out of their house, but at the end of the novel she writes Dean to tell him that she and their daughters will wait for him in San Francisco.

It is unclear whether Dean really does go back to Camille and settle down, or whether he keeps her waiting indefinitely.

The Alcatraz Guard – One of the guards working at the barracks where Remi and Sal also work in Part One, who used to work at the prison of Alcatraz. The guard is the complete opposite of Sal and his friends. He believes in strict rules and laws and takes delight in arresting and disciplining people.

Dr. Boncoeur – Remi's stepfather and a sophisticated doctor from Europe, who visits Remi in San Francisco. Remi asks Lee Ann and Sal to come to dinner with them, and to act as if everything is going well in San Francisco. But Sal gets drunk with Roland Major at the dinner and embarrasses Remi in front of his stepfather, creating a rift in Remi and Sal's friendship.

Teresa – A Mexican woman with a small child who has fled her abusive husband. Sal meets Teresa on a bus to Los Angeles and the two forge a connection immediately. They sleep together in L.A., and plan to hitchhike to New York together, but then decide to work in rural California to save money for a bus to New York. Sal lives with Teresa for a while and the two seem to care about each other a great deal, but Sal eventually gets restless and leaves her behind in order to head to New York by himself.

The Ghost of the Susquehanna – An old, mad hobo whom Sal sees outside of Pittsburgh on his way back east in Part One. The Ghost shows Sal that one can wander around and find wilderness anywhere in America, that the freedom of the **road** has more to do with a state of mind or being than with getting to any particular destination, like the west coast.

Ed Dunkel – A friend of Dean and Sal who shows up with Dean at Sal's brother's house in Virginia around Christmas. Ed marries Galatea before taking her west with Dean, but then he and Dean ditch Galatea in a hotel lobby. Ed continually abandons Galatea, but she remains confident that he will come back to her, and at the end of the novel they seem to have worked things out and are still together.

Galatea – Ed's wife. Galatea demands that Ed marry her before she travels east with Dean and him. He does, but then he and Dean ditch her in a hotel lobby. She stays with Old Bull Lee in New Orleans until Dean, Ed, Marylou, and Sal come to pick her up. She is furious with Ed, but the two end up making their relationship work.

Sam – Dean's cousin, who he meets up with in Denver. Dean is excited to see his cousin, as they were close friends while growing up, but Sam has matured and changed. He asks Dean to sign a paper guaranteeing that he will have nothing to do with Sam and his family.

Inez – After leaving Camille in San Francisco to go east with Sal, Dean meets Inez at a party in New York and quickly divorces Camille to marry her. Inez bears Dean a child, but then he leaves her behind to go find Sal in Denver and drive to Mexico to get a Mexican divorce from her.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Chad King – A friend of Sal in New York. Dean originally comes to New York to ask Chad to teach him how to write and be an intellectual, and Chad sends him to Sal to learn how to write.

Marylou – Dean's first wife. Marylou loves Dean but realizes that he will leave her. When he abandons her in San Francisco for Camille, she starts seeing other men. While living with Camille, Dean remains obsessed with Marylou, but the two drift apart as Dean becomes preoccupied with Camille and Inez.

Montana Slim – One of the hitchhikers in the back of the truck that Sal joins during his first trip on the **road**, who goes out drinking with Sal in Cheyenne before they part ways.

Mississippi Gene – Another hitchhiker in the back of the truck that Sal joins on his first trip west, during the best ride Sal says he ever had.

Roland Major – A writer and one of Sal's friends in Denver. Roland dislikes Dean and his manic, eccentric behavior, as he prefers to spend his time leisurely writing. When he runs into Sal in San Francisco, they get uproariously drunk at the dinner with Remi and Dr. Boncoeur, embarrassing Remi.

Ray Rawlins – Sal and Dean's friend in Denver, who they hang out and part with there.

Babe Rawlins – Ray's sister, who Sal hangs around with in Denver.

Tim Gray – One of Sal's friends who lives in Denver. When Sal first goes to Denver, he stays with Roland Major in an apartment belonging to Tim.

Rita Bettencourt – A girl in Denver whom Dean fixes Sal up with. Sal sleeps with her before he leaves Denver for San Francisco.

Lee Ann – Remi's girlfriend in San Francisco. Sal is highly critical of Lee Ann, and thinks that she only went to San Francisco with Remi because she thought he was wealthy. She becomes frustrated with Remi and kicks him out of their little shack in San Francisco.

Rickey – Teresa's brother, who tells Sal that he can help him make money by selling manure to farmers. However, Rickey ends up just drinking most days, telling Sal that they will make money *mañana*, tomorrow.

Ponzo – Rickey's friend, who Sal thinks is romantically interested in Teresa. Sal hangs around with Ponzo and Rickey while living with Teresa.

Old Bull Lee – An eccentric, drug-addicted old friend of Sal, who lives in New Orleans. Sal stays with him for a while in Part Two. Bull has traveled the world, getting caught up in various international drug trades. He lives with his wife Jane and their two children.

Jane Lee – Old Bull Lee's wife, who is also a heavy drug user.

Tom Saybrook – One of Sal’s friends, who hosts a big party on New Year’s Eve in New York.

Lucille – A woman in New York whom Sal thinks he loves and wants to marry, but ultimately decides to leave behind in Part Two.

Rollo Greb – Sal’s friend who lives on Long Island with his aunt. Sal goes to a party hosted by Rollo around New Year’s in Part Two, before he goes west again with Dean.

Hyman Solomon – A Jewish vagrant picked up by Dean as he, Sal, Marylou, and Ed drive south toward New Orleans.

Hal Hingham – A writer and a friend of Sal. He moves to Tucson to have time to focus on his writing but then ends up bored there, missing New York. He lends Sal some money so that Sal, Dean, and Marylou can make it to San Francisco.

Slim Gaillard – A jazz musician Dean and Sal see perform in San Francisco. As he says of several jazz performers, Dean calls Slim God.

Roy Johnson – Sal and Dean drive around with Roy in San Francisco before they leave in Part Three. When Dean comes to Denver in Part Four, he arrives with Roy.

Marie – A girl who Dean goes out with in San Francisco before he and Sal leave to go east in Part Three.

Walter – A black man in San Francisco who Sal and Dean drink with before they leave to go east in Part Three. They go get drinks at Walter’s house and are both impressed when Walter’s wife doesn’t seem to mind Walter’s drinking and going out.

Frankie – A woman Sal knows in Denver. Sal and Dean stay with her in Part Three. Dean is irritated with Frankie, but infatuated with her thirteen year-old daughter Janet.

Janet – The thirteen year-old daughter of Frankie. Dean is attracted to Janet, but Sal keeps him away.

Ed Wall – A friend of Dean, who owns a ranch with his wife. Sal and Dean stop by their ranch on the way from Denver to Chicago in Part Three.

Henry Glass – An ex-convict whom Sal meets on a bus in Part Four and accompanies to Denver.

Stan Shephard – Sal hangs out with Stan in Denver, in Part Four, and Stan goes to Mexico with Sal and Dean. As Sal sees when Stan leaves Denver and his grandfather begs him to stay, Stan is attempting to flee his grandfather for some unexplained reason.

Tom – A man who lives upstairs at Babe Rawlins’ house in Part Four and is hopelessly in love with her.

Victor – Sal, Stan, and Dean run into Victor at a gas station in Gregoria, Mexico. Victor takes them to his house where he sells them marijuana and brings them to a brothel.

Laura – At the end of the novel, Dean meets Laura, falls in love, and seems to settle down in New York with her.

Betty Gray – The wife of Tim Gray.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



FREEDOM, TRAVEL, AND WANDERING

Each part of Kerouac’s novel—until the short, concluding Part Five—tells the story of a journey, and its title emphasizes the importance of traveling, of being on the road whether riding, driving, or hitchhiking. Travel is hugely important to Sal and his companions, largely because it is associated with a kind of freedom and a sense of possibility. When Sal takes off to travel across the country, he is exercising his freedom to go anywhere, not to be tied down to any one place. At first, his goal is to travel west. As it was for the American pioneers who first traveled there, the west is a place of possibility and newness for Sal, a chance to start a whole new chapter of his life. But, once Sal gets as far west as he can—to San Francisco and the west coast—he ends up eventually journeying back east. At this point, Sal realizes that the freedom of the road is not contingent on any one destination, like the west, but is in the road itself. It is in being on the road, in the process of traveling, that Sal feels happiest and most free. For his friends and him, the journey is much more important than any destination.

Thus, travel in the novel becomes a kind of purposeless wandering. While Sal may have ostensible goals in mind, like San Francisco or Denver or even Mexico, his real purpose in traveling is simply to get on the road again. He often has no good reason for going to a particular destination. Rather, he feels an urge just to travel and wander. At various times throughout the novel, Sal tries to settle down, whether cotton picking with Teresa or working a stable job in Denver. But, he always eventually gets “the bug” to go out on the road again. Through Kerouac’s evocative descriptions of the road and the landscapes whizzing past Sal as he speeds along, the novel romanticizes and glorifies Sal’s aimless wandering. In giving such importance to the idea of travel, the novel asks readers to consider Sal’s travels in relation to other important journeys from the literary tradition. *On The Road* can be seen as a rewriting of [The Odyssey](#), for example: instead of a hero journeying home, Kerouac depicts an ordinary man who feels most at home on the road itself. One could also read the novel in relation to Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, the foundational work of western literature equating physical travel with a kind of spiritual journey. Finally, the novel also begs comparison to a

foundational text of English literature, [The Canterbury Tales](#), whose plot is entirely made up of stories told by travelers on the road to Canterbury. Through these comparisons, Kerouac's novel can be seen as claiming that the paradigmatic journey of his generation is a kind of aimless wandering. The heroes and protagonists of Kerouac's America are then the country's hitchhikers, bums, and transients.

All of this restless wandering finds an equivalent in the form and style of the novel. Its meandering plot—without a single climax, central event, or any clear symmetrical organization—mirrors Sal's crisscrossing path across the United States. And, just like Sal or Dean speeding along a highway, Kerouac's prose often speeds forward with long, run-on sentences and lists conveying the same manic energy and excitement that his characters prize so much. Stasis is the enemy not just of Sal and Dean's lives, but of the novel itself. When Sal finally chooses to settle down, staying in New York instead of going off with Dean again, this represents the conclusion of the novel. With this ending, Kerouac may suggest that the free wandering of his characters can only go on for so long and that eventually everyone has to stop somewhere. But, we don't learn exactly what happens to Dean after he leaves New York. Sal may choose to end the part of his life on the road, but for Dean the road seems to be his life.



SOCIETY, NORMS, AND COUNTERCULTURE

On The Road was hugely important to the Beat movement, a countercultural artistic and literary movement of the 1950s, and still appeals to rebellious spirits today. Kerouac's characters eschew the norms of mainstream society and live how they want, without regard for the law, manners, or social niceties. Sal and his friends indulge in drugs, heavy drinking, and casual sex, while Dean marries, divorces, and abandons several women. They steal food and cars, drive like maniacs, and wander around the country without stable jobs, socializing with other hitchhikers, criminals, and bums. Many of Sal's friends (including Sal himself) are writers and poets. They spend much of their time partying, drinking, and generally making trouble—and, one should keep in mind, this is all set in the late 1940s! Kerouac's novel was notorious for its racy material when it was published, and still has the potential to shock (or at least surprise) readers today. As Sal and his companions understand it, by rebelling against the constraints of mainstream society, they get more out of life. They live with a wild enthusiasm and do what they really want and need to do, rather than simply obeying what someone else thinks they should be doing. As Sal puts it, they are “mad to live.” Because of their countercultural behavior, Sal and his friends are often at odds with the police, so Kerouac's novel contains a good deal of anti-police and anti-government sentiment. As we see when Sal works as a barracks guard in San Francisco, or when Dean is

pulled over by police, the police seek to impose restrictions and laws on the free, mad behavior that Sal and Dean love so much.

On The Road defines and often glorifies the Beat movement, but it also raises some questions and problems with it. For one thing, how long can one rebel against mainstream society? Sal seems to return to a more normal life at the end of the novel and—as Dean starts to illustrate—all the drinking and drug use associated with such behavior eventually takes a toll. The eccentric madness of Old Bull Lee may be entertaining and interesting when Sal visits him in New Orleans, but would one want to live with him for a prolonged period of time? Would one want to be one of his children, raised by two drug-addicted parents? Additionally, who is excluded from Sal's community of friends? As the Privilege and Prejudice theme below discusses, Sal's group of countercultural friends often replicates the same prejudices of normal society. And finally, to what extent does the counterculture of Sal and others itself become a culture, with its own rules and restrictions? Sal is often afraid of being left out or left behind, and spends much of the novel following and pursuing Dean, a kind of ringleader of their group of friends. Does rebelling against mainstream culture, then, mean subscribing to just another form of culture or society? These questions, left somewhat unresolved by Kerouac, do not negate the excitement and possibility of the Beat movement entirely. Rather, *On The Road* is the quintessential representation of the movement, documenting it in all its excitement and with all its problems.



FRIENDSHIP

As much as it is a novel about journeying, *On The Road* is also a novel of friendship. To whatever extent Sal and others form a coherent “movement,” it is not an official club or organization, but is simply a loose community brought together by various ties of friendship. Wherever Sal goes, he thinks of friends he can call up to stay with, go out with, or drink with. The narration often casually drops the names of friends, as if the reader is another of Sal's friends, familiar with his acquaintances. In traveling around the country, Sal forges more and more friendships through the unique camaraderie of travel (and especially hitchhiking) companions.

In addition to Sal's vast network of friends, travel buddies, and acquaintances, Kerouac explores some especially close, intense friendships. In Denver, for example, Dean and Carlo meet every day early in the morning to sit on a bed together and talk, sharing everything about their lives. The most important friendship in the novel, though, is that between Dean and Sal. Both of them fall in love with different women over the course of the novel, but their friendship remains constant. Dean leaves Marylou, Camille, and Inez, but always comes back to Sal. And at the end of the novel, Dean and Sal's parting ways is narrated more tragically than any parting from a female love interest. *On*

The Road thus explores and celebrates this intense male friendship as even more important than romantic relationships. Sal and Dean often seem more interested in each other than in Marylou, Camille, Lucille, or any other woman. (Ironically, while the novel celebrates intense, quasi-romantic relationships between male friends, it treats the idea of actual romantic relationships between men, i.e. homosexuality, somewhat derisively, as seen with the “fag” who drives Sal and Dean out of San Francisco in Part Three.)

The intense friendships of the novel can be seen as a substitute for the family that many of Kerouac’s characters either lack or run away from. Dean, for example, doesn’t know his parents and spends some of the latter half of the novel searching for his father. Sal, on the other hand, leaves his family behind when he travels west, and Stan Shephard, in Part Four, quite literally flees from his grandfather. For Sal and his friends, their close friendships form a new kind of road family. Sal even refers to Dean as his brother at times. But, these friendships are not always ideal. Early in the novel, Sal fears being left out of Dean and Carlo’s circle. Dean abandons Sal multiple times, including while Sal is feverishly ill in Mexico. And Sal ultimately abandons Dean at the end of the novel for his plans with Remi and Laura. Nonetheless, despite its somewhat tragic ending, Kerouac’s novel still celebrates the community and camaraderie of the uniquely close friendships forged by Sal and his fellow travelers on the road, even if these relationships don’t always survive. After all, Sal may part ways with Dean at the end of the novel, but he never stops thinking of him.



WRITING

Along with several other of his friends, Sal is a writer. In fact, Dean first comes to Sal to learn how to write. Part of the way in which Sal and his friends rebel against mainstream society is in dedicating themselves to modern, experimental writing and creative pursuits rather than to traditional jobs. This aspect of *On The Road* is often read autobiographically, so that the novel can be seen as, in some way, about Kerouac himself and other Beat writers. But while people often draw direct equations between characters and real-life people (so that Sal, for example, is really Kerouac himself), what might be more important is the general tension between writing and real-life experience. Writing requires withdrawing from social life, taking time out of the crazy course of life to pause, reflect, and write. However, at the same time, one needs something to write about. One needs to live and go out in order to have interesting experiences that may form the basis for one’s writing. This tension can be seen with Sal, who leaves his half-finished manuscript at home in order to journey west after Dean. He seeks new, interesting experiences on the road, but this means putting his writing on hold for some time. Sal prizes living with a mad enthusiasm, but also values writing, which requires some peace, quiet, stability, and discipline. Sal

balances these competing impulses by alternating between going on long journeys with or in search of Dean and staying with his aunt or otherwise settling down for a period of time. This vacillation between stasis and movement, withdrawing from the madness of his friends and indulging in it, allows him to balance writing with living his life. One can also see Kerouac himself working through a similar tension through his energetic prose style, filled with run-on sentences and often heedless of proper grammar. By making his writing as exciting, meandering, and free as Dean’s journeys, he makes the solitary activity of his writing more like the mad life it depicts.



AMERICA

Among other things, *On The Road* is a portrait of mid-twentieth century America. As Sal wanders, drives, walks, rides, and hitchhikes all around the country, he sees all sorts of different sides of the country—from small towns to big cities, from east to west (and everything in between), north and south, opera houses and poor “housing-project shacks.” Even Part Four, when Sal ventures into Mexico, serves largely to illuminate America by contrast. Sal’s urge to get on the road is also associated with a specifically American pioneer mentality, a desire to explore and see the west. Sal’s migrant lifestyle and excitement at future possibilities when he goes on the road can also be seen as especially American. The United States is, after all, both proverbially a land of opportunity, where almost anything is possible, and a nation of immigrants. *On The Road* is thus a quintessentially American novel. Sal’s narration often personifies cities like San Francisco and talks expansively about the entire country or the whole continent of North America. Much of the novel is taken up by lyrical descriptions of American landscape in all its variety, from cotton fields to the Rocky Mountains.

But Sal’s relationship to an idea of America is problematic. America is Sal’s playground, the set of highways and roads through which he romps freely, but at the same time there is a pervasive sadness that Sal notices as he describes the rolling landscapes and small towns of much of his country. He often blatantly calls places sad or tragic, and in Part One sees the west as a pathetic relic of its former self. Moreover, America is also made up of all those in power, the guards at the barracks in San Francisco, people doing what they’re told, the government, mainstream society and the establishment. Sal thus cannot have a simple or uncomplicated pride or happiness in his country. *On The Road* celebrates, documents, and laments America in all its variety, expansiveness, and peculiar energy. As a novel whose plot moves around practically the entire country, it would seem to say something definitive about the United States at a particular time. But Kerouac’s book doesn’t reduce the United States to any single truth or quality. Perhaps the real lesson about America to be taken from the novel is that there is not just one America or American experience. There are many

Americas: the America of a migrant cotton picker is not the same as that of a wealthy businessman. There is the America of the oppressed, of the bums, of the rebels, as well as of the cops, of women, of northerners and southerners, small-town farmers and big-city dwellers. Ultimately, Kerouac suggests that America is as multi-form, various, and self-contradictory as his own sprawling novel.



PRIVILEGE AND PREJUDICE

The ideal world of Sal and his friends is one of freedom—from obligations, from the law and police, from being tied to any one place or even any one woman. But all this has a flip-side: Sal and Dean's freedom is often predicated on others' lack of freedom, and is generally only attainable because of their privileged status as white males in America. *On The Road* often uses marginalized or minority groups to emphasize the eccentricity or weirdness of the experiences Sal and Dean find themselves in. They go into "colored" neighborhoods or run into "queers" in San Francisco. Dipping into these communities allows Sal and Dean to demonstrate how wild and countercultural they are, without having to experience the discrimination that forces these kinds of people into marginalized communities. Dean often says that he "digs" black people, admiring how far outside the mainstream they are and what seem like their eccentricities. But this is not so much a choice (like it is for Dean and Sal) as a burden placed upon them. Sal talks about his running into "queers" for comic entertainment and shock value to the book's original 1950s audience, but the novel at times seems to harbor resentment toward them—at one point, Dean calls New York City "Frosty fagtown New York." These marginalized groups are important to the eccentric atmosphere the novel evokes, but they don't get to play central roles in the plot. This is perhaps clearest with the novel's treatment of African Americans. Dean and Sal practically worship black jazz musicians, but these people are only peripheral characters at best. While Dean and Sal "dig" aspects of black culture, they generally don't stop to consider the experiences of African Americans and their endurance of racism and segregation. While picking cotton with Teresa, Sal even romanticizes pre-Civil-War cotton picking, clearly not thinking about the horrors of slavery.

A similar dynamic is at play with women in *On The Road*. Women like Marylou, Teresa, and Camille are important to the novel's plot, but are not allowed to become rounded characters with fully fleshed-out inner lives. Sal, Dean, and other male characters often treat women as interchangeable and replaceable. They fall in love with various women, but then suddenly leave and abandon them. Dean's ideal situation is to have multiple women in San Francisco with him, so that he can spend time with different women at different times. In other words, he expects a woman to stay at home while he goes

around to other women and then be there waiting for him when he comes back. His mobile freedom relies on his women lacking *theirs*. Dean repeatedly abandons his wives to go on the road, because he needs to be free. But what about Camille's freedom? Or Inez's? Women are also often insulted by Sal's narration. They are objectified, considered mostly in terms of their physical appearance, and patronizingly called "dumb" or "stupid." Sal's narration also shows a double standard regarding sexual liberty. Sal and Dean try to sleep with women all over the country, all the time, but when Marylou sleeps with numerous men, Sal calls her a "whore."

On The Road is a story of freedom, of setting out on the road to find oneself and live how one wants to live. But it is important to recognize how privileged Sal is for being able to go on such journeys. Could he hitchhike across 1940s America so easily, for example, if he were black? Or if he had to work to support a family? Or if he didn't have an aunt who could conveniently send him money? And it is also important to consider how, although Sal prizes his own freedom and madness for life, he often doesn't respect that of others who are different from him. Kerouac's novel is a compelling, exciting, thought-provoking representation of a group of friends and fellow-travelers on the road, but not everyone has the ability to set off on the road whenever he or she feels like it, and not everyone is welcome in Sal's cadre of eccentric friends.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



THE ROAD

As the title of the novel suggests, the road is of tremendous importance to Sal and Dean's lives. They spend the majority of the novel traveling—whether driving, riding buses, walking, or hitchhiking. The open road symbolizes freedom for Dean and Sal. They long to be on the move, feel happiest on the road, and meet new friends as they travel. The idea of a physical journey along a road also comes to stand for more symbolic journeys. Dean and Sal come to understand themselves and the world better over the course of their time on the road. They travel not only on physical, literal roads, but also on journeys of maturation and learning. The road can even symbolize life itself, which can be thought of as the ultimate journey. Normally, one thinks of a road as useful for getting from one place to another. For Sal and Dean, however, their destination is never as important as the road itself, as being in the process of a trip. The road itself is the goal for them, and the journey is more important than where they end up. As Sal says at one point, emphasizing the importance of the road and all that it represents, "the road is life."



THE SHROUDED TRAVELER

It is never clear—to the reader or even to Sal himself—what propels Dean and him to keep moving and traveling on the **road**. The closest thing to an explanation that we get is Sal's dream of a shrouded figure who pursues him and urges him onward. This strange "shrouded traveler" thus symbolizes in some way Sal's inexplicable urge to move, travel, and not stay rooted to any one place. At one point, Sal thinks that the traveler is probably death, suggesting that the inevitability of death is what drives Sal to get as much out of his life as possible by hitting the road and feeling madly alive. But, in Mexico, Sal also says that Dean reminds him of this mysterious figure. This may suggest that it is only Dean's influence on Sal that propels him to stay on the move. Along this understanding, Sal's relentless restlessness would be motivated by a desire to keep up with Dean and not be left behind by his friend. However, Sal himself is a kind of mysterious, wandering traveler for much of the book. Could the strange traveler represent Sal himself, or the part of him that desires to keep moving constantly? The identity of the shrouded traveler is never stated definitively. Thus, he does not simply represent any one person. Rather, this strange figure stands in more generally for the unknown (and unknowable) cause of the restlessness that afflicts Sal, Dean, all their friends, and even the whole Beat generation.



This quote kicks off the lust for travel that pervades the book. From it, we get the sense that Sal fantasizes about traveling but may not have himself possessed the will to make it happen without Dean as a catalyst. This illustrates an important difference between their personalities: Sal is more reflective and passive, whereas Dean is impulsive and makes things happen.

This quote could be said, also, to explain what propels the dynamic of their friendship throughout the book. Sal needs Dean to show him adventures and motivate their wandering lifestyle. Dean seems to need Sal to give their life importance. Dean likes that Sal is a writer and even hopes to write himself, though he can't make himself sit still long enough to do so. So Dean and Sal need each other in a sense, and this cements their bond through the ecstasy and tribulations of the adventures that follow.

The quote also lays the foundations for the ways that their different temperaments lead to the eventual fracture in their friendship in which Dean careens himself into disaster (as his wandering nature suggests he would) and Sal settles into a life of writing, tired but still admiring of his life on the road with Dean.

☛ In the bar I told Dean, "Hell, man, I know very well you didn't come to me only to want to become a writer, and after all what do I really know about it except you've got to stick to it with the energy of a benny addict."

Related Characters: Sal Paradise (speaker), Dean Moriarty

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

While in the bar with Dean, Sal – who can, perhaps, be seen as a proxy for Kerouac himself – explains his attitude towards writing. Sal claims that it's tenacity, rather than skill or natural talent, that makes a writer. This is echoed in Kerouac's prose, which is loose, rambling, and only vaguely edited. Sal's attitude seems to be that simply getting the words out is more important than crafting them. His metaphor of writing "with the energy of a benny addict" also shows the world that Sal lives in. Bensedrine, an upper popular in Kerouac's time, was a drug that the counterculture loved to use recreationally.

Rather than being a stuffy or academic writer, it's clear that Sal wants to break with the social norms that govern writing





QUOTES


Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin Books edition of *On the Road* published in 1999.

Part 1, Chapter 1 Quotes

☛ With the coming of Dean Moriarty began the part of my life you could call my life on the road. Before that I'd often dreamed of going West to see the country, always vaguely planning and never taking off. Dean is the perfect guy for the road because he actually was born on the road, when his parents were passing through Salt Lake City in 1926, in a jalopy, on their way to Los Angeles.

Related Characters: Sal Paradise (speaker), Dean Moriarty

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 



Page Number: 1

Explanation and Analysis

and daily life. While Dean claims to want to learn to write, it seems clear that Dean is not cut out for it. He is someone who lives for experiences themselves, not for representations of those experiences. But Dean admires Sal's art and Sal admires Dean's spirit, so the two bond despite their differences.

●● But then they danced down the streets like dingedodies, and I shambled after as I've been doing all my life after people who interest me, because the only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars and in the middle you see the blue centerlight pop and everybody goes "awww!"

Related Characters: Sal Paradise (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 5

Explanation and Analysis


This luminous passage is Sal's clearest articulation of his compulsion towards people who are eccentric, reckless, and even dangerous and self-destructive. Sal isn't interested in banal daily life or in people who follow rules and live out other people's ideas and expectations – he wants passionate people who are unique and unafraid of consequences. This explains his attraction to the counterculture and the group of freewheeling friends he accumulates throughout the book.

It's important that Sal specifies that these are the types of people he's "shambled after...all my life." His wording suggests that he sees a difference between himself and those people. He is following after people who interest him in order to see their world, but he doesn't see himself as one of them necessarily. For this reason, his friendships – while intense and often rewarding – always seem a little precarious. Sal's values and interests are always slightly ajar from the group. By the end of the book we get the sense that it might be his ambition and instincts as a writer that separate him from these people who strive only to be present in the moment.

Part 1, Chapter 4 Quotes

●● "Hell's bells, it's Wild West Week," said Slim. Big crowds of businessmen, fat businessmen in boots and ten-gallon hats, with their hefty wives in cowgirl attire, bustled and whooped on the wooden sidewalks of old Cheyenne; farther down were the long stringy boulevard lights of new downtown Cheyenne, but the celebration was focusing on Oldtown. Blank guns went off. The saloons were crowded to the sidewalk. I was amazed, and at the same time I felt it was ridiculous: in my first shot at the West I was seeing to what absurd devices it had fallen to keep its proud tradition.

Related Characters: Sal Paradise (speaker), Montana Slim

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 27-28

Explanation and Analysis

This is Sal's first time in the western United States, and his pre-existing conceptions about it are very specific. He has an almost frontier-period imagination of the West; he associates it with freedom, cowboys, open spaces, and the ability to re-invent one's self without accountability. When Sal saw his first real cowboy in Nebraska, he felt that something he thought he knew about the West had been confirmed.

However, in Cheyenne he realizes for the first time that his ideas about the West are over-simplified and outdated. The town has turned the old West into a sort of Hollywood spectacle that strikes Sal as deeply inauthentic. Sal's self-awareness, by this point, is neither strong nor sharp. He thinks it's sad that Cheyenne has stooped to this kind of celebration, but he does not recognize that his ideas about what the West should be are equally romantic. During his time in the West he finds many different realities that aren't what he expected. This passage marks the beginning of his reckoning with the stereotypes he once believed in.

Part 1, Chapter 10 Quotes

●● I wanted to go and get Rita again and tell her a lot more things, and really make love to her this time, and calm her fears about men. Boys and girls in America have such a sad time together; sophistication demands that they submit to sex immediately without proper preliminary talk. Not courting talk—real straight talk about souls, for life is holy and every moment is precious.

Related Characters: Sal Paradise (speaker), Rita

Bettencourt

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 52



Explanation and Analysis

Throughout the book, nearly all the male characters have dismissive, patronizing, and even abusive attitudes towards the women in their lives. While Sal seems to genuinely like Rita, that does not translate to respect for her. Sal describes Rita as being "tremendously frightened of sex," and he says he wants to "prove" to her that sex is "beautiful." Instead of respecting that it seems she doesn't want to have sex, he feels compelled to teach her something. This is patronizing on its face, but this reasoning also seems to be a screen for Sal's more self-serving desire to have sex with her. In this passage, Sal is lamenting that he is leaving Denver and can't return to Rita, although this seems an ambivalent sentiment since he made vague plans to meet up with her in San Francisco that he never follows up on. Women are disposable objects of delight and fascination (and sometimes scorn and frustration) in this book, but rarely anything more.

Sal's lament, too, that American norms dictate that men and women must have sex immediately without talking about anything deep first seems misguided. Rita was not eager to have sex with him immediately – it was he who pressured her without first asking about her dreams and desires. As a narrator, Sal's take on the world can't be trusted at face value, but the warped ways he describes his experiences shed light on his inner life.

☞ This is the story of America. Everybody's doing what they think they're supposed to do. So what if a bunch of men talk in loud voices and drink the night?

Related Characters: Sal Paradise (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 62

Explanation and Analysis

At this point in the book, Sal is working as a guard at a barracks that houses construction workers – he has a cop's badge and uniform, which would seem to be symbols of law and order. However, Sal doesn't oversee or discipline the workers; he drinks with them instead and does his job badly because he is too drunk and rowdy. This passage comes

after Sal has unsuccessfully tried to persuade a co-worker to give the men another chance and not arrest them for their behavior the previous night (which was also Sal's behavior, though Sal is not in trouble himself).

Sal doesn't protest hard or implicate himself, rather he thinks to himself a platitude about how, "This is the story of America" and everyone is doing what they think they're supposed to do rather than being true to themselves. This is an odd and contradictory position for Sal to be in, because he is suddenly an authority figure – he represents the establishment rather than the counterculture to these men – and, because of this, he is immune from punishment. So he is benefiting from being a guard, but, all the while, he denounces such authority figures as conformists. This mirrors Sal's position in the book overall. He is devoted to a romanticized counterculture, but he's only able to choose the life he lives because he has some money and he's a white man (women and minorities in this book generally do not have the freedom to make the choices he has made). In other words, he is always both the establishment and the counterculture at once.

☞ Here I was at the end of America—no more land—and now there was nowhere to go but back.

Related Characters: Sal Paradise (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 71

Explanation and Analysis


By this point in the novel, Sal is tiring of San Francisco. He thought that he would go West and find the freedom and happiness he craved, but he quickly sours on this idea as his friendships strain, he runs into trouble at work, and he finds certain parts of the city boring. This encapsulates one lesson of the novel, that a person's initial goal never turns out to be what they thought it would be, and the path to get there is always more rewarding than the achievement itself.

This also marks a shift in mentality for Sal. Until he got to California he could still have the romanticized frontier-era ideas about the West that initially drove his journey, but once he has reached "the end of America" he has to acknowledge that America is not going to give him what he initially hoped. In saying that "there was nowhere to go but back," Sal is admitting that he needs to re-evaluate his desires and expectations and, perhaps, revisit the realities that he had overlooked in favor of his illusions about

America. As he traverses the country once more on his way back East, his observations become more specific and nuanced, less about what he *hopes* he will see and more focused on what he *actually* sees and experiences.

☛ There was an old Negro couple in the field with us. They picked cotton with the same God-blessed patience their grandfathers had practiced in ante-bellum Alabama; they moved right along their rows, bent and blue, and their bags increased. My back began to ache. But it was beautiful kneeling and hiding in that earth.

Related Characters: Sal Paradise (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 89



Explanation and Analysis

Much like Sal's assessment of his interaction with Rita, this passage points to Sal's unreliability as a balanced and reasonable narrator. Often in the book, Sal and Dean and others fetishize the African American experience as one that is somehow free from the pressures and norms of white America. Obviously, that assessment ignores the violence and prejudice that, in fact, limit African American choices in ways that a white American's choices would not be limited. Here, Sal easily praises the beauty of picking cotton, though he speaks only from an experience of doing it casually and by choice. By contrast, the black farmers and sharecroppers that pick cotton have to do this particular work in order to survive – and it's grueling labor, something that Sal can't appreciate from his tourist's understanding of it. Most tellingly, Sal casually refers to the "God-blessed patience" with which African Americans have picked cotton for generations; he's romanticizing slavery here and implying that there was something peaceful and beautiful in being enslaved and forced to pick cotton.

In a sense, this easy reverence for the labor of cotton picking flies in the face of the racist de-valuing of jobs that were traditionally held by minorities. Sal likely believes – and he is, perhaps, correct – that his attitude towards African Americans and their work is more generous than the mainstream white attitude towards minorities in the 1940s. However, replacing racist disdain with romanticized reverence is still evading a frank acknowledgement of the realities that minorities were facing. As much as Sal believes he is on a journey to learn the real America, he doesn't seem capable very often of seeing past the surface.

☛ I thought all the wilderness of America was in the West till the Ghost of the Susquehanna showed me different. no, there is a wilderness in the East; it's the same wilderness Ben Franklin plodded in the oxcart days when he was postmaster, the same as it was when George Washington was a wild-buck Indian-fighter, when Daniel Boone told stories by Pennsylvania lamps and promised to find the Gap, when Bradford built his road and men whooped her up in log cabins. There were not great Arizona spaces for the little man, just the bushy wilderness of eastern Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia, the backroads, the black-tar roads that curve among the mournful rivers like the Susquehanna, Monogahela, old Potomac and Monocacy.

Related Characters: Sal Paradise (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 97

Explanation and Analysis



At this point in the book, Sal is traveling back East from California and he is spending more time noticing the parts of the country he initially passed over in his hurry to get out West. This marks a part of the book in which his observations become more specific. Instead of dealing in vague tropes about the West, Sal is suddenly thinking about specific historical figures and their relationship to the American landscapes they inhabited.

Significantly, he frames all these men as wanderers, much like him, who were searching for something in the American wilderness. He does not acknowledge that these were all men with very specific goals and tangible attachments and commitments to their society. While this is, again, an example of Sal romanticizing the past in a self-serving way, it is, at the very least, a little more nuanced than the romantic ideas he conjured up earlier in the book, and it is an explicit acknowledgement that Sal was wrong before to look for freedom in a specific place. This passage seems to imply that Sal is discovering that the kind of freedom he once associated with the West can be found anywhere – that freedom is more tied to attitude than place.

Part 2, Chapter 2 Quotes

☛ It was a completely meaningless set of circumstances that made Dean come, and similarly I went off with him for no reason. In New York I had been attending school and romancing around with a girl called Lucille, a beautiful Italian honey-haired darling that I actually wanted to marry. All these years I was looking for the woman I wanted to marry.

Related Characters: Sal Paradise (speaker), Dean Moriarty

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 107



Explanation and Analysis


By this time in the book Sal has returned to New York from his travels out West. He seems to have been living a much less countercultural life, spending a year attending school and forming a serious relationship with a woman he wanted to marry. However, this passage shows the flippancy with which he is able to abandon this life, which implies that his attachment to it was never so deep.

This passage is an indication of Sal's ambivalence about wandering and it shows the differences between his values and Dean's. While Dean has casually married and abandoned many women, Sal has never married and it seems that, when he does, he plans to take it seriously. This implies that someday he will look to move on from his life on the road, which is a goal that Dean never claims. As the book moves forward it becomes clearer and clearer that Dean and Sal, while close friends, have profound differences that will eventually take their lives in different directions.

☝ Just about that time a strange thing began to haunt me. it was this: I had forgotten something. There was a decision that I was about to make before Dean showed up, and now it was driven clear out of my mind but still hung on the tip of my mind's tongue. . . . It had to do somewhat with the Shrouded Traveler. Carlo Marx and I once sat down together, knee to knee, in two chairs, facing, and I told him a dream I had about a strange Arabian figure that was pursuing me across the desert; that I tried to avoid; that finally overtook me just before I reached the Protective City. "Who is this?" said Carlo. We pondered it. I proposed it was myself, wearing a shroud. That wasn't it. . . . Naturally, now that I look back on it, this is only death: death will overtake us before heaven.

Related Characters: Sal Paradise, Carlo Marx (speaker), Dean Moriarty

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 115

Explanation and Analysis

Throughout the book, Sal mostly takes his desire to wander for granted; he rarely attempts to make sense of it or

explain it. However, in this moment, it seems important for Sal to investigate why he wanders. He remembers describing a dream to his friend Carlo (one that seems intense enough to have been a vision) of a shrouded traveler pursuing him across the desert. That shrouded traveler is his desire to wander, and the fear implied by this pursuit runs counter to the way travel has been framed in the book up to this point. The characters, so far, have claimed to be running by choice towards freedom, rather than running in fear from something unknown.

The dream gives a more sinister cast to Sal's relentless romanticism of the road. It's important that Sal first thinks the shrouded figure is himself and then realizes it's not – this seems to be an acknowledgement that wandering is not his nature in the way that it is Dean's. He next settles on death to explain the shrouded figure, which seems to imply a fear that without wandering Sal won't be living his life to the fullest.

☝ "I want to know what all this sitting around the house all day is intended to mean. What all this talk is and what you propose to do. Dean, why did you leave Camille and pick up Marylou?" No answer—giggles. "Marylou, why are you traveling around the country like this and what are your womanly intentions concerning the shroud?" Same answer. "Ed Dunkel, why did you abandon your new wife in Tucson and what are you doing here sitting on your big fat ass? Where's your home? What's your job?"

Related Characters: Carlo Marx (speaker), Dean Moriarty, Camille, Marylou, Ed Dunkel

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 120-121

Explanation and Analysis



Carlo is an important character, since he was first described as being just like Sal and Dean, but his friendship with them frays as his life goes in a different direction. In a sense, Dean represents the reckless and doomed extreme of the counterculture. He is accountable to nobody and has no ambition besides having fun new experiences.

Carlo rejects the same kinds of authority and mainstream culture as Dean, but Carlo is shown to be devoted to his poetry. Of anyone in the book, Carlo is the one who seems most productive; he always has new and interesting poetry to show the others, which implies that he has found a way to balance his lifestyle and his ambition.

Sal seems caught in the middle – he lives Dean's life most of the time, and tries to write sometimes. He's less carefree than Dean, and less productive and responsible than Carlo. While Sal romanticizes Dean throughout the book more than Carlo, this is a moment of reckoning in which Carlo becomes a center of morality. This is not the unexamined morality of mainstream society, but a heartfelt critique coming from a friend and fellow member of the counterculture. This is an important passage in that it challenges the simplistic ideals and reckless lifestyle of its protagonists, making the moral stakes of the book more fraught and complex.

☝ I could hear Dean, blissful and blabbering and frantically rocking. Only a guy who's spent five years in jail can go to such maniacal helpless extremes. . . Dean had never seen his mother's face. Every new girl, every new wife, every new child was an addition to his bleak impoverishment. Where was his father?—old bum Dean Moriarty the Tinsmith, riding freights, working as a scullion in railroad cookshacks, stumbling, down-crashing in wino alley nights, expiring on coal piles, dropping his yellowed teeth one by one in the gutters of the West. Dean had every right to die the sweet deaths of complete love of his Marylou. I didn't want to interfere, I just wanted to follow.

Related Characters: Sal Paradise (speaker), Dean Moriarty, Marylou

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 123

Explanation and Analysis



Despite Carlo's evisceration of Dean's lifestyle and morality, Sal still seems to worship Dean and want to do everything he can to help him. Instead of holding Dean accountable for his treatment of Marylou, he excuses it by empathizing with Dean's difficulties – his time in jail, his absent mother, his degenerate father. Instead of listening to Carlo's admonishment of Dean's treatment of Marylou, Sal comes to almost the opposite conclusion, deciding that Dean deserves Marylou's love because of his troubled past. This is another instance of Sal viewing women as objects who have importance solely through their relationship to men, as opposed to human beings who have value in themselves.

On the other hand, though, this passage is one of the most intense moments of friendship between Dean and Sal. While Dean has offered to let Sal sleep with Marylou, Sal decides, out of loyalty to Dean, that he can't do it even though he wants to. Sal views this as an act of kindness and

empathy towards Dean, which, in a way, it is, despite that Marylou is caught in the middle.

☝ On rails we leaned and looked at the great brown father of waters rolling down from mid-America like the torrent of broken souls—bearing Montana logs and Dakota muds and Iowa vales and things that had drowned in Three Forks, where the secret began in ice. Smoky New Orleans receded on one side; old, sleepy Algiers with its warped woodsidings bumped us on the other. Negroes were working in the hot afternoon, stoking the ferry furnaces that burned red and made our tires smell. Dean dug them, hopping up and down in the heat.

Related Characters: Sal Paradise (speaker), Dean Moriarty

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 131

Explanation and Analysis



Sal loves to rhapsodize about the American landscape, which is of a piece with his frontier-era ideas about open land being synonymous with freedom. However, something that his romantic frontier-era ideas about the landscape never acknowledged was that the American continent was already settled by American Indians, and to re-populate the West with white settlers was not simply to find freedom in open land, but to violently remove others from their land. In other words, romanticizing the American landscape has always been bound up with erasing the pain of others, particularly minorities.

This is clearly evident in this passage, as Sal's description of natural features of the landscape bleeds seamlessly into a description of African-American laborers; Sal's description indicates that he sees these people as part of the landscape, rather than as people with complex and important lives who have themselves constructed the American landscape as we know it through their labor. Much of Dean and Sal's conception of America is filtered through their own position as middle-class white men. They have a lot of trouble imagining the lives of others who aren't like them.

Part 2, Chapter 9 Quotes

☝ Suddenly Dean was saying good-by. He was bursting to see Camille and find out what had happened. Marylou and I stood dumbly in the street and watched him drive away. "You see what a bastard he is?" said Marylou. "Dean will leave you out in the cold any time it's in his interest."

Related Characters: Sal Paradise, Marylou (speaker), Dean Moriarty, Camille

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 159



Explanation and Analysis

While Dean and Sal often discredit Marylou's opinions and character, she is able to see something about Dean that Sal can't; he is fundamentally selfish, which is a threat to his and Sal's friendship. Prior to this passage, Sal and Dean and Marylou were all traveling together, but Dean left them on a whim in San Francisco in order to go visit another woman. Sal seems just as surprised by this as Marylou as they watch him drive away, but Marylou is the one who is able to show Sal that this is part of a pattern of behavior for Dean.

The reason Marylou is able to see this aspect of Dean is that, as a woman, Dean treats her with less respect than he treats Sal, and once Sal is in the position of being disrespected by Dean it takes Marylou to make sense of it for him. This passage shows a faultline in the friendship between Dean and Sal; it indicates that the friendship might not be as important to Dean as it is to Sal, and it foreshadows a time in which Dean will seriously let Sal down.

●● At lilac evening I walked with every muscle aching among the lights of 27th and Welton in the Denver colored section, wishing I were a Negro, feeling that the best the white world had offered me was not enough ecstasy for me, not enough life, joy, kicks, darkness, music, not enough night. . . . I wished I were a Denver Mexican, or even a poor overworked Jap, anything but what I was so drearily, a "white man" disillusioned.

Related Characters: Sal Paradise (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 169

Explanation and Analysis


At this point, Sal has tried to settle in Denver and commit to a stable job at a fruit market, but he is dissatisfied with the life that he is living after the excitement of the road. His response to this dissatisfaction is to romanticize the lives of minorities because they seem to Sal to be living exciting lives that are outside of the American mainstream.

What Sal does not understand is that their lives are not an example of the kind of countercultural existence that Sal

chose for himself. The people he romanticizes live in white-imposed exile from the American mainstream because of bigotry. For Sal to imagine the excitement and ecstasy of being a minority (in contrast to the dreary disillusionment of being a white man with an obligation to go to work every day) shows how profoundly he does not understand America, even though his whole purpose in life seems to be to explore America and try to see it for what it is.

●● I looked at him; my eyes were watering with embarrassment and tears. Still he stared at me. now his eyes were blank and looking through me. It was probably the pivotal point of our friendship when he realized I had actually spend some hours thinking about him and his troubles, and he was trying to place that in his tremendously involved and tormented mental categories.

Related Characters: Sal Paradise (speaker), Dean Moriarty

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 178

Explanation and Analysis

This is a pivotal moment in Sal and Dean's friendship, and, because of that, a pivotal moment in the book. Sal has come to find Dean in San Francisco and discovers that Dean's life seems like a mess; he's in trouble with women, his health isn't great, and he seems unhinged. Instead of writing him off or trying to get him help, Sal decides that the best thing to do for Dean is to get him on the road again. This is a role reversal in their friendship, as it is usually Dean who spurs Sal to action. It also points to something sinister about their friendship; they seem to be enablers of each other's worst traits, including their desire to evade all responsibility in their lives.

Despite that Sal's method of helping Dean seems not to be the best one, Dean is deeply moved to realize that Sal has spent time considering his needs and problems. This empathy would seem to be a fundamental function of friendship, and the fact that Dean takes note of this in Sal emphasizes Dean's persistent inability to empathize with others – it just isn't the way he operates. So even though this is presented as being a beautiful moment for the two men's friendship, it spells trouble to come and points to problems from the past.

☛ All the cigarette butts, the bottles, the matchbooks, the come and the gone were swept up into this pile. Had they taken me with it, Dean would have never seen me again. He would have had to roam the entire United States and look in every garbage pail from coast to coast before he found me embryonically convoluted among the rubbishes of my life, his life, and the life of everybody concerned and not concerned.

Related Characters: Sal Paradise (speaker), Dean Moriarty

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 233

Explanation and Analysis



At this point, Sal and Dean have spent the night in a movie theater in Detroit with a bunch of socially marginal people that Sal and Dean think are sad. Sal imagines being swept up with all the trash left on the floor of the movie theater. His description of this trash echoes, in a sense, his description of the kinds of people in the theater, which points to an implicit fear in Sal that he is becoming one of these sad people instead of achieving his countercultural dreams.

The passage seems to mark a rare moment of near-self-awareness by Sal about the fine line between being a member of a drug-fueled counterculture and being an addict with few ambitions, although he snaps out of it quickly to imagine himself happy in the dustbin with all the rubbish and to say that it is better to be anonymous in the world than famous. This seems to be another case of Sal's willingness to put a positive spin on almost any experience that he perceives as being outside the American mainstream.

Part 4, Chapter 1 Quotes

☛ Whenever spring comes to New York I can't stand the suggestions of the land that come blowing over the river from New Jersey and I've got to go. So I went. For the first time in our lives I said good-bye to Dean in New York and left him there.

Related Characters: Sal Paradise (speaker), Dean Moriarty

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 237

Explanation and Analysis

At this point in the book, Sal has stayed in New York a while and made progress on his book, but when Spring comes he feels compelled to hit the road again – this time without Dean. First, this points to the tension Kerouac consistently sets up between writing and experience. Unlike Carlo, Sal never seems able to find a lifestyle that allows him to simultaneously write and have experiences; he is always bouncing back and forth between the two, never seeming fully satisfied either way.

Second, this points to a new dynamic in Sal and Dean's friendship in which Sal does not need Dean to inspire him to travel. This also comes at a moment in which Sal is recognizing Dean's patterns with women – Sal seems able to criticize Dean for the first time and imagine a life without him being the prime motivator. This is by no means an end to their friendship, but an evolution of it in which Sal seems less in awe of Dean and more his equal.

☛ Dean took out other pictures. I realized these were all the snapshots which our children would look at someday with wonder, thinking their parents had lived smooth, well-ordered, stabilized-within-the-photo lives and got up in the morning to walk proudly on the sidewalks of life, never dreaming the raggedy madness and riot of our actual lives, our actual night, the hell of it, the senseless nightmare road.

Related Characters: Sal Paradise (speaker), Dean Moriarty

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 241

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Dean and Sal are looking at photographs from their friendship and Sal imagines that their children will one day see these pictures. He is startled to realize that the pictures do not convey the excitement and rebellion that he feels has characterized his and Dean's lives. He worries, as a result, that his children won't know how complex and adventurous their lives actually were.

Sal's worries point to several things. While Dean has previously imagined him and Sal growing old together as hobo, it seems that Sal's vision of the future is one in which the two of them grow old as reasonably mainstream white male Americans, raising a family in a context in which their children could conceivably not know that their fathers had once been part of the counterculture except through photographs. This suggests, again, Sal's and Dean's diverging futures. It also, importantly, acknowledges that


appearances are reductive. Sal himself doesn't explicitly make this leap, but he has spent the whole book judging people (minorities, women, even his white male friends) based on their appearances, and this passage indicates that Sal's superficial judgments, like the imagined judgments of Sal's imagined children, could fail to scrape the surface of what is true.

Part 4, Chapter 2 Quotes

☞ Suddenly I had a vision of Dean, a burning shuddering frightful Angel, palpitating toward me across the road, approaching like a cloud, with enormous speed, pursuing me like the Shrouded Traveler on the plain, bearing down on me. I saw his huge face over the plains with the mad, bony purpose and the gleaming eyes; I saw his wings; I saw his old jalopy chariot with thousands of sparking flames shooting out from it; I saw the path it burned over the road; it even made its own road and went over the corn, through cities, destroying bridges, drying rivers. It came like wrath to the West. I knew Dean had gone mad again.

Related Characters: Sal Paradise (speaker), Dean Moriarty

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 246-247

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Sal (who is in Denver with friends) learns that Dean is on his way to Denver. The news causes Sal to have a vision reminiscent of the one he described to Carlo of the shrouded traveler, except this time the shrouded traveler chasing him across the desert is neither Sal himself nor his fear of death; it is Dean. This is a dark and frightening vision in which Dean is a kind of demon causing Sal to travel based on fear rather than friendship. Sal is generally worshipful of Dean and willing to go along with whatever he says, but his vision here points to an alternate possibility about Sal's and Dean's friendship: that it is based on fear in addition to, or even instead of, love.


Throughout the book Sal seems uncertain about the extent to which wandering is part of his nature or simply brought about by Dean's presence. While the reality seems to lie somewhere in between, this passage suggests that Sal's wandering impulse is a result of Dean's presence, and that it is not a good thing.

Part 4, Chapter 5 Quotes

☞ Behind us lay the whole of America and everything Dean and I had previously known about life, and life on the road. We had finally found the magic land at the end of the road and we never dreamed the extent of the magic.

Related Characters: Sal Paradise (speaker), Dean Moriarty

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 264

Explanation and Analysis

Just as Sal began his journey to the Western United States with romantic and simplistic notions about what he would find there, he and Dean travel to Mexico with the notion that somehow Mexico will provide the magic that America didn't. Sal seems unable to shift his paradigm for viewing the world. He constantly believes that the vague and romantic reality he craves is out there for him to find, despite the fact that all his traveling has only served to present him with places whose complexity and difficulty disappoint him.

Sal never reassesses his belief that his romantic ideas are true, which points to his preference for his romantic fantasies about the world over a frank assessment of the reality before his eyes. In a sense, it seems that it is this quality (more than any other that he might attribute to a Shrouded Traveler) that propels his wandering.

☞ And he was gone. Twelve hours later in my sorrowful fever I finally came to understand that he was gone. . . When I got better I realized what a rat he was, but then I had to understand the impossible complexity of his life, how he had to leave me there, sick, to get on with his wives and woes.

Related Characters: Sal Paradise (speaker), Dean Moriarty

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 288

Explanation and Analysis


In this passage, Dean and Sal are in Mexico and Sal is sick. Instead of staying and taking care of his friend, Dean leaves him to go back to New York and see Inez. This is a complicated moment for Sal because, after Dean's departure, he is finally admitting "what a rat" Dean is for being so unreliable and such a bad friend. It's stunning, in a


sense, that it Sal so long to realize Dean's nature, but, on the other hand, for Sal to acknowledge this major fault of Dean's is a big step forward for Sal's ability to reckon with the reality of the world rather than retreating into his fantasies about what reality should be.

Nonetheless, Sal fails to hold Dean accountable for this behavior, seemingly chalking it up to fate and "complexity" that Dean always seems to be abandoning people and getting into trouble. This passage points to the morality of the book overall, which seems not to put much stock in the importance of human choice and decency. Sal seems unable to affirm that anyone should have any responsibility to anybody else.

●● So in America when the sun goes down and I sit on the old broken-down river pier watching the long, long skies over New Jersey and sense all that raw land that rolls in one unbelievable huge bulge over to the West Coast, and all that road going, all the people dreaming in the immensity of it, and in Iowa I know by now the children must be crying the land where they let the children cry, and tonight the stars'll be out, and don't you know that God is Pooh Bear? the evening star must be drooping and shedding her sparkler dims on the prairie, which is just before the coming of complete night that blesses the earth, darkens all rivers, cups the peaks and folds the final shore in, and nobody, nobody knows what's going to happen to anybody besides the forlorn rags of growing old, I think of Dean Moriarty, I even think of Old Dean Moriarty the father we never found, I think of Dean Moriarty.

Related Characters: Sal Paradise (speaker), Dean Moriarty

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 293

Explanation and Analysis

In this final passage, Sal and Dean have seen one another for the last time, and it is under conflicted circumstances. Sal has found the woman he wants to marry and is close again with a friend who had been previously estranged from him and Dean. Sal seems to be finally assimilating to mainstream society and ready to leave his days on the road behind. When Dean asks to ride with Sal to Penn Station and Sal's friend refuses, Sal waves goodbye to Dean, symbolically choosing his new life over his old one.

However, in this last poetic passage that seems to be Sal's attempt to capture the essence of the American continent by describing landscapes and people and the constant road moving through all of it, Dean emerges in the end to tie it all together. This implies that Sal sees Dean as emblematic of America overall, and it also presents Dean as a redemptive figure in the face of death. Despite the fact that Sal has left Dean behind, Sal recognizes that Dean taught him to live and showed him the best and worst of America.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PART 1, CHAPTER 1

Sal Paradise recalls how his “life on the **road**” began when he met Dean Moriarty, shortly after splitting up with his wife. He had learned of Dean through his friend Chad King, whom Dean had written to from reform school, asking to be taught about “Nietzsche and all the wonderful intellectual things that Chad knew.”

Dean arrived in New York City with his new wife Marylou, and Sal paid him a visit in his “cold-water flat.” Dean looked like a hero from an old Western, and had in fact been working on a ranch in Colorado before marrying Marylou and coming to New York. Sal describes Marylou as sweet but “dumb and capable of doing horrible things.”

Dean asked Chad King to teach him how to write and Chad told him to ask Sal instead, since Sal was a writer. After getting in a fight with Marylou and then fleeing from the police, Dean showed up on Sal’s doorstep one night (he lived with his Aunt in New Jersey), asking him to show him how to write.

Dean and Sal went to get drinks and Sal agreed to let Dean stay with him for a while, though he said he couldn’t teach him anything about writing. The two agreed to go out west at some point in the future. Sal says that Dean was “simply a youth tremendously excited with life.”

According to Sal, while out west before coming to New York, Dean had spent “a third of his time in the poolhall, a third in jail, and a third in the public library.” One night, the two went into New York to meet some girls, but the girls didn’t show up. Dean ended up meeting Carlo Marx, a “sorrowful poetic con-man.”

Dean and Carlo hit it off right away and Sal ended up following them as they rushed down the street, just as he’s pursued interesting people his whole life. Sal says that he only finds interesting the people who are “the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time.” For about two weeks, Sal didn’t see Dean or Carlo, as those two became fast friends.

The beginning of the novel establishes the importance of its two main subjects: Dean and Sal’s friendship and Sal’s “life on the road.” Dean seeks out Chad King to learn how to become a writer and an intellectual.



For Sal, Dean is associated with the mythical, romanticized past of the West, to which he will soon travel. While he is fascinated by Dean, he is much more critical of Marylou, whom he pigeonholes as sweet but dumb.



Dean first meets Sal because he wants to learn how to write. Not respecting social norms (including the law), Dean is often in trouble with the police, as here.



Sal admires Dean for his mad, free excitement for life. Dean is the catalyst that Sal needs to go on the road: almost as soon as they meet, they begin making plans to travel.



Sal, Dean, and their friends are all characterized as countercultural Beat figures: they are in and out of jail and mostly concerned with meeting girls and having a good time, but at the same time are “poetic” and value literature.



Sal is interested in people who disregard mainstream society in favor of living life to the fullest. Sal is slightly left out as Carlo and Dean become such good friends.



In the spring, many of Sal's friends—including Dean—took trips out west. Dean, Carlo, and Sal took a picture together before Dean left, and they cut it two so that Dean and Carlo each kept a half. Sal then journeyed out west slightly later, beginning his "whole **road** experience."

Sal says that he went after Dean partly because he reminded him of a kind of long-lost brother. He says all his friends were either intellectuals or criminals, but that Dean's intelligence was of a different kind. He calls him "a western kinsman of the sun." He felt an urge to take off and follow Dean out west.

Sal and his friends take to the open road, heading out west. The picture that Dean and Carlo each keep half of symbolizes their friendship, but (given that it's cut in two) might also suggest the possibility of such a friendship breaking.



Sal regards his close friend Dean as like a brother to him. At this early point in the novel, Sal still associates the freedom of the road with the particular destination of the west.



PART 1, CHAPTER 2

In July 1947, Sal was prepared to go west, having saved up fifty dollars. An old friend named Remi Boncoeur had invited him to come to San Francisco. Sal left the half-finished manuscript of his book at his aunt's house and took off.

Sal saw on a map that Route 6 went all the way from Cape Cod to Los Angeles, and so decided to journey north to Bear Mountain, where he could get on this **road** and stay on it all the way to the west coast. After getting out of New York City, he hitchhiked further north. When he finally got to Bear Mountain Bridge, he was left outside in the pouring rain.

Sal cursed and thought of everyone out west "having a big time," without him. At last, a car came and took him to a town called Newburgh. The man driving the car informed him that his idea of taking Route 6 the whole way wouldn't work and told him to go back through New York and head for Pittsburgh. Sal was annoyed with all the money he had wasted, but swore that he'd get to Chicago by the next day.

In order to travel and have interesting experiences, which he might then write about, Sal has to put his book to the side and stop writing for some time.



Sal chooses to journey in a somewhat nonconventional way, hitchhiking by himself.



Sal has an underlying sense of loneliness, of being left out while everyone else has "a big time." His journey is already off to a less-than-ideal start: his trip will be less about getting to his destination efficiently and more about the interesting path he takes to get there.



PART 1, CHAPTER 3

Sal took a bus through Pennsylvania and Ohio all the way to Chicago. He walked around the city, thinking about "all my friends from one end of the country to the other and how they were really all in the same vast backyard doing something so frantic and rushing-about."

Sal took a bus out of Chicago and then started to hitchhike again. A woman picked him up and took him all the way to Iowa, where Sal saw the Mississippi River for the first time in his life. Stopped in a small Iowa town, Sal ate apple pie and ice cream in a bus station. He notes that this was practically all he ate during his trip west.

As Sal continues along his journey, he thinks of America as one giant "backyard" where his mad friends rush about, enjoying life.



By hitchhiking, Sal meets all sorts of people while traveling. Eating almost exclusively apple pie—a stereotypically classic American food—suggests that he is exploring a distinctly American experience.



Sal took another bus and then got picked up by a truck driver, who took him as far as Des Moines. He stayed in an inn near the railroad tracks and when he woke up the next morning, he says that he didn't know who he was. He felt like a stranger, "at the dividing line between the East of my youth and the West of my future."

Sal saw some beautiful girls in Iowa, but says he was in a hurry to get to Denver, where Carlo Marx, Dean, and Chad King were, as well as other friends. Sal continued hitchhiking, and soon met up with another traveling New Yorker, an Irish man named Eddie. Sal says he liked Eddie because "he was enthusiastic about things."

Sal and Eddie got on a bus and made their way into Nebraska, where Sal saw his first real cowboy. They started hitchhiking again and met a cowboy who had two cars he was driving back to Montana, and needed help driving one of them about a hundred miles, where he would meet his wife. Eddie and Sal agreed to help. Eddie drove one car, while Sal and the cowboy were in the other, and Eddie sped around ninety miles per hour.

The cowboy told Sal that he hated Nebraska and told him to come see "God's country," Montana, sometime. They stopped and Sal and Eddie ate in a diner. A big, "old-timer Nebraska farmer," came in and Sal was fascinated by him, calling him the personification of the West.

Sal and Eddie continued journeying with the cowboy and then found other people to hitchhike with. They got to a town called Shelton, which Eddie remembered he had been in once before. It started raining, and Sal gave Eddie a wool plaid shirt. As they waited for a ride, a man offered to give them both jobs in a carnival, but they declined, wanting to continue their respective journeys.

At last, a farmer's trailer pulled up to Sal and Eddie, and its driver said that he could only take on one passenger. Without saying a word, Eddie hopped on and left Sal behind. Sal felt like he was just about to give up on getting a ride, when a car stopped and picked him up.

By setting out on the road and leaving his home, Sal is in the process of discovering himself. Being on the road has already unsettled Sal's idea of who he is.



Sal prioritizes meeting up with his friends over chasing after girls. By hitchhiking, Sal is able to meet people and make more friends, like Eddie.



Sal is excited to see a real cowboy, a figure of the west that Sal has romanticized so much in his imagination. Eddie drives recklessly, with no regard for any speed limits.



Even more than seeing the cowboy, Sal is delighted to see the farmer in the diner, who personifies the freedom and happiness Sal associates with the west.



Sal and Eddie have bonded on the road and become good friends, so much so that Sal lends him a shirt. The offer to work at the carnival is appealing, but Sal and Eddie prefer to keep moving and traveling.



Despite Sal and Eddie's newfound friendship, Eddie doesn't hesitate to leave Sal behind. Sal doesn't let this bother him too much, though, as he hitches another ride. Being on the road seems to involve an easy coming together and parting, the making of and departing from friends. Everyone is moving, on their own journeys which sometimes they share for a while.



PART 1, CHAPTER 4

Sal says that shortly after this he had “the greatest ride in my life.” It was in a truck driven by two young Minnesota farmers, who were picking up every single hitchhiker they came across in their large flatbed. Along with Sal in the truck bed were two young North Dakota farmers, two “young city boys” from Ohio, a tall man from Montana (called by Sal “Montana Slim”), a thirty-year-old hobo named Mississippi Gene, and Gene’s “charge”: a blonde sixteen-year-old runaway.

The truck was headed for Los Angeles. Sal thought about riding all the way to California, but decided that he had to go to Denver, where all his friends were. The truck stopped so people could eat, and the two farmers driving shouted “Pisscall!” and “Time to eat!” Sal learned that the two farmers were brothers, who had to transport farm equipment from Los Angeles to Minnesota.

The hitchhikers ate, and Sal bought a bottle of whiskey. The truck continued on, speeding into Colorado, as the hitchhikers in the back passed the bottle of whisky between them. Sal says he felt “like an arrow that could shoot out all the way.”

Sal talked with Mississippi Gene, who told him he had some friends they could stay with in Ogden. Sal was tempted, but said he was headed for Denver. Gene reminded Sal of a hobo he had known called Big Slim Hazard. He asked if Gene had ever heard of Big Slim, and it turns out he had known him. Sal continued drinking as the truck drove on, and “was feeling pretty good.”

Mississippi Gene made fun of Sal’s ragged shoes, and all the hitchhikers laughed together and continued drinking the whiskey. The truck sped through a town without stopping, disregarding Montana Slim’s request for a “pisscall.” Slim decided to urinate over the side of the truck, but then the driver swerved back and forth, making him fall down and urinate all over himself. The hitchhikers all laughed at the prank.

The truck stopped in a small town called Ogallala and the two North Dakota farmers got off to find work on farms. Sal went into a soda fountain and bought cigarettes for some of his fellow hitchhikers. The truck got going again and went into Wyoming. He looked up at the sky, happy with how quickly he was traveling and excited about what awaited him in Denver. He told Mississippi Gene, “I hope you get where you’re going, and be happy when you do.”

Sal has a fun time on “the greatest ride in [his] life.” He meets new friends from all over the country, brought together in a kind of hitchhiking community in the back of the truck. The hitchhiking brings together all sorts in a kind of democracy of travelers.



Sal has to make a choice between continuing this fun ride with his new road acquaintances and sticking with his original plan to meet up with his friends in Denver.



Sal enjoys the feeling of the open road, drinking with his fellow travelers, and his freedom from any obligations or duties.



Sal is again tempted to change his plans and go off with his new hitchhiking friends, but again decides to go after Dean in Denver. Sal continues to feel “pretty good” on the road. The hitchhikers form a kind of countercultural community, as Sal and Gene both happen to know Big Slim.



All the hitchhikers and fellow travelers share the bond of the road and act like good friends, drinking together and having fun with pranks.



Sal is continually excited by speeding along on the road. He hopes that Gene will be happy when he gets where he’s going, but all of the characters Sal meets on the road (and himself, too) seem to be happiest not when they get to where they’re going but rather while they’re still going.



The truck made it to Cheyenne, where it was Wild West Week, with everyone dressed like cowboys. Sal was disappointed at “what absurd devices [the West] had fallen to keep its proud tradition.” Sal parted ways with everyone in the truck, ready to head toward Denver. He and Montana Slim hung around Cheyenne, as the others left. Sal realized he would never see the others again and watched the truck “disappear into the night.”

Sal is disappointed when the real west doesn't live up to his romanticized ideal of it, built up by ideas of the wild west and the frontier spirit. Sal's new friends from the truck disappear as quickly as they came into his life.



PART 1, CHAPTER 5

Sal went to some bars with Montana Slim and then ate at a chili joint where he left a love note for his waitress. Back outside, Slim asked Sal if he could find a mailbox, because he had written a postcard to his father. They went into another bar where they picked up two girls who were “dumb and sullen.”

Sal and Slim pass their time drinking and finding girls. Sal is more than willing to befriend other male travelers, but he is particularly critical of the women that he encounters.



After going to a nightclub, Sal's girl wanted to go back to her home in Colorado. He offered to take her home but she refused. She said she wanted to go to New York, but Sal told her, “ain't nothin in New York.” Sal reflected on all the money he had wasted recently on drinks and fell asleep in the Cheyenne bus station.

Sal has already wasted most of his money somewhat irresponsibly. He says there's nothing in New York, because it is for him a kind of stable home, in contrast to the excitement of the road.



When Sal woke the next day, Montana Slim was already gone. Hungover, he went outside and saw the Rocky Mountains for the first time in his life. He set off walking along a highway toward Denver and hitched a ride to Longmont, Colorado. There, Sal slept on a grass lawn outside a gas station, happy to finally be in Colorado.

By traveling around the country, Sal gets to see the extreme variety of places that are all part of the United States, including the Rockies, a significant symbol of the American west.



Inside the gas station, Sal had a milkshake, prepared by “a very beautiful Colorado gal.” This made Sal excited for what might await him in Denver. He caught another ride that took him into Denver. Having finally arrived, Sal had “the most wicked grin of joy in the world.”

Sal has completed the first part of his first road trip and is excited to see his friends. But will the destination be as good as the journey was?



PART 1, CHAPTER 6

The first thing Sal did in Denver was look up Chad King. He called Chad's mother, who located him, and Chad came and picked Sal up. Sal learned that Chad had stopped being friends with Dean for some reason, and didn't know where he was. Chad also wasn't speaking with Carlo Marx at that time. Sal says that this was the beginning of “Chad King's withdrawal from out general gang.”

Sal's ideal group of friends is starting to fracture and break up. Sal's friends all rebel in some way against mainstream society, but their community of friends is itself a kind of miniature society from which Chad, for example, begins to withdraw.



Sal says he found himself in the middle of a dispute between Chad King (and some other friends), on the one hand, and Dean and Carlo on the other. According to Sal, this dispute had “social overtones,” as Dean was from a bad background, with an alcoholic father in and out of jail.

Sal’s community of like-minded friends is beginning to divide along class lines. Even though their countercultural group rejects societal norms, they still have some prejudices based on social class.



Dean and Carlo had a basement apartment, where Sal would later spend “many a night that went to dawn.” But on his first day in Denver, Sal slept at Chad King’s place. He stayed there and ate with Chad’s family, wondering where Dean was.

After traveling across much of the country largely in pursuit of Dean, Sal can’t find him in Denver. Sal and Dean have a close friendship, but Sal is more often than not in the position of chasing after him.



PART 1, CHAPTER 7

In Denver, Sal moved in with his friend, a writer named Roland Major, in an apartment belonging to another friend named Tim Gray. Sal describes a story Roland wrote about a character who travels to Denver and hangs out with “arty types.” A few blocks away from Sal and Roland’s apartment was the Rawlins family, which included “the wild son,” Ray Rawlins. Ray and Sal became friends.

Roland’s writing stands in to some degree for Kerouac’s own novel, which is also written about “arty types” and writers. Sal continues to make new friends in Denver.



Sal continued to wonder where Dean was, until one day he received a call from Carlo Marx. Carlo told him that Dean was also in Denver, seeing two women at the same time (one of them being Marylou).

As often, Dean is seeing multiple women as he wants, not considering their own feelings.



Carlo told Sal that he and Dean were attempting to “communicate with absolute honesty,” while sitting on a bed facing each other, after taking the drug Benzedrine. Carlo says that Dean could do anything—“become mayor of Denver, marry a millionaires, or become the greatest poet since Rimbaud.”

Carlo and Dean attempt to have an intense friendship based on complete honesty. Their friendship is also based to some degree on drinking and drug use, like the Benzedrine they both take.



Carlo informs Sal of Dean’s schedule: he is with Marylou during the day while Carlo works, then goes to his other woman, Camille, at 1 AM. Then, he meets up with Carlo and they talk until six in the morning. Carlo says that Dean and Marylou are preparing to divorce.

Without a normal job, Dean balances spending time with Marylou, his other woman, and his close friend Carlo. He plans to divorce Marylou, but still spends time with her, and will later come back to her.



Carlo and Sal went to the house where Dean and Camille were. Carlo knocked on the door, then hid, not wanting Camille to see him. Dean answered the door completely naked. Dean was overjoyed to see Sal and introduced him to Camille. He told Camille that he had to take Sal out and “fix him up with a girl.”

Dean’s nudity (which will recur throughout the novel) shows how he eschews cultural norms like clothing in favor of personal freedom.



Sal, Dean, and Carlo took off into the city. The trio went to a house where some sisters, all waitresses lived. Sal called Ray Rawlins, who came over and joined them. Ray called a friend with a car, and Sal suggested that they all go to his apartment. However, when they got there, Roland blocked the door, not wanting any “goings-on like this,” in the apartment.

The rowdy group went back into downtown Denver and Sal ended up finding himself alone in the street without any money. He walked back to his apartment, Roland let him in, and he fell asleep.

PART 1, CHAPTER 8

Sal says that everyone began planning a trip to the mountains. Sal got a call from Eddie, who happened to be in town and was looking for work. Dean took Sal and Eddie to “the markets,” where the two found jobs—Sal didn’t show up to work the next morning, though. Sal describes a huge party that he went to at Ray Rawlins’ house.

After the party, Sal went to Carlo Marx’s house, where Carlo read him some of his poetry, in which he called the Rockies “papier-mâché,” and “the whole universe was crazy and cock-eyed and extremely strange.” Dean then arrived and announced that he was all set to divorce Marylou and marry Camille.

Dean and Carlo sat down cross-legged on Carlo’s bed, stared at each other, and talked: “they began with an abstract thought, discussed it; reminded each other of another abstract point forgotten in the rush of events.” Sal sat all night and listened to the two talk back and forth, until Dean decided to “stop the machine,” (i.e. stop talking) even though Carlo didn’t want to stop. Sal went back to his apartment.

PART 1, CHAPTER 9

Sal and his friends now made their “trek to the mountains.” He went with Ray Rawlins, his sister Babe, Roland Major, Tim Gray, and Betty Gray to Central City, an old mining town with an opera house built when the town had grown wealthy from silver mining. The group stayed at an old abandoned miner’s house.

Sal, Dean, and Carlo are focused on having a good time. Roland, by contrast, wants more peace and quiet. Roland is dedicated to spending time writing, whereas Sal is more dedicated to having a good time in order to collect experience to write about.



Despite finally being around all his friends, Sal ends up all alone on the street.



Sal coincidentally meets up with his road friend Eddie, who he thought had abandoned him for good. Sal gets set up with a steady job, but decides to shirk his new responsibilities in favor of partying.



Carlo is another of Sal’s writer friends, whose strange poetry bears similarities to the untraditional style of the Beats. Dean plans to leave Marylou for Camille, but will he be able to commit himself to any one woman?



Dean and Carlo have a close, but somewhat crazy, friendship, literally staying up all night talking about all sorts of things in a manic desire to share each other’s thoughts completely. Carlo is annoyed when Dean stops early, hinting that their friendship might not be perfect.



Sal’s trip to the mountain town offers another chance to have some fun, as well as an opportunity to see a piece of American history that testifies to the old western mining rush.



Sal went to the opera with Babe Rawlins, and he loved it, getting “lost in the great mournful sounds of Beethoven and the rich Rembrandt tones of his story.” Babe and Sal returned to the miner’s house, and Sal helped Roland and Tim clean out the place. They called out to girls in the street, asking them to help clean the house and come to their party later that night.

After cleaning the house, Tim, Ray Rawlins, and Sal went to the rooming house where the opera singers were staying. They took the singers’ hairbrushes, colognes, shaving lotions, and other things, and bathed and got ready for the night. They returned to the house, ate, and began drinking. Before long, “great crowds of young girls came piling into,” the house.

Sal went to some bars and then returned to the party. He wished Dean and Carlo were with him, but then realized they would probably be out of place with the crowd. He says that those two were “the sordid hipsters of America, a new beat generation.”

Some of the opera singers came to the party and sang. Sal was having a great time and says that “the girls were terrific.” Then, some teenagers showed up and “just grabbed girls and kissed them without proper come-ons.” The teenagers ruined the party, so Sal went with Ray and Tim to some bars.

Out in Central City, Sal saw someone named Denver Doll shaking hands with everyone and talking to all sorts of people. Sal says Denver wasn’t “drunk on liquor, just drunk on what he liked—crowds of people milling.”

Ray Rawlins got into a dispute with an Argentinian tourist at the bar and punched him out. Sal, Tim, and Ray left the bar before the sheriff could find Ray. Outside, they ran into Roland Major. Sal says he wondered “what the Spirit of the Mountain was thinking,” and saw “ghosts of old miners.” He felt as though he were on “the roof of America.”

Sal and his friends went back into the same bar, where Tim threw a drink in the face of an opera tenor. They went to another bar, where Ray called a waitress a whore. A group of locals told them to get out of the bar, so they left and went back to the miner’s house to sleep.

The next morning, Sal had stale beer for breakfast. He and his friends began the “sad ride back to Denver.” As they approached Denver, Sal felt an urge to go to San Francisco.

As a somewhat Beat character, Sal is equally at home listening to opera and asking random girls to come to a huge party in an abandoned house.



Sal and his friends have no concerns about breaking into the singers’ rooming house and using their things. Their only concern seems to be having a good time.



Sal has fun cavorting around with the “new beat generation,” but is also caught between his different groups of friends and feels left out of Dean and Carlo’s close relationship.



Happy with his hipsters and beat generation friends, Sal scorns the teenagers who crash his party, so he goes out to bars with his friends.



Denver Doll exemplifies the bizarre madness that Sal values, a kind of intoxication with life itself.



Sal and his friends act without restrictions on their behavior, but this can get them into trouble. The Spirit of the Mountain and the ghosts are literalized figures of the majestic sense of history and the American past Sal feels out west.



Again, the wild behavior of Sal and his friends gets them into some trouble, this time with the locals.



Sal has enjoyed Denver, but already feels an urge to get back on the road and keep moving, this time further west.



PART 1, CHAPTER 10

When Sal came back to Denver, he found Carlo and was surprised to learn that Carlo and Dean had also been in Central City, going around to different bars. Dean then stole a car and they sped back to Denver. Sal wrote his aunt for more money, so that he could go to San Francisco. He told Carlo that he wanted to leave, but delayed his trip because Dean had arranged for him to meet a woman named Rita Bettencourt.

Sal says that Rita was “a nice little girl, simple and true, and tremendously frightened of sex.” They had sex and then “made vague plans to meet in Frisco.” Sal walked Rita home and then lay down outside with some hobos, which made him want “to get back on that **road**.”

Sal said goodbye to Roland Major, Ray Rawlins, and Tim Gray. He wandered around Denver for a few days, unable to find Dean or Carlo. Sal says that he simply “had to go.” He finally found Carlo and listened to some more of his poetry. Sal went to where Eddie was staying and took back the shirt he had leant him way back in Nebraska.

Sal went to the bus station and bought a ticket to San Francisco. Dean called Sal right before he left and said that he and Carlo would join Sal in San Francisco. Sal realizes that he “hadn’t talked to Dean for more than five minutes,” all the time he had been in Denver.

PART 1, CHAPTER 11

When Sal got to San Francisco, he was two weeks late for meeting his friend Remi Boncoeur. Sal says the trip from Denver was uneventful. When he first got to California, he felt “warm, palmy air—air you can kiss.”

Sal found Remi’s place in a neighborhood of “housing-project shacks.” Remi had left a note on his door telling Sal to climb in through the window if no one was home. Sal climbed in the window, finding Sal and “his girl, Lee Ann,” sleeping on what Sal later learned was a stolen bed.

Not only does Dean drink and take drugs, but he also has no problems stealing cars, apparently. His non-conformist behavior goes all the way into theft—he just takes what he wants. Meanwhile, Sal is eager to get back on the road. Unlike many of the bums and vagabonds Sal hangs out with, he has the fortunate ability to just write to his aunt for more money when he needs it.



As narrator, Sal describes Rita very patronizingly. He makes plans to meet up with her in the future, but is well aware of how unlikely this is, as he hopes to lead a wandering life on the road.



Despite his attachment to Dean, Sal has a hard time finding him in Denver. He says goodbye to all his friends, including Carlo with his poetry, and prepares to resume his travels.



Even though a large reason for his traveling to Denver was to see Dean, Sal hardly spent much time with him there. And now he feels the need to leave Denver already to head further west.



It is no surprise that Sal, who doesn’t hold to a normal job or typical schedule, is two weeks late to meet up with his friend Remi. California is yet another part of America—a part of the much-hyped, almost mythical American West—that Sal will experience.



Remi lives in a run-down part of town and leaves his shack (furnished with stolen furniture) so that anyone could easily climb inside.



Sal says that he met Remi in prep school, but the two bonded because Remi had dated Sal's former wife before Sal married her. In San Francisco, Remi was waiting for a ship to work on, and working as a guard at a nearby barracks in the meantime. Sal says that Lee Ann "had a bad tongue," and she and Remi constantly yelled at each other.

Remi was delighted when Sal climbed in through the window and laughed when he saw him. Sal describes a black man who lived next to Remi and whose great laugh could often be heard from Remi's shack. Sal guesses that Remi may have picked up this laugh from his neighbor and thought that he was going to have a fun time in San Francisco.

Remi had Sal sleep on a cot in his shack and made sure to tell Sal "not to touch Lee Ann." Sal describes Lee Ann as "a fetching hunk, a honey-colored creature," with "hate in her eyes." She had come to San Francisco with Remi thinking that he was wealthy and was now stuck with him in a little shack. Sal's plan was to stay with Remi and write a story for a Hollywood studio, which Remi would bring to Los Angeles.

Sal wrote "some gloomy tale about New York," which Remi took to Hollywood. After more writing, Sal decided he wanted a job, so Remi arranged to get him the same job he had, as a guard at the barracks. Sal was hired and given a badge, a club, and a police uniform. Remi gave him a gun, as well.

Sal went to work at the barracks, which housed overseas construction workers, most of whom "were running away from something—usually the law." Sal says that the other guards were "a horrible crew of men, men with cop-souls." One night, Sal was the only guard on duty, and "all hell broke loose."

All of the construction workers were drinking and making lots of noise, because their ship was leaving the next morning. Sal went to one door and asked them to quiet down, but the occupants offered him a drink. Sal went around to all the doors and accepted drinks from the workers and before long "was as drunk as anybody else." At dawn, he accidentally put the American flag up on its pole upside down.

In the morning, the other guards (including one who had worked at Alcatraz), told Sal that he could go to jail for hanging the flag upside down. The Alcatraz guard talked fondly of his time guarding and disciplining prisoners there. Sal told him he didn't feel "cut out to be a cop."

In Sal's life, male friendships seem to outlast romantic relationships. His friendship with Remi, for example, emerged from both of their failed relationships with the same woman. As with many other female characters, Sal is immediately critical of Lee Ann.



Sal is excited by Remi's laughter because his only intentions in coming to San Francisco are to have fun and enjoy himself.



Sal's descriptions of Lee Ann tend to objectify her as an attractive "creature," while also disparaging her personality. Sal plans to use his writing to make a bit of a living in California.



Sal only writes for so long, before he decides to stop in favor of living his life and finding new experiences. It is ironic that Sal—a bit of a rebel with little respect for the law—should work as a kind of policeman.



Sal identifies more with the workers (who, like him, are on the run) than with the other guards, who stand for everything about mainstream society Sal and his friends hate.



Comically, Sal is a horrible guard, because he doesn't really care about rules and would rather just get drunk with the workers.



The Alcatraz Guard is the opposite of the kind of person that Sal would like to be, as he takes pleasure in disciplining people and upholding rules and laws.



One night, another guard told Sal that they had to arrest some workers for making too much noise. Sal reluctantly went with him and tried, unsuccessfully, to persuade him to give the workers a break. Sal says that if it weren't for Remi, he "wouldn't have stayed at this job two hours."

Remi and Sal were often on duty by themselves. Remi would walk around looking for open doors, so that he could maybe steal something from a room. He finally found an open door one night, but it ended up being the room of the barracks supervisor. Remi and Sal lied and said they were looking for a mop.

Remi and Sal were often able to break into the barracks cafeteria and steal all sorts of food. Remi would often quote President Truman ironically, saying, "We must cut down on the cost of living." Sal says that he gradually began to realize that "everybody in America is a natural-born thief."

One day, Sal and Remi went in to San Francisco and saw the Banana King, an old man who sold bananas on a street corner. Remi insisted that Sal had to write about the Banana King, though the subject bored Sal.

Another day, Remi, Sal, and Lee Ann went out to an old abandoned freighter in the San Francisco bay. Remi looked for copper lining that he could take, but it had all been stripped already by thieves. Sal mentioned that he'd love to sleep on the abandoned boat, and Remi bet him five dollars he wouldn't.

Sal began going out in San Francisco more often, trying to meet women. He describes "the loneliness of San Francisco," and says that he had to leave the city or else he'd go crazy. He wrote to Carlo and Dean, and they sent replies that they were going to meet him in San Francisco.

As September came around, things began to fall apart with Remi and Lee Ann. Things came to a head when Sal went with them to a racetrack. On the way, Remi delivered a bag of groceries stolen from the barracks to a poor widow in a housing project. At the racetrack, Remi quickly lost all his money.

Frustrated after losing his money, Remi got angry with Sal, and then he and Lee Ann got into an argument. Lee Ann threatened to leave him for a cashier at the racetrack. Since Lee Ann had lived in the shack before Remi, she told him to pack up and leave.

The incident with this guard is a further example of how bad a policeman Sal makes. Sal hates the job, but stays with it for a while because of his friend Remi.



While ostensibly upholding law and order as guards, Sal and Remi actually roam the barracks looking to steal.



From Sal's perspective, everyone in America is a thief, so there is nothing wrong with his stealing. Remi quotes Truman ironically, using the words of the President to justify his lawless behavior.



Remi thinks that the Banana King is something worth preserving in Sal's writing, but it is not the kind of interesting experience Sal wants to write about.



The fact that the ship has already been stripped of copper seems to support Sal's claim that everyone in America is a thief, and there is nothing particularly wrong with Remi's or his stealing



Sal is now beginning to get restless after staying in one place for some time. Additionally, he misses his close friends Dean and Carlo.



Remi acts like a countercultural Robin Hood, stealing to give to the poor. But he is not exactly heroic, as he immediately goes and wastes all his money at the races.



Whenever Sal stays in one place too long, things seem to deteriorate and fall apart, as they do now with Remi and Lee Ann.



Remi asked Sal and Lee Ann for one final favor. His stepfather, a “distinguished doctor” from Europe was coming to visit and Remi wanted to go to a nice, expensive dinner with him. Remi asked Sal and Lee Ann to come along, to make it seem like everything was going well. Lee Ann agreed to this, and Sal guesses that she thought Remi’s wealthy stepfather “might be a catch.”

By the day of the dinner, Sal had just recently quit his barracks job. He met Remi and Lee Ann at a fancy restaurant, where he happened to see Roland Major. Roland crashed the dinner party and leaned over Dr. Boncoeur (Remi’s stepfather) to talk to Sal. He rudely called Dr. Boncoeur a high-school French teacher. Sal “gave up” and got drunk.

Sal realized that the dinner was a failure and that Remi wouldn’t talk to him again after this. Sal thought of how disastrously his planned trip west had gone. He had come to “the end of America,” and now had “nowhere to go but back.” Roland got thrown out of the restaurant, and Sal went with him to drink at a bar.

The next morning, Sal decided to leave San Francisco, but then saw a mountain that he had promised he would climb before leaving the city. So, he stayed another day and climbed the mountain, looking out at the Pacific Ocean and “the great raw bulge and bulk of my American continent.”

PART 1, CHAPTER 12

The next morning, Sal slipped out the window of Remi’s shack while Remi and Lee Ann were still sleeping. Sal realized that he never ended up spending a night on the abandoned ship in the bay. He hitchhiked south past towns with “magic names,” and inhaled “deep breaths of the fragrant air.”

After more hitchhiking, Sal found himself in Bakersfield, and went to the bus station to catch a bus to Los Angeles. He saw “the cutest little Mexican girl,” whose “little flanks looked delicious,” and she ended up getting on the same bus as Sal, bound for L.A. Sal sat next to her and worked up the courage to talk to her.

Sal and the “Mexican girl” traded their stories. She had left her abusive husband and was going to L.A. to live with her sister. She had left her son with her brother. Before long, Sal and the girl were holding hands and he was leaning his head on her shoulder. Sal says that there was an unspoken agreement that “when I got my hotel room in LA she would be beside me.”

Remi lives an atypical life, but still wants to pretend to his stepfather that he is living more normally. Sal continues to paint a negative portrait of Lee Ann, assuming that she is interested in Remi’s stepfather for his money.



Sal can only hold down a steady job in one place for so long. His drunken friend Roland ruins any chance Remi had of convincing his stepfather that he had a normal, stable life in San Francisco.



Sal and Remi’s friendship is now deteriorating. Sal has traveled all the way across America, but he still doesn’t feel like he’s arrived at where he should be. So the only thing to do is to go on the road again.



Having traveled from coast to coast, Sal is able to look out on the entire country, having seen and learned a great deal about all sorts of places on his trip.



As soon as Sal gets on the road, he feels better, enjoying the “magic names” of American towns and inhaling the “fragrant air.”



As he continues on his hitchhiking journey, Sal finds a new girl who interests him. Once again, his descriptions immediately objectify the girl and reduce her to an object of his sexual appetite (literally, with the word “delicious”).



Unlike Sal, who is traveling by bus for personal enjoyment and fulfillment, the Mexican girl has gone on the road to escape an abusive husband. Sal’s kind of freely wandering travel relies on his privileged life.



When the bus arrived in L.A., Sal started to worry that Teresa (the Mexican girl, whose name he now happens to mention) was a hustler who took advantage of guys like him taking buses to L.A. Sal and Teresa got breakfast and then went to a hotel.

Sal is almost always critical of female characters, and quickly assumes the worst about Teresa.



Sal mentioned a friend of his in New York, a six-foot redhead named Dorie, and Teresa thought that this was a Madame and Sal was a pimp. The two argued and Sal called her “a dumb little Mexican wench.” He told her to leave, but Teresa decided that Sal actually wasn’t a pimp, so she stayed. They had sex and slept until the late afternoon.

Sal’s insult is similar to many of his derogatory descriptions as narrator of other female characters.



PART 1, CHAPTER 13

Sal stayed at the hotel with Teresa for the next fifteen days. They planned to hitchhike to New York together. One night, Sal heard a police car across the street and sobbing coming from a rooming house. He says that “LA is the loneliest and most brutal of American cities.”

Sal now plans to take Teresa with him as a companion on the road. L.A. shows Sal yet another version of America, one that appears lonely and brutal to him.



Nonetheless, L.A. was full of “the beatest characters,” marijuana, jazz, and “long-haired brokendown hipsters.” Sal “wanted to meet them all,” but he and Teresa were busy looking for work, so they could save money to go to New York. Sal looked at all the different people in L.A., all of whom had “come to LA to make the movies.”

Wherever Sal goes, he likes to meet and hang around with those outside of the mainstream, the “beatest characters” and hipsters.



Sal went with Teresa as she got her things from her sister and a friend who lived on “the colored main drag of LA.” Sal bought some marijuana, but when he and Teresa smoked it, it turned out to be just tobacco. Sal and Teresa decided to leave for New York. They went east to Arcadia, California, “pointed toward the American continent.”

Sal’s travels around America involve seeing both white and “colored” areas. Sal now begins his journey back east across the country he has already traversed once.



As Sal and Teresa walked along the **road**, cars full of high-school kids sped by, the kids jeering at Sal and Teresa. They went into a soda fountain, but encountered the same kids, and left. That night, they stayed in a motel room, “held each other tight,” and “had long, serious talks.” Sal says that they made a kind of “pact.”

The high school kids represent a kind of “normal” society that irritates Sal. He and Teresa form a strong bond by traveling together along the road and being honest with each other.



The next morning, Sal and Teresa decided to go to Bakersfield and work picking grapes until they had enough money to go to New York by bus. When they got to Bakersfield, though, they couldn’t find jobs. They went into “Mexican town,” and Teresa asked people about jobs. Sal describes the “Mextown” as “one blazing bulb of lights,” with “movie marquees, fruit stands, penny arcades, five-and-tens, and hundreds of rickety trucks and mud-spattered jalopies.”

Sal is happy to work as a kind of migrant laborer, picking grapes, instead of settling down with a better job. Sal now sees yet another side of America, the America experienced by Mexican immigrant laborers.



Sal and Teresa bought a bottle of wine that night and after drinking they decided to hitchhike to Teresa's hometown and live in her brother's garage. They got to the town and stayed in a hotel room. The next morning, Teresa went to find her brother. She came back with her brother, her son, and her brother's friend Ponzo.

Teresa's brother, Rickey, sold manure to farmers. He drove Sal and Teresa to "see some farmers about manure." They drove around and talked to some farmers, but nothing came of it, so they went to a saloon to drink. Sal says that "Americans are always drinking in crossroads saloons on Sunday afternoon." Rickey assured Sal that they'd make money the next day.

Sal got drunk with Rickey and Ponzo, and then they ate dinner at a Mexican restaurant with Teresa. Teresa and Sal didn't have a plan for where they would sleep, so they ended up staying in a motel room with Teresa's child. Teresa said that everything would be fine *mañana* (tomorrow). Sal says that for the next week all he heard was "*mañana*."

The next day, Sal found a tent in the "cotton fields and grape vineyards," where he could stay with Teresa and her kid. Rickey and Ponzo arrived with beer and started drinking. Rickey assured Sal that they would make lots of money selling manure the next day. Sal realized that these plans would never really happen, so he went around looking for "cotton-picking work."

Sal found a job picking cotton. It was difficult work, but "it was beautiful kneeling and hiding in that earth." He describes a black couple who "picked cotton with the same God-blessed patience their grandfathers had practiced in ante-bellum Alabama." Sal earned about \$1.50 per day picking cotton. He "forgot all about the East and all about Dean and Carlo and the bloody **road**."

When winter came around, Teresa and Sal decided they had to leave their tent. Teresa and Sal went back with Ponzo to Teresa's hometown, so she could see her family, but Ponzo's truck broke down. They all went to a bar and drank. Sal felt "the pull of my own life calling me back," and wrote to his aunt for fifty more dollars.

Sal went with Teresa back to her family, but he waited a quarter-mile away, so her parents wouldn't see him. He heard her family arguing and yelling at Teresa for leaving her husband, but they eventually welcomed her back home. Sal had a Billie Holiday song stuck in his head as he waited outside in the cold.

Sal continues to live his life outside of normal expectations for someone like him, deciding to live in a garage.



Rickey and Sal end up drinking instead of actually working or selling any manure. At the saloon, Sal generalizes about Americans, finding something quintessentially American about drinking in a saloon on a Sunday afternoon.



Sal doesn't have a plan, and just gets drunk with Rickey and Ponzo, neglecting work and finding a place to stay other than a motel room.



Sal is mostly content to linger around without a plan, drinking and having fun, but even he eventually gets fed up and looks for steady work picking cotton.



Sal idealizes the hard work of picking cotton, even romanticizing the forced labor of slavery. If he had to do this his entire life, perhaps he wouldn't think it was so beautiful. For now, Sal thinks that he is happy settling down away from the road and his friends.



Sal is again beginning to get sick of staying in one place. While he has enjoyed spending time with the poor community of migrant workers, he has the luxury of being able to return to his more comfortable life when he wants.



Just as Sal stays a certain distance away from Teresa's home, his privileged life will always be distant from that of Teresa and her family.



Not wanting Sal to leave, Teresa told him that he could stay in a nearby farmer's barn, and she would pick grapes to earn enough money for both of them. Sal moved into the barn. He accompanied Teresa to her family's house again, and again waited outside, unseen. He heard Teresa and her father argue and fight.

Teresa didn't want Sal to leave, but he told her that he had to. He had sex with Teresa in the barn his last night in the area, and the next morning Teresa brought him breakfast. They agreed to meet in New York whenever Teresa could get there, though Sal says they both knew this wouldn't happen. Sal left and hitchhiked back to L.A., arriving in the early morning. There, he bought a bus ticket to Pittsburgh and spent most of his remaining money on food for the trip.

PART 1, CHAPTER 14

Sal's bus went through Arizona. He had a book that he had stolen in L.A., but "preferred reading the American landscape," instead. The bus went through New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas. It arrived in St. Louis by noon, and Sal walked along the Mississippi River.

Back on the bus, Sal met a girl and they "necked all the way to Indianapolis." She got off the bus at Columbus, Ohio, but they made plans to meet in New York. After arriving in Pittsburgh, Sal walked along "the mournful Susquehanna," with an old hobo he called "the Ghost of the Susquehanna," who talked incessantly.

The Ghost of the Susquehanna walked in the middle of the **road** and Sal was sure that "the poor little madman," would get hit by a car. Sal eventually parted from the hobo and caught a ride to Harrisburg, learning that he had been walking along the wrong **road**.

Riding in the car, Sal saw the Ghost of the Susquehanna standing under a streetlamp. The driver stopped and told him that he was walking the wrong way, but the old man insisted that he knew where he was going. He said he was headed for "Canady." Sal says that he "thought all the wilderness of America was in the West," until the Ghost taught him otherwise.

Sal must choose between Teresa, who wants him to stay with her, and going back on the road, to his own life on the east coast.



Just as with Rita Bettencourt earlier, Sal makes plans to meet up with Teresa again, but doesn't intend to keep them. After settling down for a while with Teresa and her family, he now returns to the road.



Sal reads the American landscape as if it were a book for him to study and learn from. His bus ride gives him another chance to see much of the country.



Sal evidently has no trouble getting over Teresa, and gives an empty promise to meet this random girl in New York, just as he told Teresa. Sal enjoys the company of a hobo, the ultimate wandering vagabond.



Sal is fascinated by the madman "Ghost" just as he was by Dean's own kind of madness.



From the Ghost, Sal learns that one can wander around and find the freedom of the road anywhere, not just in the west, which he used to associate exclusively with a kind of wilderness and freedom. Sal learns that the freedom comes not from the place but from the wandering.



Sal says that the wilderness of the east is the same wilderness of Ben Franklin, George Washington, and Daniel Boone. In Harrisburg, Sal slept at the train station, and then was thrown out in the morning. Starving and with no money for food, Sal stumbled around in the morning, which had “a whiteness like the whiteness of the tomb.”

Sal caught a ride out of Harrisburg. He told the driver he was starving, and the man said that starving periodically was good for one’s health. Eventually, the driver shared some sandwiches with Sal and “the madman,” drove him all the way to New York.

Sal found himself back in Times Square, after traveling “eight thousand miles around the American continent.” Sal had no money for a bus back to his home in New Jersey. He didn’t know where any of his friends were. He panhandled for bus money and got home

At home, Sal “ate everything in the icebox.” He found his half-finished manuscript waiting for him. Sal says that he got back home just in time, because Dean had come to the house a few days before, waiting for him, but then had left for San Francisco two days before Sal arrived.

PART 2, CHAPTER 1

Sal stayed at home for a year, during which time he attended school on the G.I. bill and finished his book. He went to visit his brother in Testament, Virginia for Christmas, 1948, and wrote to Dean to tell him where he’d be. While sitting around his brother’s house with relatives, a dirty car pulled up and a “weary young fellow,” came to the door. Sal recognized him as Dean.

Along with Dean were Marylou and someone named Ed Dunkel. Sal’s family and southern relatives looked at Dean, Marylou, and Ed with confusion. Sal’s brother was planning on moving soon, and was sending some furniture to Sal’s aunt’s house in Paterson. Dean offered to drive the furniture up to New Jersey.

Sal learned that Dean had lived with Camille in San Francisco and had a daughter. He worked on the railroad and made decent money, but one day “blew his top,” and decided to buy a car and drive to the east coast to see Sal. He told Camille he’d be back in a month. Sal took Ed, who also worked on the railroad, with him on the trip.

By traveling around the “wilderness” of the east, Sal feels as though he is getting in touch with the American past. Out of money and food, he has become a weary traveler not unlike the Ghost of the Susquehanna himself.



Sal unluckily hitches a ride with a particularly mad driver (who thinks that starving occasionally is okay). But he nonetheless helps Sal continue his journey home.



Sal has now wandered almost all over the country, seeing all sorts of different sides of it. Back in New York, he finds himself stranded without any friends and has to beg for bus fare.



The whole time he’s been traveling, Sal hasn’t been able to work on his book. He just barely missed crossing paths with Dean, who is on his own wandering journey.



While staying at home, Sal is able to finish writing his book. After traveling for so long, he has settled down for a bit with his family. But the fact that he writes to Dean shows that he may be missing both his friends and the open road.



Sal’s family members are taken aback by his nontraditional, countercultural friends.



Like Sal, Dean is unable to stay put in one place for long. But, his pursuing his own freedom means abandoning his own wife and daughter.



Ed wanted to bring his girlfriend Galatea along, but Galatea wouldn't come unless Ed married her. So, Ed married her and the three started driving east. Galatea kept wanting to sleep at hotels, which drained all their money, so Ed and Dean "gave her the slip in a hotel lobby."

Dean felt a desire to see Marylou again, so he drove to Denver and found her. They "had ten hours of wild lovemaking," and decided they would be together again. Dean, Marylou, and Ed drove through the cold Midwest and picked up a hitchhiker who promised them a dollar if they drove him to Memphis. When they got to Memphis, though, the man couldn't find his dollar. They finally got to Sal's brother's house in Virginia, not having eaten for 30 hours.

Dean danced inside to a jazz record, to the dismay of Sal's southern relatives. Sal says that Dean's madness "had bloomed into a weird flower." He went with Dean, Ed, and Marylou for a spin in Dean's car. They saw a poor black man in a mule wagon, and Dean told everyone to "consider his soul." He said that he would like to know what the man was "poor-ass pondering about this year's turnip greens and ham."

Dean then suddenly sped away and asked Sal where Carlo was. Dean thought that "this was the new and complete Dean, grown to maturity." He pulled into the railway station, parked, and bought some cigarettes, talking and laughing. Sal says Dean's "laugh was maniacal."

Dean saw a black woman and said, "Dig her, ...that little gone black lovely. Ah! Hmm!" Dean, Sal, Marylou, and Ed sped back to Dean's brother's house. Sal says that he now had "the bug," again, the itch for "another spurt around the **road**."

PART 2, CHAPTER 2

Sal, Dean, Marylou, and Ed took off at night for Paterson, New Jersey. They sped along and Dean had to periodically reach out the window and wipe a hole in the ice-covered windshield to see through. He often "gestured furiously," as he talked, taking both his hands off the steering wheel.

Sal says that he went with Dean "for no reason." He had been seeing a woman named Lucille in New York and thought he wanted to marry her. He told Dean that he wanted to marry someone and settle down, because "this can't go on all the time—all this franticness and jumping around." They pulled into New York in the early morning.

Ed shows as little concern for Galatea as Dean showed for Camille, abandoning her all by herself at a random hotel.



Dean shuffles between his different women (and wives) as he likes, without regard for whoever he might hurt in the process. His freedom is of a radical sort, meaning that he sees himself as unencumbered by any social bonds. Dean, Ed, and Marylou drove across the country on their own road trip, picking up random hitchhikers.



Dean's "weird flower" of madness confuses Sal's family members, while Sal is happy to go for a spin with his old friends. Dean is superficially interested in the poor black man. He seems to see some kind of authenticity in the black man's poverty, but does not actually consider the man's oppression as a minority or his difficult life.



Dean's maniacal laugh is infectious, attracting Sal to the joyful, free life of the road.



As with the poor black man earlier, Dean "digs" the black woman without really considering her life. Once again, Sal has the desire to hit the road.



Dean has no respect for speed limits and no worries about safety while driving with an ice-covered windshield with both hands off the wheel.



Sal is infatuated by Dean and the life of the road, but even he thinks that he will have to settle down for good sometime. Sal's connection to the wandering life is both real and has a little bit of tourism to it—there is a sense that he is just visiting.



PART 2, CHAPTER 3

Sal, Ed, Dean, and Marylou went to Sal's house in Paterson and slept there. The next day, Sal got a phone call from Old Bull Lee, in New Orleans, who said that someone named Galatea Dunkel had come to his house looking for Ed. Galatea got on the phone and Sal told her that Ed was with them and they'd pick her up in New Orleans on the way back west.

Sal got another call from Camille, in San Francisco, looking for Dean. Dean called her back, while Sal called Carlo Marx and told him to come over. Carlo came, bringing his poetry. He had spent time in Dakar, Senegal, where a witch-doctor told him his fortune. Carlo asked Sal and Dean what reason they were traveling for and then asked, "Whither goest thou, America, in thy shiny car in the night?"

Dean and Sal drove Carlo back into New York and then drove back down to Virginia to get more furniture and bring Sal's aunt back to Paterson. Dean told Sal that he was certain God exists and then said, "Everything since the Greeks has been predicated wrong. You can't make it with geometry and geometrical systems of thinking."

Dean went on and on about his strange ideas and beliefs. Sal says that "these were the first days of his mysticism." On the way back to New Jersey, with Sal's aunt in the car, they got a speeding ticket. Dean had no money, so Sal's aunt paid for it, so that Dean wouldn't have to spend a night in jail. Sal says Dean surprisingly paid his aunt back a year and a half later.

Sal drove into Paterson at dawn to find Ed and Marylou smoking cigarettes in his aunt's house, not having eaten since Sal and Dean left. Sal's aunt bought some groceries and cooked everyone "a tremendous breakfast."

PART 2, CHAPTER 4

Dean and Sal were looking for a place to live in Manhattan as New Year's Eve rolled around. Ed talked about a previous New Year's when he was broke and got free food from a bakery, and then mentioned how he got "visions all the time," like a hallucination of his dead mother.

Sal and his friends having so much fun and living freely has a flip-side, represented by Galatea. Ed has only found his freedom by abandoning Galatea.



Just like Ed, Dean gets a phone call from the woman he's abandoned. Sal calls Carlo, who has been having his own odd adventures, reuniting his old group of friends. As his question suggests, Carlo sees the restlessness of Sal and Dean as emblematic of America as a whole.



Dean is full of opinions and eccentric ideas that he shares enthusiastically with Sal. His comments about God and his ideas that you can't "make it" with geometry or that sort of thinking implies that he sees a random, non-rational life as the right way to connect with and understand God.



Sal has always been interested in Dean's oddness, but now it has turned into full-blown mysticism. Dean again has no regard for the law, but he is fortunate to have Sal's aunt pay for his ticket.



Sal and his friends prize freedom and living their own lives, but at times seem like they can hardly take care of themselves. Sal's aunt has to cook for them like they were children.



The kind of eccentric madness that Sal is fascinated by in Dean becomes a dangerously real madness with Ed, as he has hallucinations.



Sal asked Ed what he was going to do about Galatea, and what he was going to do in with his life in general. Ed replied, "I just go along. I dig life." Sal, Ed, Dean, and Marylou drove into New York for a party.

Ed is happy to "just go along" life without any plans. But while this life philosophy may be freeing, it is also self-centered and irresponsible, as revealed through his lack of care for Galatea.



Around this time, Sal got the feeling that he had forgotten something. He thought it had something to do with someone called the **Shrouded Traveler**. As he had once told Carlo, he had a dream about a "strange Arabian figure," who pursued him across a desert. Sal was puzzled by the dream, but concluded that "something, someone, some spirit was pursuing all of us across the desert of life and was bound to catch us before we reached heaven." Sal later thought this **Shrouded Traveler** was simply death.

The Shrouded Traveler represents the unknown cause of Sal's endless desire to keep traveling and moving. At one point, Sal thinks that the traveler represents death, such that his life on the road was a constant attempt to elude the inevitability of death. But later he will compare Dean to this mysterious figure.



Sal went to a party at his friend Tom Saybrook's place and then stayed in New York for three days going to various parties. He brought Lucille to one and she told him she didn't like him when he was around Dean. Marylou flirted with Sal and told him that Dean was going to go back to Camille, so he should come to San Francisco and live with her.

Sal spends more time partying with friends. He used to think he could settle down with Lucille, but she seems incompatible with his eccentric close friends. Marylou, meanwhile, is aware of Dean's tendency to leave those he claims to care about.



Sal resisted Marylou's advances. He says that he knew he and Lucille "wouldn't last much longer." Lucille was married with a child, and Sal had thought that he could marry her if she divorced, but now he knew that "the whole thing was hopeless."

Sal now realizes that he is not ready to settle down and marry, but rather needs more time of aimless wandering whether on the road or among wild parties.



Sal went to all sorts of parties. He saw his friend Damion, whom he calls "the hero of my New York gang, as Dean is the chief hero of the Western." Ed went home with Lucille's sister. Sal fell asleep on a couch with someone named Mona.

Sal continues to prioritize going to parties with his friends and enjoying himself, not worrying about anything else.



Sal went to Long Island and a party hosted by "the wild, ecstatic Rollo Greb." Rollo lived at his aunt's house, and she threatened to call the police when Sal and his friends made too much noise. Rollo had two libraries full of books, listened to opera, and was "a great scholar," whose "excitement blew out of his eyes in stabs of fiendish light." Dean loved Rollo.

Rollo is another example of Sal's eccentric friends at odds with mainstream society (here represented by Rollo's aunt). Like some of Sal's other beat friends, Rollo combines a penchant for partying with a learned interest in art and literature.



During their weekend of partying, Sal and Dean went to hear a jazz pianist play. Dean was ecstatic at the music and referred to the pianist as God. Sal realized that Dean's "madness would lead nowhere," and says he "didn't know what was happening to me." He attributes this feeling to the "tea" he and Dean were smoking.

Sal is attracted to Dean's madness, but also worries about where this kind of behavior will lead eventually. He enjoys some aimless wandering, but will want to settle down eventually.



PART 2, CHAPTER 5

Sal went back to his aunt's house to rest. His aunt told him he was wasting his time with Dean, but Sal wanted to "take one more magnificent trip to the West Coast." He says that he wanted to see what Dean would do and also wanted "to have an affair with Marylou," since he knew Dean would get back together with Camille.

Before Sal, Dean, Marylou, and Ed left, Carlo talked to them in his apartment and asked what they were all doing with their lives. He warned them that their vagabond lives would soon fall apart. Sal and his friends stayed at Carlo's apartment for a while. Ed walked around Times Square one night and suddenly thought that he was his own ghost, walking on the sidewalk.

One day, Dean asked Sal for a favor. In a "hoodlum bar," he asked Sal to "work Marylou," i.e. sleep with her. Sal thought Dean "wanted to see what Marylou was like with another man." Dean and Sal went back to Carlo's apartment and told Marylou their plan.

Sal couldn't go through with it while Dean was watching, so he asked Dean to go into the other room. Sal whispered to Marylou that they should wait until they were "lovers in San Francisco." He left the room and sent Dean back to Marylou. Sal thought about Dean's time in prison and how he had never seen his mother. He concluded that he "didn't want to interfere," in Dean's "complete love of his Marylou."

Carlo came back to the apartment, upset at "jam on the floor, pants, dresses thrown around, cigarette butts, dirty dishes, open books." Sal saw that "Marylou was black and blue from a fight with Dean about something," and knew "it was time to go." Before leaving, he collected his things from his aunt's house and called Old Bull Lee in New Orleans, who was fed up with Galatea staying there, waiting for Ed. Sal told his aunt he'd be back in two weeks and then took off west again.

PART 2, CHAPTER 6

Sal, Dean, Marylou, and Ed all felt good getting on the **road** again. Sal felt as though they were "performing our one and noble function of the time, *move*." Dean told everyone that what happened in New York was behind them, and everyone agreed, happy with "the purity of the **road**."

It's no surprise that Sal's aunt—a part of the "normal" world—doesn't approve of Dean, or that Sal doesn't listen to her. But it is interesting that Sal has discrete reasons for wanting to go: that this will be his last such trip, or that he wants to get with Marylou. Dean doesn't have reasons like that: he just lives recklessly. Again this points to a difference between Sal and Dean, and a sense that Sal is in it for the experience while Dean is in it because there's no other way for him.



Carlo has now withdrawn from the original friend trio of Carlo, Dean, and Sal. In part one, he took off west with Dean, but now he warns Dean and Sal that their purposeless wandering can't go on forever.



Dean and Sal make the plan for Sal to sleep with Marylou without consulting her—they treat women as playthings. Marylou threatens to come between Sal and Dean as friends.



Usually not shy with women, Sal values his friendship with Dean so much and cares for Dean so much that he doesn't want to come between Marylou and him.



Carlo is beginning to get fed up with Dean and Sal's irresponsible behavior. While Dean has been inconsiderate to both Marylou and Camille in the past, this is the first time we see evidence of him physically abusing Marylou. When things get bad, Sal realizes they have stayed in New York long enough and should get on the road. The road—moving—always seems to be the cure.



The whole group is happy to be traveling again. Sal feels happiest when on the move and gets a sense of purity from the open road.



As they drove toward New Orleans, Dean told Marylou that they had to live together in San Francisco, where he'd be home "every two days and for twelve hours at a stretch," while spending the rest of the time living with Camille. Sal had thought that Marylou was going to "switch" to him, and so began to worry that he would be left alone if Marylou and Dean stayed together.

Dean's ideal arrangement in San Francisco is good for him, but extremely selfish. He essentially wants Marylou and Camille both to wait around for him while he does as he likes, seeing each of them as it pleases him.



Sal and everyone arrived in Washington D.C. at dawn on the day of Truman's inauguration for his second term. They saw "great displays of war might...lined along Pennsylvania Avenue." Ed drove and sped past a policeman, so they were stopped and questioned by the police, who were suspicious of everyone.

The "displays of war might" represent the public, political America rejected by Sal and his friends. The police are also an example of the conformity imposed by mainstream society that Sal and his friends resist.



The police charged Dean a 25 dollar fee. When Dean protested, they threatened to take him to jail. Dean was so mad he wanted to get a gun and shoot the cop who gave him the speeding ticket. Sal says that "the American police are involved in psychological warfare against those Americans who don't frighten them with imposing papers and threats."

Sal hates the police both for disrupting their free travels and because they represent the upholding of social norms and codes that Sal, Dean, and others are acting out against.



Dean picked up a bum in Virginia named Hyman Solomon, who said he went around to Jewish houses and asked them to give him money since he was a Jew, as well. He was reading a book that he didn't know the title of, "as though he had found the real Torah where it belonged, in the wilderness." Dean was delighted with Solomon's eccentricity.

Solomon is even more of a wanderer than Sal, and Sal is interested in his eccentricity. His narration almost paints Solomon like a prophet.



In Testament, Virginia, Solomon said that he could "hustle up a few dollars," and then join Dean and everyone for a ride to Alabama. But, when Solomon left to go get some money, he never came back, so Dean drove off. Dean said that their being stopped in Testament again, with its biblical name, and the "Biblical character" of Solomon proved God's existence.

Solomon's eccentricity has the downside of his being unreliable. The biblical symbolism suggested by Dean heightens the importance of their road trip, bringing up latent similarities to episodes of wandering in the Bible (Moses leading the Jews out of Egypt, for example).



Dean picked up another hitchhiker and then dropped him off in North Carolina. Sal drove along "the holy road," through South Carolina at night while everyone else slept. Dean and Sal were overjoyed to be in the south at last. Dean pulled into a gas station and filled up the car without paying.

Sal finds a kind of spirituality in the road, which he calls holy. As usual, Dean doesn't feel the need to pay for things like gas when he can get away with stealing it.



Dean began "telling his life story," and told everyone how he lost his virginity at age nine. Ed talked to himself in the back of the car, repeatedly talking about he was a ghost that one night in Times Square. The car radio blared jazz as they approached New Orleans. Dean confidently said, "Now we're going to get our kicks!"

Ed continues with his strange madness. Dean is excitedly certain that they will get their "kicks" in New Orleans. But, like anywhere else, does Dean and Sal's time in New Orleans come with an expiration date, before they must get back to the road?



As they drove into the city, Dean pointed at various women and yelled, "Oh I love, love, love women!" He saw "Negroes...working in the hot afternoon," and "dug them, hopping up and down in the heat." They went to Old Bull Lee's house outside of town.

Old Bull Lee wasn't home, but Sal saw Jane Lee there, who used to live with Sal's wife and him in New York. Galatea saw Ed and was upset, asking him, "Where have you been? Why did you do this to me?" Bull came home and was pleased to see Sal. Sal notes that Bull and his wife had an expensive drug habit and hardly ate. Their two children hardly ate either.

Sal gives a quick synopsis of Bull's life. He travelled all around the world, reading and getting caught up in various drug trades. In New Orleans, Bull spent much of his time reading Shakespeare and the Mayan Codices. He had chains in his room that he used with his psychoanalyst, who had discovered that Bull had seven personalities. Sal describes Bull as a teacher: he, Dean, and Carlo had all learned from him.

Bull asked Sal what he was doing traveling across the country, and Sal didn't have much of an answer. Bull said that it wasn't safe traveling around America without a gun and showed Sal his extensive gun collection, including a "German Scheintoth gas gun," that could "knock out a hundred men."

Sal and Dean wanted to go out for a night on the town in New Orleans, but Bull said that New Orleans was dull. Sal said that there had to be "some ideal bars in town," but Bull told him that the ideal bar didn't exist in America. Bull finally agreed to take them to bars, and they went into New Orleans, leaving Jane at home with the kids.

Sal, Dean, and Bull took a ferry into New Orleans. Sal watched as "the river poured down from mid-America by starlight," and felt like everything in the world was one. He notes that they later found out a girl on the ferry had jumped off the boat that night and committed suicide. After going to some bars, they returned to Bull's house, where Marylou took all sorts of different drugs together.

Again, Dean superficially "digs" marginalized black people without considering their plight, as they labor in the hot afternoon.



Galatea gives voice to all the frustrated people left behind by Ed, Dean, and Sal in their reckless obsession with their own freedom. Bull and Jane are examples of Sal's eccentric, countercultural friends, though the fact that their children don't eat much suggests there may be real and profound consequences to their wild behavior.



Participating in drug trades, reading literature and mysticism, dabbling in psychoanalysis, and accepting his seven personalities, Bull is a prime example of the countercultural Beat eccentricities that Sal loves.



Sal doesn't really have a reason for traveling. He simply likes the feeling of being on the road. Bull's character gets stranger and stranger, as he reveals his dangerous gun collection.



Bull laments the present state of things in America, claiming the country has no ideal bars. Nonetheless, Bull, Sal and all their friends go out to have a good time in the city. Jane, however, stays home to be responsible for the children.



Going out with his friends and in transit, Sal feels at one with everything, and sees the river as important because it runs its course across so much of middle America. Not to be outdone by Bull or Jane, Marylou indulges in a variety of drugs herself.



Everyone drank and took drugs, playing out their “sad drama in the American night.” Sal wanted to go for a walk and look at the Mississippi River, but had to look at it through a fence. Bull complained about bureaucracy and unions.

Sal sees the experiences of his friends as epitomizing the “sad drama” of his generation’s America. The fence could represent the boundaries imposed by society that keep people from truly experiencing life.



PART 2, CHAPTER 7

The next day, Dean was helping Bull salvage a piece of wood for a shelf. As he practiced throwing knives at a target, Bull shared some of his quasi-conspiracy theories with Sal, about how the government deliberately keeps safer tires, gum that prevents cavities forever, and clothes that last forever from the public.

Bull continues to be characterized as an odd figure standing outside and against most of society, complete with conspiracy theories about how the government is keeping things from everyday people.



Bull told Sal some odd stories about his aunt, a man with a brain disease that made him somewhat crazy, his cats, and his Portuguese neighbors. Bull told Sal to try his “orgone accumulator,” a big box with a chair inside that accumulates orgones, “vibratory atmospheric atoms of the life-principle.”

Bull’s bizarre orgone accumulator is further evidence of his eccentric madness, which is at the foundation of his friendship with Sal.



Bull and Sal went to the horse races. One horse’s name (Big Pop) reminded Sal of his father, but Bull bet on a different horse. Big Pop won and Bull said they should have paid attention to Sal’s “vision.” On the ride back from the races, Bull told Sal his belief that the living are in contact with the dead, but that scientists simply don’t understand the mutation in the brain that happens upon death.

Bull shares more of his odd beliefs with Sal. The absence of Sal’s father, brought up by the name Big Pop, points to a broader absence of family and father figures for Sal and his friends. In order to fill the void left by their lack of family, they form tight-knit bonds of friendship.



Back at Bull’s place, Sal, Dean, and Ed played basketball and then “turned to feats of athletic prowess.” Then, Sal, Dean, and Ed went into New Orleans, hopping onto a freight train on the way. Bull and Jane were beginning to get sick of all the company at their house, and when Sal got his G.I. check he decided to leave. He, Dean, and Marylou drove off toward California.

Sal, Dean, and Ed have enjoyed their time in New Orleans, but not as much as they enjoy being on the road. As with most any location in the novel, Sal can only stay with friends here for so long before they get sick of each other and the journey must continue on.



PART 2, CHAPTER 8

Sal, Dean, and Marylou drove out of New Orleans, along the Mississippi River. They stopped at a grocery store where Sal stole some food and Dean stole a carton of cigarettes from a gas station, so they were “stocked for the voyage.”

Once again, Sal and Dean have no qualms about stealing when it helps their own pursuit of personal freedom on their “voyage.”



They drove through some swampy land. Dean hoped they'd find a "jazzjoint...with great big black fellas moanin guitar blues." They soon found themselves surrounded by a dark forest and Sal says that the dark was "a manuscript of the night we couldn't read." As they went into Texas and approached Houston, Dean recalled some of his times there (complete with drugs, booze, poetry, and women).

Sal took over driving after Houston. It started to rain and Sal had to veer off the **road** into the mud to avoid a car coming at them on the wrong side of the **road**. Dean and Sal had to get the car unstuck out of the mud, and ended up covered in mud themselves. They encountered snow and were cold and miserable. They all missed New Orleans.

In Sonora, Sal stole more food. Dean kept talking nonsense, and drove them toward El Paso. At one point, he stopped and took off all his clothes to run around outside. He encouraged Sal and Marylou to "disburden yourselves of all that clothes," and the three of them drove for a while all naked in the front seat.

After a while, they parked the car and Marylou and Dean had sex while Sal slept. They drove onward to Clint, Texas, the home of a radio station Dean was familiar with. They finally arrived in El Paso, completely broke, needing money for gas. Dean ran off with "a crazy dumb young kid, fresh out of reform school." Marylou told Sal that she knew Dean was going to leave her.

Dean came back and they sped out of El Paso, planning to pick up some hitchhikers who might help out with gas money. Sal says that Marylou watched Dean out of the corner of her eye with "an envious and rueful love." He says that Dean had confessed to him that he thought Marylou was a whore and a pathological liar.

Dean picked up a young hitchhiker, but the hitchhiker had no money. Sal said he could borrow money from a friend in Tucson, so they headed that way. In New Mexico, Sal pawned a watch for a dollar, which was enough money to get them to Tucson. A policeman pulled them over, but after checking Dean's license let them go on. Dean said that police are "always interfering."

Dean idolizes black jazz music, but never stops to consider the plight of black people in the segregated America of the 1940s. Sal's comparison of the night to a manuscript recalls his earlier description of reading the American landscape. Dean fondly recalls some of his times cavorting freely with drugs, women, and poetry.



This is a rare time when Sal and Dean actually regret being on the road and wish they were back in a particular place. But this bad mood doesn't stay around for long.



Sal continues to steal as Dean continues to spout his mad ideas. The three characters' nudity is a kind of small rebellion against the strictures and norms of society, such as the obligation to wear clothes in public.



Sal's close proximity to Dean and Marylou having sex underscores the odd tension of this trio, with Marylou placed precariously between the two close friends. As always, Dean is quick to run off on his own without considering other people.



Dean plans to pick up other wanderers along their way. He calls Marylou a liar and a whore, even though he's the one who has seen multiple women at the same time and abandoned both Marylou and Camille.



Sal relies on his network of friends all over the country. Dean is again frustrated with the police—Dean sees the police and their insistence on rules and order as interfering with his quest for radical freedom—to do whatever he wants.



In Tucson, Sal found his friend Hal Hingham, a writer who had moved to Arizona to write in peace. Sal, Dean, and Marylou ate a meal at Hal's place, and then Hal lent Sal five dollars. Hal was lonely and missed New York. With the five dollars, Sal took off with Dean and Marylou, leaving Hal behind like "the other figures in New York and New Orleans," as their "foolish gang," kept moving.

Whereas Sal takes to the road to find interesting experiences for his writing, Hal tries to help his writing by withdrawing to a peaceful place. Yet Hal finds his peaceful place isolating, and Sal, at least so far, doesn't actually do much writing. Sal and his friends are always moving.



PART 2, CHAPTER 9

The group picked up a hitchhiker (a musician) and drove down a mountain pass into California. Dean told Sal all about his times in California as they drove past different places. When they all arrived in San Francisco, Dean left Sal and Marylou, without any money, to go find Camille. Marylou complained about "what a bastard," Dean was.

Dean is quick to abandon both the woman he has led on (after already cheating on her and divorcing her before) and the friend he has brought with him all the way across the country. Marylou's response suggests that there is real human cost to Dean's actions, though the novel doesn't dwell on it.



PART 2, CHAPTER 10

Sal and Marylou found a hotel that let them stay on a room on credit. Sal "lost faith" in Dean, who had abandoned him, and says he had "the beatest time of my life" in San Francisco. Marylou stayed with him for a couple of days. Sal realized she had only wanted him to make Dean jealous, and so now was not interested in him.

Sal loses faith in Dean as their friendship seems to deteriorate a bit. Completely broke, Sal now really finds what it's like to be a beat.



Sal told Marylou about a dream he had, where a giant snake coiled in the earth, which he says is Satan, was going to come up out of the earth and eat everything, until a saint named Doctor Sax would destroy it. But then Sal thought the snake might just be "a husk of doves." He says he was "out of my mind with hunger and bitterness."

Sal's bizarre dream could be wringed for some kind of symbolic significance, but it may be equally wise to regard it as the mad vision of a delirious person. For Sal, though, the two are perhaps not mutually exclusive.



Marylou left Sal and went off with a nightclub owner. Sal says he "saw what a whore she was." He walked around the city, mad with hunger, and saw a woman in a fish and chips restaurant. He thought she was his "mother of about two hundred years ago in England," and had a hallucination where the woman scolded him and called him "lost boy."

Following Dean's misogyny, Sal calls Marylou a whore. But he and Dean sleep with all sorts of women all across the country. Sal thus shows a clear double-standard for sexual morality between men and women. It may be that what Sal is criticizing is that Marylou went off with someone who wasn't a beat, who wasn't broke, implying that she was trading herself in return for comfort and money. Yet one might also argue that she might have liked the nightclub owner and that it is not unjustified for Marylou, after the treatment she has received from Dean, to see what less "beat" men are like.



Sal says that he crossed over from “chronological time into timeless shadows,” and saw angels. He realized that he had been born and reborn countless times and felt “sweet, stinging bliss.” He walked through the city, smelling all sorts of foods, hungry and delirious.

For Sal, there is a kind of universal wisdom that can be gained through a bout of madness and delirium.



PART 2, CHAPTER 11

Dean finally found Sal in this state and brought him to his house with Camille. Sal liked Camille better than Marylou, who he told Dean was a whore. Dean got a job selling pressure cookers door-to-door. At first, he was hugely enthusiastic about it, but soon lost interest.

Sal continues with his misogyny toward Marylou. Dean is at first excited to sell pressure cookers, but can't stay happy in a normal, steady job for long.



Sal and Dean saw Slim Gaillard, a black jazz musician, perform in a nightclub. Dean loved the performance and thought Slim was God. Sal describes all the wonderful jazz musicians he and Dean saw in San Francisco. He “goofed around” in the city until his next G.I. check came, and then he got ready to go back home.

Dean and Sal's only goals in the city are to have fun and listen to jazz. Dean finds an intense spirituality in jazz, which (with its nontraditional character and improvisation) was very important to the style of Beat writing.



On the last night before leaving San Francisco, Sal went out with Dean. Dean found Marylou and the three of them went all over the city, “hitting Negro jazz shacks.” Sal says he really wanted to leave, and took off the next morning, saying goodbye to Dean and Marylou.

Dean and Sal enjoy going to “Negro jazz shacks” but don't stop to think about the African Americans themselves who lack the freedoms they themselves cherish. After a short stay in San Francisco, Sal feels the need to get moving again.



PART 3, CHAPTER 1

After some time at home, Sal went to Denver and tried “settling down there,” with a job in a wholesale fruit market. He would often walk around Denver wishing he were black, because “the best the white world had offered was not enough ecstasy...not enough life, joy, kicks, darkness, music, not enough night.”

After so much time on the road, Sal tries to settle down. He romanticizes the interestingness of black life without considering all the discrimination and hardship black Americans must struggle with in the 1940s.



One evening Sal saw a bunch of young people “of all kinds, white, colored, Mexican, pure Indian,” all playing softball. Sal felt sad and thought the pitcher looked like Dean, while a woman watching the game looked like Marylou.

The softball game can be seen as a metaphor for America, a country that encompass many different races and ethnicities. Sal seems to miss his friends, perhaps even Marylou.



Sal went to see “a rich girl” he knew, who gave him a hundred dollar bill and told him to take a trip to San Francisco, because he had been talking about it for a while. Sal hitched a ride to San Francisco and immediately went to Dean’s house at two in the morning.

Sal is fortunate enough to have a rich friend who will randomly give him money so that he can go find his happiness on the road. Sal immediately goes to Dean.



PART 3, CHAPTER 2

Dean answered the front door completely naked and welcomed Sal inside, where they talked. Camille was upset, as she knew that the arrival of Sal meant Dean would likely go on the **road** and leave her again.

Dean filled Sal in on what had been happening in San Francisco. Dean had “gone crazy over Marylou again,” and spied on her as she had a different man every night at her apartment. One day, he smoked too much uncured marijuana and went through various states of intoxication for days. On the third day, he had a series of waking nightmares, and he went to see Marylou. Dean told Sal that he loved Marylou so much he had wanted to kill her.

Dean barged into Marylou’s apartment with a gun and gave it to her, telling her to shoot him. She refused. Dean told Sal that Marylou was now married to a car salesman. Dean had an injured thumb from hitting Marylou, which had gotten worse and worse so that he essentially had a lame hand.

Dean told Sal about all the medicines he had to take because of his thumb and its complications (it had gotten infected), and other doctor’s appointments he had to go to. He told Sal about his daughter and congratulated him on finishing his book.

The next morning, Camille came into the house, saw Dean and Sal with another friend, and threw Dean out of the house. As Camille and Dean were fighting, Sal saw a painting of Galatea on the wall and realized that Galatea and Camille were friends. He imagined them complaining to each other about “the madness of the men.”

Dean was still his enthusiastic self after getting thrown out, but Sal saw how badly Dean was doing. He suggested they go to New York and then Italy together. Dean just stared at Sal and Sal says that this “was probably the most pivotal point of our friendship,” because Dean realized that Sal had thought about his problems and wanted to help him. Finally, Dean agreed to go to Italy.

Dean's habit of nudity continues. Camille realizes that Sal's arrival means Dean will likely abandon her again for his own freedom on the road.



Dean is unable to settle down and commit to one woman, apparently. His drug use and eccentric madness here shows its ugly side, as he becomes dangerous. His earlier misogyny directed against Marylou threatens to become seriously violent.



Dean's mad life seems to be taking a toll on him now, both mentally and physically. For the second time, Dean abuses Marylou physically.



Sal was able to finish his book while taking some time off from the road. Dean is getting older and his reckless behavior is slowly beginning to catch up with him in his health.



Camille has had enough of Dean disregarding her in favor of his friends and his obsession with a free, eccentric life. Sal imagines Galatea and Camille talking together because they are both female victims of the male selfishness exhibited by Dean and Ed.



Sal has long been chasing after Dean and looking up to him. But now things begin to shift, as it is Sal who must help Dean out of a difficult point in his life. Sal's solution to their troubles is to hit the road again on a trip al the way to New York and beyond.



PART 3, CHAPTER 3

Dean and Sal went to a bar to plan their trip. Dean wanted to go to Denver and find his father. He said that he didn't need Marylou anymore, even though he still loved her. Before leaving San Francisco, Sal and Dean drove around with their friend Roy Johnson and tried to find Remi. Sal went to where Remi used to live, but couldn't find him.

Sal decided to go see Galatea, whom Ed had recently left in order to go to Denver. Galatea said that she was sure Ed would come back to her. Sal "got to like" Galatea, so she went out with Dean, Sal, and a girl named Marie for a night on the town.

Galatea criticized Dean for leaving Camille, and Sal tried to defend him. Galatea scolded Dean for traveling east and leaving Camille to look after their children. Sal reflected on Dean and thought he was "the HOLY GOOF," and "Beat—the root, the soul of Beatific."

Dean's missing father could be part of the reason for Dean's restlessness, the thing he is actually searching for. Before leaving San Francisco, Sal and Dean decide to have fun with their friends.



Galatea has been left behind by Ed just as Dean has repeatedly left Camille and Marylou behind. Yet Galatea has a quiet confidence in the settled-down life, believing that Ed will return.



Galatea criticizes Dean's selfishness in prioritizing his own freedom and enjoyment over caring for his family. For Sal, Dean's eccentricity is a kind of saintliness, as he punningly links the words Beat and Beatific (which means blessed).



PART 3, CHAPTER 4

The group went out to hear some jazz music and had a great time. Dean and Sal got one jazz musician to join them and hang out with them. They all piled into a big Cadillac and sped through the city. They had a wild night and Sal and Dean thought a saxophone player looked like Carlo Marx.

Dean and Sal went around to different bars and ended up drinking with "a colored guy called Walter." They went back to Walter's place for more drinks, and Sal was impressed when Walter's wife at home didn't seem bothered by this at all. As the night went on, Sal tried to figure out where he and Dean could sleep.

Dean had a friend who lived with his father in a hotel room, and they ended up crashing with them for the night. Sal went to get his and Dean's bags from Galatea's place, where Galatea warned Sal, "Someday Dean's going to go on one of these trips and never come back." Part of Sal didn't want to leave San Francisco, but the next day he and Dean took off headed east.

Dean and Sal have a good time going out drinking and listening to jazz. The fact that they see Carlo Marx in a saxophone player may mean that they miss their old friend.



Sal and Dean continue to have their reckless fun. Their admiration of Walter because his wife doesn't complain shows how sexist they are: they value a wife who stays at home and doesn't criticize her husband.



For once, Sal doesn't quite feel ready to leave and get back on the road. Galatea, having already felt what it's like to be abandoned by someone like Dean (in her case, Ed), warns Sal that Dean will abandon him as well.



PART 3, CHAPTER 5

Sal and Dean hitched a ride along with a tourist couple out of San Francisco with “a tall, thin fag,” in an “effeminate” car that Dean called a “fag Plymouth.” Dean and Sal talked excitedly in the car, first about the musicians they saw the previous night, then about various childhood memories of riding in cars, then about how excited they were to reach Denver.

In Sacramento, the driver bought a hotel room and invited Sal and Dean up to the room. He propositioned them, and Dean tried to get him to give them money, but he wouldn’t. When they got back on the **road**, Dean drove for a while, speeding so dangerously that the other passengers were terrified.

Sal tried to assure the passengers that Dean was a good driver, but they insisted on someone else driving the rest of the way to Denver. Dean and Sal arrived in Denver at last, with an even longer journey ahead of them. Sal says that they didn’t mind this, though, because “the **road** is life.”

Now that they're on the road, Dean and Sal are filled with fresh excitement. While they disdain society and its restrictions, they themselves show their own prejudices here with their offensive descriptions of the gay man driving them.



Dean has no regard for speed limits or safety—his own or that of his passengers.



Sal and Dean have much wandering ahead of them. As Sal says, the road is life. This is true both literally—Sal spends most of his life on the road—and metaphorically, as life is itself a kind of journey.



PART 3, CHAPTER 6

In Denver, Dean made a comment in a restaurant about Sal getting older, which upset Sal. Referring to the man who had driven them out of San Francisco, Sal said, “I’m no old fag like that fag.” When their food came to the table, Dean started to tear up and went outside.

The mother of the family with whom they were staying, whose husband had run off, was called Frankie. She was about to buy a truck, and Dean tried to help her choose one to buy, but she backed out in the end, which infuriated Dean. Dean called her dumb and frightened and said she reminded him of his father.

One night, Dean arranged for his cousin Sam to meet up with Sal and him. Dean told Sal all about how close he was with his cousin when they were growing up and was excited to see Sam. They went to a bar to meet up with Sam, where Dean asked people about Marylou, who he heard had been in Denver recently.

When Sam arrived, he told Dean he didn’t drink anymore and said that he only came so that Dean would sign a paper separating himself from his family. Dean was saddened but asked Sam about old childhood memories, which Dean seemed to enjoy recalling.

Sal and Dean’s close friendship starts to fray a bit. Sal idolizes the younger, energetic, enthusiastic Dean, and so is perhaps a bit sensitive about being slightly older.



Like other female characters in the novel, Frankie has been left behind by her husband. Dean is highly critical of her, calling her dumb, even though she is kind enough to let Sal and him stay with her.



Dean has found a kind of family with all of his friends, but is excited to reconnect with his actual family through Sam.



This scene reveals a tragic side to Dean’s heroic wandering. He is an individualistic vagabond partly because he is separated from his own family.



Sam left and Dean and Sal went to a carnival, where they spotted “one amazing little girl,” amid a crowd of Mexicans. They bought some beer and went back to Frankie’s house, where Sal tried to make sure Dean didn’t try anything on Janet, Frankie’s young daughter.

Sal and Dean (but especially Dean) see women almost exclusively as sexual objects. Sal must even try to keep Dean away from the very young Janet. Dean is deeply charismatic, but there is also something terrifying about him.



PART 3, CHAPTER 7

The next afternoon, Dean and Sal walked around Denver. Dean walked into a sports store and stole a softball, so they played catch as they walked along the sidewalk. They went back to Frankie’s house and started drinking.

Dean steals the softball casually and easily, thinking nothing of breaking the law.



Across the field behind Frankie’s house lived “a beautiful young chick” that Dean was interested in, and as Dean and Sal kept drinking, Dean would periodically run across the field and whistle for the girl. The girl’s mother eventually walked over with a shotgun, and said that she’d shoot Dean if he came to her house again. Sal told her to calm down and said that Dean was his brother.

Dean’s reckless behavior threatens to get Sal and him in trouble. After committing to and abandoning Marylou and Camille, Dean seems attracted to practically every girl he encounters. Sal says that Dean is his brother to calm the girl’s mother, but also really does feel that they are as close as brothers.



Sal, Dean, and Frankie prepared to go out drinking in Denver that night. Sal got a call from a woman friend in Denver who had been giving him money who now realized that he was using her and called him a bastard. They all went out drinking, and Dean stole some cars for fun, eluding the police each time.

Sal has been taking advantage of a woman giving him money in order to have his fun, liberated life. Dean now progresses from stealing food and gasoline to stealing cars just for fun.



Sal and Frankie didn’t want to ride in a stolen car, so they took a cab home, and Dean drove back, leaving a stolen car outside Frankie’s house. Sal and Dean drove the stolen car out into a field away from Frankie’s house. Sal says “everything was in a horrible mess.”

Like Dean, Sal doesn’t like most rules and laws, but apparently draws the line at riding in a stolen car. As he and Dean tend to do, they have made a mess of things at Frankie’s. Any time they stop anywhere things eventually become a mess—emotionally, legally, or both.



PART 3, CHAPTER 8

The next morning, Dean was worried because his fingerprints were all over the stolen car, which he realized belonged to a detective. Sal and Dean hurriedly packed their things and left. They went to a travel bureau in Denver and found a Cadillac that needed to be driven to its owner in Chicago.

Sal and Dean get back on the road to avoid the law, and this suggests another aspect of the road: it is also escape, the freedom it offers is a freedom from the consequences of their actions.



Dean picked up a waitress, whom he convinced that the Cadillac was his. He drove off with her, leaving Sal and two other passengers behind for a while, and then came speeding back to pick everyone up. Dean, Sal, and the passengers (two young Irish men) departed in the Cadillac. Just outside of Denver, Dean broke the car's speedometer by going over 110 miles per hour.

Dean told Sal that he wanted to stop at Ed Wall's ranch on the way to Chicago. He said that the waitress he had picked up, named Beverly, was going to come to New York and marry him as soon as he divorced Camille. As they got onto a dirt **road** leading toward Ed Wall's ranch, it was raining and Dean drove so fast that the car slid in the mud and ended up in a ditch.

Dean went to get help from a nearby farmer, who towed the car out of the ditch with his tractor. Sal told the two passengers in the car that Dean was mad but he was Sal's brother. Dean and Sal admired the farmer's beautiful daughter, who watched the car get towed.

At last, they got to Ed Wall's ranch. Sal says that Ed was like "Dean's older brother." Ed's wife cooked a large meal for everyone. Dean tried to convince Ed that he owned the Cadillac, but Ed thought Dean had probably stolen it. After the meal, Sal, Dean, and the two passengers got back on the **road**.

PART 3, CHAPTER 9

As they continued driving, Dean and Sal admired the car. Dean said that with this car they could drive all the way to the southern tip of South America. They were both excited for Chicago. Dean told Sal about some of his past run-ins with the law and mentioned his alcoholic father. He told the story of when he first saw Marylou at a soda fountain in Denver (she was fifteen).

Dean drove past some hobos on the side of the **road** and thought if his father might be among them. They saw a man driving a Buick and raced him until the man gave up and pulled into a gas station. They drove on, with Dean speeding and weaving in and out of traffic dangerously. Dean rear-ended another car in a minor accident.

Dean decides to have some fun with the car, ignoring Sal and two other passengers who are supposed to come along to Chicago. Dean breaks speedometers the same way he breaks laws or social conventions. He is always pushing boundaries.



Dean has apparently made another careless promise to another woman that he has no intention of keeping. While on the road, he wants to stop and see his old friend Ed Wall. Yet his carelessness once again gets them into trouble. Dean has a "purity" about him in the sense that he is always true to himself and lives in the moment. Yet in being true solely to himself he is never true to others—he is selfish, dangerous, and breaks things.



Sal continues to refer to Dean as his brother, because they are such close friends. Dean and Sal objectify the farmer's daughter, as they do to virtually any woman they come across during their travels.



Dean's friends fill in for the void left by his absent family. Thus, Sal and Ed are like brothers to him. Sal and Dean don't stay at Ed's for long, keeping a quick pace on their journey.



Dean is caught up in the excitement of the road, imagining that he could drive all over the world. Dean's stories fill in some of the background of his character: he's been on the road and in trouble with the law for most of his life.



Perhaps one reason why Dean finds himself roaming all over the country is because he is in some way searching for his long lost father somewhere among the hobos and vagrants he sees. He continues to drive recklessly and dangerously with no regard for traffic laws.



Later on, Dean got pulled over by a policeman, who said the man they rear-ended claimed that he had been hit by someone driving a stolen car. Dean drove to the police station, where they verified that Dean was a hired driver.

The police interfere once again with Dean's free-spirited driving. But this time—for once—Dean hasn't actually done anything wrong.



Back on the **road**, Dean continued driving dangerously until they pulled into Chicago, looking like “a new California gang come to contest the spoils of Chicago, a band of desperados escaped from the prisons of the Utah moon.” Sal calculated that Dean drove at an average of 70 miles per hour the whole way.

The earlier accident and the run-in with the police have no effect on Dean's dangerous driving habits.



PART 3, CHAPTER 10

Dean and Sal shaved and showered at a local YMCA and then drove around in the Cadillac for a wild night in Chicago. Dean told Sal that they had to “go and never stop going till we get there.” Sal asked where they were going and Dean said he didn't know, but they just had to go.

Dean and Sal have no real destination in mind, but know that they just have to keep going, moving, traveling.



They went out and heard a bunch of different jazz musicians perform. Sal describes some of his favorite jazz musicians. They saw a musician named George Shearing, and Dean said that Shearing was God. After their crazy night, Sal and Dean returned the car to its owner, who didn't even recognize it at first, because it was so dirty and beaten up.

With its improvisation and (in the 1940s) countercultural appeal, jazz is the perfect music for Sal, Dean, and the Beat generation. Dean even continues to find God through jazz performances.



PART 3, CHAPTER 11

Dean and Sal got on a bus to Detroit. Dean fell asleep and Sal talked with “a gorgeous country girl” who turned out to be dull. They arrived in Detroit and spent the night in an all-night movie theater with all sorts of sad characters.

The dull country girl lacks the eccentric excitement that characterizes Sal and his friends. In Detroit, they bum around with more mad, sad characters.



Dean says he almost got swept up with the garbage in the theater by some attendants who were cleaning, and imagines Dean having to search for him in garbage pails all over the country until he could find Sal “embryonically convoluted among the rubbishes of my life, his life, and the life of everybody.”

Sal's imagining of being swept up in a big heap of garbage like an embryo suggests that he sees himself as being reborn and finding himself by traveling through the trash and dregs of society.



Dean and Sal wandered around Detroit and finally found a man who offered to drive them to New York. They got back to Sal's aunt's house, and his aunt said that Dean could only stay for a few days.

Dean and Sal get back on the road and finally make it to Sal's aunt's home. Sal's aunt has had enough of Dean's aimless, reckless nonsense.



About five days later, Dean met a woman named Inez at a party and fell for her. He called Camille to plan a divorce so he could marry Inez. A few months later, Camille gave birth to Dean's second child and then a few months after that Inez gave birth. Now that Dean had several children, he and Sal decided not to go to Italy after all.

Yet again, Dean is quick to fall in love and go back on his earlier promises. He now abandons Camille (and his daughters) again. Dean's new love for Inez gets in the way of his Italy plans with Sal.



PART 4, CHAPTER 1

Sal made some money from selling his book and, when spring came, he felt the need to go. He decided to leave New York without Dean, who was working at a parking garage and living with Inez. Sal realized that he was doing with Inez exactly the same thing that he had done with Camille. Oddly, Inez and Camille talked on the phone often about "Dean's eccentricities."

Sal once again makes progress on his writing career while staying put at home. But he feels the call of the road once again. Camille and Inez apparently bond over having to endure the same inconsiderate behavior of Dean.



One night, Sal and Dean were talking and Dean said it wouldn't be so bad if they ended up as bums together. Dean mentioned that he had gotten in touch with his father, who was in jail in Seattle. He had plans to get his father an apartment in New York when he got out.

Dean doesn't see a problem with wandering around his whole life, and wouldn't mind doing so with his close friend Sal.



One afternoon, Dean and Sal played baseball and basketball outside with some younger kids, who easily beat them. They had dinner at Sal's aunt's house and Dean paid Sal's aunt back for the speeding ticket she had paid for so long ago.

Playing basketball with the young kids shows Dean and Sal how much they've aged, and how their energetic life on the road has taken a bit of a toll on them.



Sal told Dean that he hoped they'd grow old together with their families, living on the same street, and Dean agreed. Dean told Sal that Ed and Galatea had gotten back together. Dean and Sal look over some pictures of themselves and their friends and Sal realized that their kids would see these pictures and think that they "had lived smooth, well-ordered, stabilized-within-the-photo lives."

Sal hopes he and Dean will remain friends forever. In his vision of the future, though, their life on the road gives way to a settled down existence with families. Sal imagines that his kids won't realize how wild his life was. Perhaps this means that the older, settled people that Sal looks down on were once themselves young, eccentric, and free.



PART 4, CHAPTER 2

The next night, Sal took a bus toward Washington. He wandered around West Virginia, Ohio, Indiana, Missouri, and Kansas. On the bus, he met someone named Henry Glass who had just gotten out of prison for attacking someone with a knife when he was thirteen.

Sal once again hits the road by himself, sees more of the country, and makes a new friend—a recent ex-convict.



Sal went to Denver with Henry, where they met up with Tim Gray and Stan Shephard. They all went out drinking, and Stan said that he had heard Sal was going to go to Mexico. Stan wanted to come along, and Sal agreed.

Sal is happy to reunite with some of his old friends, and makes a plan for yet another road trip—this time all the way to Mexico.



Sal stayed in an apartment that Babe Rawlins arranged for him, and Henry “vanished off.” Sal, Stan, Tim, and Babe spent a week drinking and listening to jazz in Denver. Sal was preparing to go to Mexico when he learned that Dean was on his way to Denver.

Sal imagined Dean traveling west like “a burning shuddering frightful angel...pursuing me like the **Shrouded Traveler**.” He figured Dean had “gone mad again.” The new plan was now for Dean to drive Sal down to Mexico.

As quickly as Sal's road friend Henry came into his life, he disappears. Sal spends his time drinking and having fun in Denver. Dean tried to stay put in New York but evidently couldn't pass up an opportunity to travel with Sal once again.



Dean's resemblance to the Shrouded Traveler suggests that he may be the mad impetus behind Sal's restlessness, impelling him to keep traveling.



PART 4, CHAPTER 3

When Dean arrived, Sal was at Babe Rawlins' house. Babe's mother was out of town, so her aunt was watching over the house. Someone named Tom was living upstairs and was “hopelessly in love” with Babe, though Babe was after Tim Gray. Dean arrived with Roy Johnson, mad as ever.

Dean informed Sal that he was going to get a Mexican divorce (“cheaper and quicker than any kind”) with Camille. Dean and Sal “had a big night,” reuniting with old friends including Ed and Galatea. They went to a “mournful party,” where Dean was quiet and withdrawn.

The group went from party to party, getting “fumingly drunk.” Dean and Sal drove around and Sal started to get excited for their trip south to Mexico. Dean was convinced that this trip would “finally take us to IT!”

Before they left, Sal went with Stan to his house, where his grandfather sadly begged Stan not to go. Sal realized that Stan was “fleeing his grandfather” for some reason. Sal, Dean, and Stan got in Dean's car and took off, headed for Mexico.

Now the old Denver group of friends are reunited and ready to have their reckless fun. Babe's aunt is watching over the house, as if Babe and the others were irresponsible children.



Dean plans to finalize his divorce from Camille and commit to Inez. But how long will it be before he leaves Inez behind, as well? Sal and Dean go out for a “big night” with their friends. Yet the party turns out to be a sad affair—signaling that it's time, probably, to move on.



Sal and Dean have a good time, as usual, frequenting parties. They are excited to take yet another trip together, and convinced that it will be some kind of culmination, that they will find the elusive thing they are always searching for, the elusive thing they can't even describe.



Sal and his friends all have their reasons for seeking the open road, whether they are fleeing something or searching for something. Stan seems to be fleeing his grandfather, possibly because he can't bear the responsibility of love that his grandfather seems to need from him.



PART 4, CHAPTER 4

Not far out of Denver, Stan got stung by a strange bug and his arm swelled up, so the group had to stop and get penicillin from a hospital. Sal says, "O sad American night!" as he recalls how they drove down toward Mexico, sharing stories.

Despite Stan's strange bug sting, Sal and Dean are excited by the prospect of their new trip. Sal again feels as though he is experiencing something definitive about the "American night" by traveling through the country.



They drove through Texas, as Dean and Sal told Stan about books they had read and Stan talked about his travels in Europe. They went further and further south in Texas, as it got hotter and hotter, and stopped in San Antonio to get more penicillin for Stan's arm.

Dean, Sal, and Stan solidify their new friendship trio as they travel together and share stories.



While Stan went to a hospital, Dean and Sal went to a pool hall and got excited about Mexico. They drove off, and went through Laredo, feeling "awful and sad," but were happy when they finally crossed over into Mexico at three in the morning. They exchanged their money for Mexican pesos and "stuffed the big rolls in our pockets with delight."

Having seen so much of the country, Sal and Dean are now happy to cross into Mexico, a brand new land that holds the promise of excitement and surprise.



PART 4, CHAPTER 5

The group stopped just over the border and bought some beer and cigarettes, pleased at how cheap everything was. They were tremendously excited about being in Mexico and drove further south, into a desert. Sal says that he and Dean "had the whole of Mexico before us."

Having already traversed the United States several times back and forth, Sal is excited to have a huge stretch of unexplored (by him) land before him on the open road.



Dean told Sal that they were entering "a new and unknown phase of things." They arrived at the town of Sabinas Hidalgo around seven in the morning. As they drove through town slowly, they saw a group of women, one of whom asked where they were going. Dean said he was "digging" everyone here.

Mexico is associated in Dean and Sal's minds with the new and unknown, allowing them to rediscover the excitement of the road.



They got back on the **road** and headed toward Monterrey. Dean said he was high off the Mexican sun. He kept driving through Monterrey for Mexico City. They drove through a swampland with "thatched huts with African-like bamboo walls," and "strange young girls."

Dean's excitement at driving through a new country continues. Sal's narration patronizingly paints the Mexicans they see as primitive, strange, and exotic.



Sal drove for a while and felt like he was driving across the world, through "the essential strain of the basic primitive, wailing humanity." Sal passed by what he called "great, grave Indians...the source of mankind and the fathers of it."

Sal enjoys the freedom of this drive, but his quest for self-discovery comes at the cost of denigrating the natives he sees as primitive.



Sal stopped at a gas station near Gregoria and someone named Victor came to his car, saying that he could get “gurls,” (that is, prostitutes) and marijuana for Sal. Victor got in the car and they drove to his house. Sal was worried that Victor’s mother would be upset at him getting marijuana, but Victor said that his mother got it for him.

Victor’s brother brought some marijuana out to the car and Victor rolled a huge joint, which everyone (including Victor’s brothers) smoked. Dean and Sal liked Victor and his brothers, though they couldn’t understand what they were talking about in Spanish. For a moment, Sal thought Dean could understand Victor speaking in Spanish.

Sal says that Dean looked like Franklin Delano Roosevelt and like God. Victor brought over his baby son to show to everyone. Dean said it was the prettiest child he’d ever seen. Victor then showed Dean, Sal, and Stan to the brothel. They played music on a jukebox as loud as they wanted, which Sal says he never could do in America.

Dean, Sal, and Stan danced with the prostitutes, and then went off with different ones. Sal wanted to sleep with “a sixteen-year-old colored girl,” but gave up when the girl’s mother came in and talked to her. After sleeping with one woman, Sal went off with Dean’s original woman, but this woman was too drunk, so he went with another one. The three of them drank and slept with different prostitutes until nighttime.

The whole time, Sal kept thinking of the sixteen-year-old girl. Victor finally showed Sal the bill for everything, which was over three hundred pesos. Sal walked outside and remembered he “was in Mexico after all and not in a pornographic hasheesh daydream in heaven.”

Victor took them all to a nearby bathhouse, where Stan and Sal showered. Victor was sad to see them all go, and asked them to come back. Dean said he’d take Victor to the U.S., but Victor said he probably couldn’t go because he had a wife and kid and no money.

Mexico is a virtual paradise for Sal and Dean, as prostitutes and marijuana are easy to find and more socially (and legally) acceptable than in the United States.



Sal and Dean enjoy smoking marijuana and feel that it brings them closer together in a kind of bond with Victor and his brothers, even in spite of the linguistic boundary between them. They are always trying to get close to people, to bond with people, and then to move on to find the next person with whom to bond.



Sal idolizes his friend Dean as a new kind of American hero and spiritual guide. He is having an ecstatic time in Mexico, a country that so far seems to be free from the restrictions that always interfered with his good times in America.



Sal, Dean, and Stan are having a raucous time, enjoying themselves without any regard for laws or propriety. But their liberated happiness coincides with the exploitation of young girls and other prostitutes.



In contrast to the United States, Mexico, with its lax laws, is for the countercultural Sal and his friends like a daydream or magical haven of sex, drugs, and fun.



Unlike Dean, Victor chooses not to run off and enjoy himself with new friends because he cares about his duties toward his family and is constrained by poverty. Being free like Dean is a luxury he can’t afford.



PART 4, CHAPTER 6

Outside of Gregoria, the car's headlights stopped working, and the group had to drive through a dark jungle, with lots of insects and bugs all around. They drove onwards and got to "a jungle town" where they stopped and tried to sleep in the car, though it was incredibly hot out. Sal ended up sleeping on top of the car, getting bitten by hundreds of mosquitoes. Sal says, "the atmosphere and I became the same."

A policeman found them sleeping by the car, but didn't seem to mind. Sal says America doesn't have this kind of "lovely policemen." Sal tried to go back to sleep and then had a vision of a wild white horse galloping toward Dean. In the morning, Dean said he also dreamed of a white horse.

Dean, Sal, and Stan started driving through the jungle again, seeing all sorts of gigantic bugs. They got out of the jungle and started driving toward some mountains, seeing "mountain Indians" along the side of the **road**. They stopped the car outside a little hut and saw a three-year-old Indian girl.

Dean guessed about the girl's life, how she would never know anything of the "outside world," and probably had a "wild chief." They drove on and saw more Indian girls. Dean got out and gave one girl his wristwatch. They kept driving, past some shepherds, and finally got into Mexico City.

The group entered the hustle and bustle of the city, filled with "thousands of hipsters in floppy straw hats." Sal was enjoying the city, but then started to get sick and delirious with a fever. The next thing he knew, he was lying on a bed and Dean was telling him that he was going back to New York to see Inez. Sal would have gotten upset with Dean for abandoning him, but knew Dean "had to leave me there, sick, to get on with his wives and woes."

PART 5, CHAPTER 1

Sal says that Dean drove back through Gregoria all the way to Louisiana before the car broke down and he had to fly back to New York. Dean and Inez got married, but then he immediately went back west to San Francisco to see Camille and his two daughters.

Sal and Dean like to live their lives off the beaten path, and now they do so quite literally as they drive through the dense jungle. Sal's constant desire to become one with nature, with life, with the world, is here achieved, he feels, by sleeping outside on top of the car in the middle of the jungle.



This episode with the policeman illustrates by contrast how oppressive and irritating the American police can be to Sal and people like him. Sal and Dean's shared dream of the horse seems to indicate their incredible closeness and that they have found a kind of pure freedom.



Sal, Dean, and Stan continue on the road, marveling at all the strange sights they see that are so different from the American experience they know.



Dean perhaps exaggerates the primitiveness of the girl with his idea of a "wild chief." Sal and Dean finally reach the destination of their final meandering trip together.



Sal enjoys the city at first, but—as often is the case—he has a worse time at his destination than he had getting there. Just as Dean has abandoned people close to him in the past, he turns his back on Sal even while he's sick. But Sal forgives Dean because he idolizes, looks up to, and pities his dear friend.



Immediately after trying to settle down with Inez, Dean goes on the move again, betraying yet another wife.



When Sal was on his way back from Mexico City, just over the border in Texas he ran into “a tall old man with flowing white hair,” who told him “Go moan for man.” Sal was unsure what this meant, and went back to New York.

In New York, Sal met the girl he “had always searched for” and fell in love. He and the girl, named Laura, planned to go to San Francisco and Sal wrote Dean to tell him, but then Dean ended up coming to New York.

Dean told Sal things were good between Camille and him, and that he wanted Inez to come to San Francisco as well and live on the other side of town where he could see her. Dean went to Inez and proposed this idea, but she threw him out. Sal got a letter for Dean from Camille, saying that she and her daughters were waiting for Dean in San Francisco.

Sal says that the last time he saw Dean was “under sad and strange circumstances.” Remi Boncoeur happened to be in New York, and Sal and Laura had made plans to go to a concert with him. Remi came to pick Sal and Laura up, and Dean was heading to Penn Station at the same time to head back west.

Dean asked to ride uptown with Sal as far as Penn Station, but Remi refused, so Sal and Laura got in the car and waved goodbye to Dean as he walked outside in the cold. Sal says that at night now he thinks of all the “raw land” of America “that rolls in one unbelievable huge bulge over to the West Coast,” of Dean Moriarty, and of Dean’s father—but especially, he clarifies, of Dean himself.

Sal has another run in with a strange, mad figure who may offer a kind of disguised wisdom, though it is unclear what these “wise” words might mean—which is not so different from all the other seeking for wisdom in the novel, in which the seeking feels valuable but no wisdom is ever actually found. After his trip, Sal now goes back home.



Sal finally appears to settle down and doesn’t need to go on the road anymore. But he writes Dean again perhaps because part of him misses his friend and their old times together.



Dean’s ideal situation is self-centered and rather sexist: he wants two women to wait around for him while he goes to each one as he pleases. The responsibilities of Dean’s life with Camille and his children are starting to catch up with him, as the letter from Camille exemplifies.



Though Sal and Remi parted under unfavorable circumstances in San Francisco, they reunite now in New York as Sal has begun to live a more settled-down life. Just as they reestablish their friendship, Sal and Dean’s comes to a bit of an end.



The novel concludes with this tragically narrated scene of Sal and Dean parting ways for good. Sal seems to have moved on from his road life and settled down at last, and this is a life from which Dean is excluded, as symbolized by Remi refusing to give him a rise. Sal still thinks of his friend fondly and associates Dean’s mad restlessness with the huge, sprawling landscape of America. Yet Sal himself seems no longer to partake of the road himself. He has escaped that sadness, has had the experiences that he can now write about, and has settled down with the “girl he had always searched for”. Dean for him is an idea of a kind of purity that Sal no longer has to struggle to live up to. He still loves the idea, but he does not have to live it.





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