

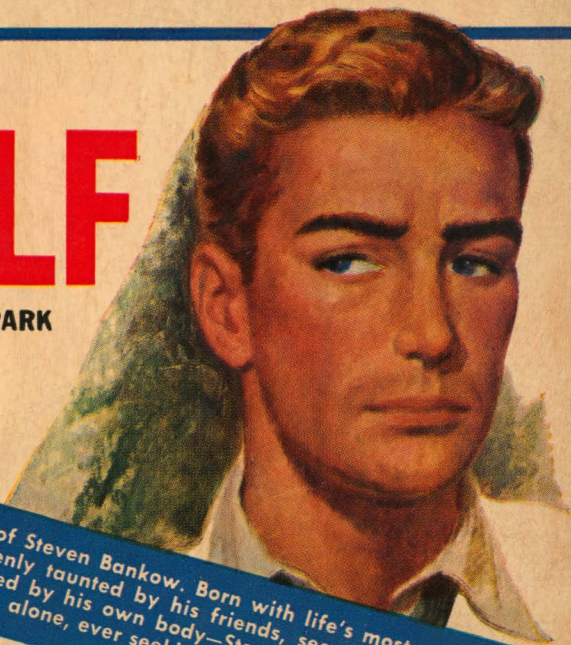


WHAT WAS HIS BODY'S DARK SECRET THAT
MADE HIM NEITHER MAN NOR WOMAN ?

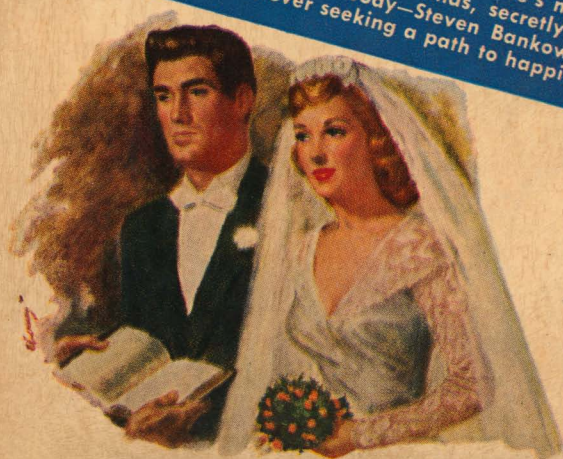
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HALF

JORDAN PARK



This is the story of Steven Bankow. Born with life's most awful abnormality, openly taunted by his friends, secretly despised by his father, shamed by his own body—Steven Bankow walked the face of the earth, alone, ever seeking a path to happiness.



A LION ORIGINAL—
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135

"They should have killed me at birth."

But they didn't, and Steven Bankow went out into the world, walking a tightrope, a man without manhood.

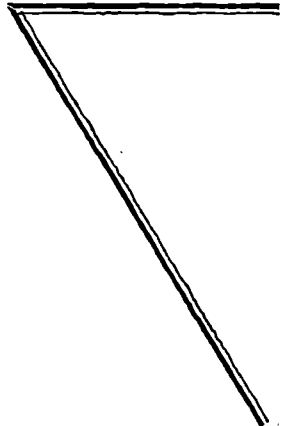
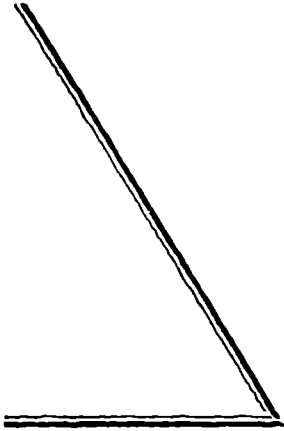
He tried friendship, but his friends despised him. He tried marriage, but his wife scorned him. He tried the armed forces, but that was the most terrible shame of all.

He had no place to turn.

So he did the one thing he feared most. He went to the doctors, turned his strange body over to their probing fingers, their instruments, their machines. And he found out the truth—and this was the worst torment.

He wasn't a man at all.

by
Jordan Park



Half is a completely new novel.
It has never been published before,
in any form, at any price.
For the very best in *new* novels,
always look for the words—
**A LION ORIGINAL—NOT A
REPRINT**



Half

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New York City

A LION ORIGINAL

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author's agent*

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CHAPTER ONE

IT WAS a brief item, even for the society page of the Searcy, California, *Intelligencer* (circulation 4,800):

"The engagement of Miss Stephanie Bankow and Mr. Charles Wainwright was announced by the parents of Mr. Wainwright at a dinner party last night held in the Conquistador Room of the Old Mission Hotel. The wedding will take place, the couple said, before the month is out. They plan to take up residence in Searcy.

"Mr. Wainwright is an architect associated with the Los Angeles firm of Britton, Deem & Wainwright.

"Miss Bankow, who has just returned from a nationwide concert tour, plans to give up her career in singing to be a housewife."

The story appeared in the issue of October 12, 1952.

It was an unimportant story except to those who knew that Stephanie Bankow was, nine years before, not a woman, *but a man*. . . .

CHAPTER TWO

THEODORE BANKOW—he had changed the name from Tadeusz Bankowski—held his head and cursed his troubles. He had been laid off for a week from the packing plant and God alone knew when he'd be called back. Ilyeana was yelling in the kitchen with birth pangs as the Bankows' fourth child was coming into the bleak November of 1925.

He felt vaguely sorry for Ilyeana even though it was a woman's business and to be expected. He had even hired Madame Inge Klopf, Licensed Midwife, instead of calling on some neighbor's experienced wife. Klopf was bustling about now, rattling pans on the roaring kitchen stove.

Theodore saw his breath steaming by the light of the gas jet and cursed Madame Klopf for ordering him from the blood-warm kitchen—and pinning a blanket over the door to boot. He flapped his cold hands together and tried to think of a way to stave off the midwife's demand for her five-dollar fee.

The place was Chicago's South Side, Thirty-fifth Street west of the Union Stockyards. Theodore wore tattered hand-me-down clothes and lived in a battered hand-me-down apartment, one of forty in what was called Bedbug Row. The German immigrants had passed through it first, when the two-story red brick face of the Row had been new and shining. Now the

Germans and their children were dispersed through the North Side in comfortable houses on their own lots. The Irish had moved through next, but their advantage of knowing their adopted country's language got them out fast. The city administration was studded with Irishmen who had risen from that very neighborhood. And last had come the Poles, to rent the decaying apartments, scratch their insect bites, work brutally long hours amid the stinks of the stockyard and curse their fate.

There was a shriek from the kitchen that brought Theodore to his feet in a cold sweat, but it was not followed by the thin newborn wail. If there was something a man could do—but there wasn't.

He thought of prayer and began to recite the Our Father, and then reconsidered. The Hail Mary made much more sense under the circumstances. But after saying it three or four times he found that he was looking through the window into the night sky and worrying again.

A furtive noise from the side room gave him an outlet for his choked-up nerves. He clomped to the door, yanked it open and glared down at the mattress where the blond heads of Michael, four, Catherine, three, and Peter, two, projected from a mound of patched blankets.

"What you kids up to, hah?" he demanded. Peter, with his mouth open, was probably asleep. Michael and Catherine were probably playing possum. "You be quiet and stay sleeping," he snapped at them. "Is none business of yours what goes on." He always—almost always—talked English, however uncertain, to the children, and insisted that Ilyeana do the same. It was a way of helping them to overcome the tremendous advantage held over them by an Irish immigrant. Of overcoming the incalculable advantage of a native-born

Protestant, he never thought at all. It was too much to hope for.

Theodore went back to the bedroom and the Hail Mary. Under the soothing repetition he was vaguely wishing that they had a Polish priest for rector of St. Steven's parish. Father McGinnis was a good man and a clever man, but surely there must be a Polish priest somewhere just as good and just as clever . . . maybe if St. Steven's had a Polish priest he'd find himself in church oftener than once a year at Easter, he thought. In Lodz where he was born the question never came up. Here in America things were different, so different he wouldn't have believed it. He, Tadeusz—no, now he was Theodore—missing Communion for weeks, months at a time! Unbelievable, the old men would mutter back in Lodz if they heard such a story. Unbelievable. He was a good boy, they would mutter. What kind of a place can America be?

A place, he slowly and firmly answered the old men of Lodz—with their crooked-stemmed pipes and their sweeping mustaches—a place where there is not much hope for you if you are set in your ways and too thick-headed or tired to learn new ones. But a place, he fiercely told the old men, where there is hope for your children. A place where they can become landed proprietors, or colonels of cavalry, or judges.

But the imaginary old men didn't believe that either. They shook their heads and muttered that it was unbelievable.

Theodore paced the floor and flapped his hands, fiddled with the gas jet trying to turn it down low so that it would save gas but not quite go out. It did go out and the matches were in the kitchen.

He pulled the blanket aside—damn the woman, it's my kitchen!—and walked into warmth that made him

gasp and lean against the wall. Madame Klopff, her hair pinned under a white cap and her fire-hydrant figure enveloped in a white rubber apron, glared at him through bull's-eye goggles.

"Out!" she said.

"I come for matches," he told her with dignity, and stole a look at Ilyeana, sweating on the brass bed, her eyes shut, her fair hair straggling, her lips drawn back from her clenched teeth.

"Theodore?" she asked faintly, not opening her eyes. Madame Klopff indignantly threw a sheet over her naked abdomen and said to her husband: "Out!"

He brushed her aside, took Ilyeana's hand and said in Polish: "Thou wilt be delivered soon, beloved. Soon thy pain will be at an end and there will be another child to care for us in our age. Soon thou wilt have a wonderful child, beloved. Do not fear."

Madame Klopff had not understood the words but she understood the tone. She took him by the wrist gently and said: "Outside, *bitte*. You make all schlow, understand? A licensed midwife I have been for twenty years. I will not hurt your wife."

Half blinded by tears, he fumbled some kitchen matches from the box and walked out into the cold bedroom. As he lit the gas jet he heard a great gasping grunt from the kitchen. As though, he thought wildly, she had been kicked in the belly by a horse. And then there were others. He sat down in a chair moved from the kitchen and held his head. Would it never end?

The panting, intermittent newborn wail began. Theodore sank to his knees and prayed again, this time not in words.

The blanket was ripped aside and Madame Klopff rushed into the room holding two strange things—a folded cloth and a small can with a screw cap. Ignoring

Theodore, she unscrewed the cap, dumped some liquid from the can onto the cloth, screwed the cap back on, set the can on the floor and rushed back into the kitchen. A thin, sickeningly sweet odor filled the room. Theodore, wonderingly, picked up the can and read the label. Big red letters told him SULPHURIC ETHER, which he could neither pronounce nor understand. America was full of writing he could not pronounce or understand.

The newborn wail tapered off into gasps. He took pride in them. They were strong gulps for air.

Madame Klopf came back into the room slowly, stripping off bloody rubber gloves.

"Is all right everything?" he demanded. "Is a boy?"

Madame Klopf looked him in the eye and said: "Nein. They both live. But everything is not all right. Sit down. Let me talk."

He sat down. They both live. Then everything *was* all right.

The midwife said, taking the can of ether from his hand: "Your wife is *aschleep*. I put her to *schleep* with this. I could not open it in the hot room with the *offen* all hot; it would have *ekschploded* us all dead. I had to put your wife to *schleep* because there is something to decide."

"The baby," Theodore gasped. "Marked?"

She nodded grimly. "Marked. The baby I think should also be put to *schleep*—and not to wake up."

"Let me see," Theodore said, his mouth dry as dust.

A baby born in Lodz many years ago had been born with horns, so they said. And babies were born without arms, without eyes, without legs . . .

He stared down at the panting, wrinkled little red morsel of flesh. It lay in a faded blanket beside its mother, who was snoring faintly and smelling of that

sickly-sweet odor. Bloody newspapers were everywhere.

Theodore did not dare draw the blanket open; he gave a look of appeal to the midwife. The *head* looked normal . . .

She drew the edges of the blanket apart and Theodore looked down on a sturdy newborn baby of about six pounds with no apparent malformations.

"It's a boy," he said softly.

"*Nein!*" said the midwife, and pointed to the baby's genitals. "Look close."

He looked close. He had seen male babies before—Peter and Michael. He knew what they looked like. This one looked—*wrong*. He touched the baby to confirm what he saw. The baby looked like a boy at first and then when your eyes focused it looked terribly wrong. There was no opening in the small bud of flesh that at first made it look like a boy.

The midwife picked up the thinly crying baby. "See," she said. "Look close." The opening was at the base of the infantile male organ, underneath.

Madame Klopf bundled the baby in the blanket again, and led Theodore into the cold bedroom.

"I—do—not—understand," he said very slowly and carefully. He was shaking and his English was deserting him. He had to compose the sentence out of individually remembered words; it didn't come into his head as a unit. "What does it mean?"

"It means I think the baby should be put to schleep," the old woman said. "And you must hurry and make the mind up. Soon the wife will wake. Such things I have seen before. The birth certificate I make out, what do I write down? The space iss for 'male,' the space iss for 'female.' For such a baby there iss no space."

"He look like boy," Theodore said.

"Ja," Madame Klopf agreed pitilessly. "He look like boy. And then look close and he look like girl. But he iss neither—or both."

"He look like boy," Theodore repeated dazedly. "He is boy. The other thing, it will close up maybe. He is boy. Put it down 'male' in the space. The other thing, it will close up. Maybe a week. Maybe a month. Maybe—he is boy, Madame." Theodore tried a nervous laugh. *Thou shalt not kill.* "This talk is foolish. Un-necessary."

Madame Klopf was very angry. "Foolish dumb Polack," she spat. "Soft heart, soft head. What kind of life do you giff your monster? He cannot be husband. I am Lutheran so it makes nothing to me, but he cannot be priest. You understand."

Theodore said thickly: "He will be husband if he want. He will be priest if he want. I name him Steven after the saint of this parish. You go do your business. Put it down 'male.' He is boy. And if after this I tell you, he die—" He showed her his hands, glaring. She understood and quailed.

Theodore went into the side room and bent over the blond heads projecting from the mound of blankets. "Kids!" he yelled, tousling Catherine's mop. "Wake up! You got little brother name Steven! Little boy!"

Peter began to cry, Catherine blinked at him, nine-tenths asleep. The oldest boy Michael said: "Aw, Pop! Leave me sleep!"

He grinned, knuckled Michael's scalp and rushed down the steps to the icy sidewalk. The downstairs apartment was rented by his good friend Frank Oswiak—not a Pole, a Bohemian, but a good feller. A light was on, and he pounded on their door, next to his.

One of the windows flew up and Frank stuck his head out to yell: "Watta matta, you crazy?"

"Crazy, sure!" Theodore yelled back. "I got boy! Betcha weighs ten pound!"

"Waddaya know? Come on in, I unlock door right away. We celebrate."

He unlocked the door. Mrs. Oswiak was awake by then, railing: "So he got boy—who ain't got boy? I got five boys, you wanna get drunk on *hombru*, you get drunk and don' yell like crazy you got boy! Open me bottle too, Frank. How is Ilyeana, Ted?"

"She okay, thanks." Frank flipped the rubber-gasketed, wire-bound porcelain caps off three black bottles of home brew and they drank thirstily.

"Fine boy," Theodore said. "He be real man some day. I go to bed, I don't make no girls, I tell you that!"

"So who made your Catherine?" Frank demanded. "Wasn't that when you was outta town in Gary?"

"I make Catherine too," Theodore said. "Just to show. I gonna call boy Steven. Like the saint of the parish. Maybe he want to be priest, it help him . . . Mrs. Oswiak."

"Yeah?"

"You—you ever hear that maybe Madame Klopff was a little—" he twiddled his finger at his temple.

"Nah, I never heard anything like that. She's an old lady, of course. What's on your mind, Ted?"

"Nothing. I got real boy, you bet!" He looked around, and Frank hastily opened another bottle of the strong beer.

In half an hour Theodore was pretty drunk and Frank Oswiak was looking ruefully at the empties. This particular batch had worked out very strong, very tasty. Everybody had liked it, and now it was gone. Well, Ted had a right to celebrate.

The new father was babbling: "He get good education. Don't talk no Polish to him ever, Frank. You

promise me that? This America, so don't talk Polish to him. You promise me that? He gone make big money, he gone show the Irishmen. You promise me that?"

"I promise," Frank said wearily. "I wouldn't talk Polish to him even if I was a Polack, which I ain't. Lemme help you upstairs, Pop."

"That right. You call me Pop. Got a fine boy. Betcha he weigh ten pounds. Soon he weigh twenny-thirty pounds."

Frank practically carried him up the stairs. Madame Klopf was cleaning up, burning bloody newspapers in the stove. The smell of ether was gone, and Ilyeana, looking groggy and happy, was holding Steven to her breast. She grinned at the men and Madame Klopf gave Theodore a glare and a mutter about drunkards.

Theodore kissed Ilyeana, kissed the baby, stuck his hand into the sugar bowl and grandly held up a five-dollar bill. To the midwife he said: "First you show birt' certificate how filled out."

Wordlessly she passed it over and Theodore peered at the form. He beckoned conspiratorially to Frank. "Frank, you tell me how she put down—is boy or girl?"

Oswiak resignedly took the certificate, read it and told Theodore: "She put down 'male.' That means 'boy.'"

"Is all right then." He handed her the bill with a flourish and folded up on the floor.

As Frank lugged him into the bedroom he muttered: "Is a boy. Is fine boy name Steven."

Madame Klopf, Licensed Midwife, unpinned her cap and took off the apron and bull's-eye goggles. She packed them into her black bag and shrugged on a heavy black cloth coat against the November cold.

"Fool!" she gritted before she left. "*Verdammt Narr!*"

Ilyeana looked startled, and in her arms Steven began to scream.

"So it will be," Madame Klopf muttered, and went out into the cold.

CHAPTER THREE

STEVEN felt that Mama was scared, and protectively tightened the grip of his six-year-old hand on hers. They had walked many blocks, clear out of the neighborhood he knew. He'd got tired and wished Mama would carry him the way she used to, but hadn't asked her. He knew he was a big boy now, too big to be carried, and he knew Mama had things on her mind.

They stood before the largest building he had ever seen. It was red brick, like Bedbug Row, but the brick was new and shining; the window sills were not splintering painted wood but shining white stone.

Mama said tremulously, "You don't be scared, Steven," and led him up shining stone steps and through a metal door. Everything inside was big, everything shone bright.

"Am I in school now, Mama?" he asked, baffled. He understood there was more to it than this—that there were other kids, lots of them. But where?

"Shush," she said. "We go see principal, Miss Glennon."

They went up more shining steps; his legs were becoming very tired, but he didn't complain. Mama looked *very* scared. At the top of the steps there were doors, and through one of them he saw kids sitting in rows, silent and absorbed. He felt that there must be some

mistake. The kids were big kids. They'd beat hell out of him if a little kid like him was put in with them.

"Mama," he began to protest.

"Shush!" She towed him into a dark and quiet room where two women sat at big tables. There were chairs, there were books in glass cases, on the wall was a gigantic shining clock—he stared about him devouring the new sights, almost forgetting his mother.

"Am Mrs. Bankow with son Steven," Mama said timidly to one of the women. "Steven is for kindy-garten. And because is two months late Miss Principal Glennon says to see her."

"Surely," one of the women said. "My! So this is Steven!"

He looked up at her and said: "Uh-huh."

"I'm Miss Crane, Steven. Do you want to stay with me for a little while out here? Your mother has to see the principal."

"No," he said, and clutched his mother's hand tighter.

"Do like the lady say, Steven," his mother said angrily. He knew she wasn't angry, just scared, and he didn't want to leave her alone.

That woman knelt before him and showed him a big, bright book. "Where do you want to sit, Steven? I'll read to you."

"What about?"

"Elephants," she said. "See? Here's a picture of an elephant. Do you know what his name is? And do you know what kind of hat that is he's wearing?"

Before he knew what had happened he was sitting absorbed in the wonderful adventures of Babar, and Mama was somewhere else for the time being.

Lucille Glennon, principal of P.S. 103, had gone as far as a woman could go in the school system by the age

of thirty-nine. The cost to her emotional and physical health had been staggering. She was a Ph.D., she was the country's top authority on primary education of first-generation urban immigrants, she was a hard-driving administrator, and she looked like a fifty-year-old speakeasy waitress with T.B.

She studied Mrs. Bankow in one fast glance, smiled and shook hands. The woman obviously had a problem with that child. The three other Bankow children had gone to school on time, were doing nicely; the family was poor but not desperate or shiftless. Why had it taken three warnings before she enrolled Steven? She knew what the law was.

"Glad to see you, Mrs. Bankow. Is the young man outside?"

"Yes, Miss Glennon. I bring him. I bring him every day from now on for mornings."

"Oh. Surely that won't be necessary, will it? Your Michael's ten years old and there aren't any bad streets to cross—not since we got that traffic light on Archer." The woman's face hardened slightly about the mouth, and Lucille Glennon was, among other things, an accomplished "cold reader." Without a pause she went on: "But of course you should do whatever you think best." She was rewarded with a relaxation of the grim, defensive look.

"Tell me something about Steven, Mrs. Bankow. I have four hundred and twenty-six boys and girls here, but I can't learn too much about any of them. What does he like to do best?"

"Sing. He like to sing."

"That's nice. Your Michael, Catherine and Peter are the healthiest children in P.S. 103, you know. How about Steven?"

An inscrutable Slavic barrier crashed down between

them. "Healthy boy," Ilyeana Bankow said tonelessly. "Never sick. Never to doctor. You think he need doctor or nurse, first tell me. I am the mother. I have to say."

"Of course," the principal said, pretending to write it down. That was it. God knew what was in the woman's mind, but what was it. She didn't want Steven to be examined by doctor or nurse. Christian Science was entirely out as a possibility. Add in the fact that the Bankows had no more children after Steven and what was the answer?

"Let's have a look at the young man," she said briskly, and led Mrs. Bankow to the outer office. Steven, a sturdy, healthy, obviously intelligent six-year-old, was chatting with Miss Crane.

He looked up and said: "Mama, there's this elephant he's the king of the elephants his name is Babar and he has a queen and a little boy elephant and it's all in French but Miss Crane can read French so it comes out American—"

"Shush!" Mrs. Bankow snapped. "Later is time to tell me about book." She turned to Miss Glennon and said formally: "You look at him. Is all right, not? Is healthy boy. So remember what I say. I am the mother."

"Surely," Miss Glennon said. "Miss Crane, will you take Steven to the kindergarten?"

Kindy-garten, Steve found out, was a large bright room with a lot of kids his size, chairs his size and plenty of toys. There were two grownups, Miss Fisher and Mrs. Kretz. Miss Fisher was young and pretty and friendly; Steven saw first thing that the kids liked her and didn't like Mrs. Kretz. He didn't think he liked Mrs. Kretz much himself; her face was sourly forbidding. He decided to avoid her, but it was Mrs. Kretz

who sat him down and talked to him quietly, explaining how things were there and how you did things.

"Your mother will come for you at lunchtime and take you home for the next few weeks. Then later on you'll have your lunch here and you'll go home in the afternoon like the older children. We have a lot of fun here. We sing and draw and play dancing games and play with blocks and we learn how to use tools if we're very careful. Now, you may have to go to the bathroom. When you do, you come to Miss Fisher or me and say: 'May I leave the room?' And then one of us will take you to the boys' room and wait outside until you're through. Only one child can go at a time—"

He didn't remember much of it except about the bathroom. As soon as Mrs. Kretz let him go, he wandered to a group of four kids who were playing with blocks. The blocks were piled as tall as he was in a single uncertain layer with open spaces in it. Bright tin cups stood in the open spaces.

"What's that?" he asked one of the kids.

"Store," the boy said. "Don't you bunk into it or I'll ruin you. What's your name?"

"Steven. What's yours?"

"Melvin Shea. What's the rest of your name?"

"Steven Bankow, thirty-five hundred South Halsted Street," he said proudly. ("You ever get lost, Steven, you go to cop in blue coat, gold buttons with blue cap. You tell him you Steven Bankow, thirty-five hundred South Halsted Street. Now you say back for me.")

"That isn't a name," the kid said scornfully. "You're a dope."

"You're a dope yourself," Steven said, quailing a little.

"You're a *Polack* dope." Steven had seldom heard the word, and then only heard it spoken with an all-in-

the-family license that robbed it of hatred. But Melvin's intention was perfectly plain. He had spat it out, sneering and confident. Steven understood clearly that somehow the word was supposed to hurt him and lower him in everybody's eyes. He calmly pushed over the tower of building blocks—the crash was awful—and stood there waiting for trouble.

Instantly pretty Miss Fisher was there, saying: "That wasn't nice, Steven."

"He called me a—a dope." Steven didn't want to say the word. Somehow there was evil magic in it—

"He called me a bastard," Melvin said, looking pathetic.

Miss Fisher winced. "You mustn't say things like that, Steven," she said. (The child didn't deny it so it must be so. He just stood there looking stunned, probably by the strangeness of the environment. *How did they pick up such dreadful things so young?*) "Now I think you should go and play somewhere else with some other children—and don't say things like that again. It *isn't* nice." She led him away from the trouble spot, not seeing Melvin's triumphant grin. "Now would you like to draw with crayons or learn to use the carpenter's set?"

Steven looked around. "I want to do what they're doing," he said, pointing to a table where three girls were earnestly stitching scraps.

(Merciful heavens, what do I do now? Why didn't they teach me *anything* useful in Normal School? What do I do about a boy who wants to play with the little girls sewing doll's clothes?)

"*Why* do you want to do what they're doing, Steven?"

"It looks like fun. I want to."

Mrs. Kretz had been watching with grim amusement. Miss Fisher threw her an agonized glance, and she de-

cided to bail the brainless little fluff out. She called: "Singing time, children! Chairs in a circle around the piano!"

Miss Fisher gasped with relief and said to Steven: "Well, nobody's going to sew now. Here, I'll show you where to put your chair for singing time."

(But Melvin had heard it all. The new kid wanted to sew with the girls. Under cover of the scraping chairs dragged into place he told the half-dozen little foot-kissers who were his friends. Steven was a sissy. Steven was a sissy. Steven was a sissy.)

Mrs. Kretz fingered the piano for a few satisfying chords before beginning to pick out melody for the children with one finger. "Everybody knows 'London Bridge,'" she said. "First we'll sing it through once and then we'll sing it and play the London Bridge game. Ready?"

She clenched her teeth a little before beginning to thump the keys. The scrawk of twenty-four unformed voices more or less in unison was a bit of an ordeal to Mrs. Kretz; she took vocal music rather seriously.

*Lon-don Bridge is fall-ing down,
Fall-ing down, fall-ing down;
Lon-don Bridge is fall-ing down,
My—fair—la-dy!*

Her trained ear heard something new and startling in the ragged chorus—very faint at first and picking up steam by the last line. It was a new voice, strong and sweet *and on perfect pitch*.

Bemused, she listened through the second stanza.

*Take the key and lock him up,
Lock him up, lock him up,
Take the key and lock him up,
My—fair—la-dy!*

It must be Steven, the new boy, she thought. Yes, it

was Steven. She twisted around on the piano stool and saw him singing heartily, his mouth a large, round O, in accordance with the doctrines of every leading *maestro del canto*.

She thought, flustered, it's incredible. The hand of God personally molded that child's vocal cords, throat, palate and sinuses into a musical instrument!

"Children," she said steadily, "let's sing it again but this time think about the words. When you sing *fall-ing down*, try to make it sound like falling down—a big bump. And when you sing *lock him up*, make it sound like a lock going *click-click!*"

Miss Fisher looked startled. Weren't they awfully young for anything like that? Weren't they just to get some notion of pitch and have some noisy fun?

Mrs. Kretz avoided her look and said: "Ready."

The children sang through the two stanzas again. Of them all, only the incredible voice of the new child followed her suggestion, easily and with zest.

The implications were unavoidable. Not only a voice but musical *intelligence*, the frame of mind that understands music as language.

In a bit of a daze she supervised the noisy romp of the London Bridge game. What should she do about the child? What—a chill ran through her—would his talent cost him? Nature was even-handed, always. If she gave one thing, she took away another. Whoever heard of brains and beauty together, she thought, with a contemptuous glance for pretty Miss Fisher. He had been given a voice and the instinct to use it; what would be taken from him in return?

After the London Bridge game Mrs. Kretz, still spinning slightly, went to her desk. Steven followed her and said: "Can I go to the bathroom?"

"Certainly. Only it's better to say: 'May I leave the room.' Remember next time?"

"Yes."

Up came Melvin, with an unformed scheme floating in his mind. Maybe he could kick the new kid in the pants while he was busy at a urinal; maybe he could bang his head against the wall or maybe even with luck shove him into a toilet.

"Please, may I leave the room too, Mrs. Kretz?"

"You know you can't, Melvin. Only one child at a time."

She started out with Steven. Melvin wailed: "But I got to leave the room. *Please*, Mrs. Kretz!"

"Oh, all right. Just this once if it's really necessary."

She led them across the hall to the door with BOYS on it and waited.

Inside Melvin went innocently to a urinal. Steven looked at the urinals uncertainly, looked at Melvin uncertainly, and went to one of the two toilet bowls. It was smaller, lower and more comfortable than the one at home.

Melvin finished his imaginary business and turned to Steven. "You got to do number two?" he asked. (Innocent conversation to lull the enemy while planning the attack.)

"No," Steven said shortly, finished his business and hastily buttoned himself.

"*You do number one sitting down?*" Melvin asked, thunderstruck.

Steven gave him an honest answer—a terrible mistake when you are dealing with one of the Melvins of the world. "I got to," he said, and went out into the corridor. Melvin followed a moment later looking as though God's hand had descended on him. This was better than kicking the new kid in the pants. This was

better than dumping him into a toilet bowl. This would ruin him.

In five minutes both the teachers knew that something unprecedented was going on. The whispers, the giggles, the stunned looks directed at Steven.

Some stupid joke, Miss Fisher decided. Bring it out into the open and let them see how silly they were being.

"Charles," she said sharply to one of Melvin's toadies. "Suppose you tell me what you just told Evelyn. If it's so funny I want to hear about it too."

Charles looked in anguish at his chief.

"Go on, tell her," Melvin urged jovially.

Charles gulped and said: "I told her the new kid has to do number one sitting down like a girl."

And then twenty-three children were howling their sadistic delight at the twenty-fourth. It was earsplitting when he began to cry and ran from the room.

Mrs. Kretz ran after him and caught up as Miss Glennon was striding down the corridor toward the riot in the kindergarten.

"What's going on in your department, Dolly?" the principal demanded.

"One of those outbursts, Miss Glennon. They've unanimously decided that this little fellow here isn't up to their high standards. It seems he sat down on a commode to pass water instead of going to a urinal."

Steven sobbed: "I got to! I can't help it! Honest, I can't help it!"

The riot down the hall was subsiding.

Miss Glennon gave Steven a long, pitying look and then turned to Mrs. Kretz. "Need any help?" she asked.

"Yes," Mrs. Kretz said weakly. "Would you, please?"

"Right. I'll put on my dragon mask. Come on, young man. Nobody's going to push you around in *my* school."

Her magnetism was so powerful that Steven followed her back into the scene of his torment without more than a moment's hesitation.

Miss Glennon was talking to her doctor about the whole situation that night after dinner.

"—so I gave them the old snarl and some talk about fair play for the record. But I think they understand that the child is under my personal protection. When they fool with him they fool with me."

"Uh-huh," said Dr. Shaughnessy.

"But he said he *had* to and I told you about the parents having no more children after him and the way the mother made her point about no physical examinations."

"Uh-huh," said Dr. Shaughnessy.

"Don't you uh-huh me, Bill. I didn't invite you to dinner for the pleasure of watching you stuff yourself; I wanted to pick your brains. What's wrong with the boy and what can be done about it?"

"The boy get home all right?" asked Dr. Shaughnessy.

"Yes-the-boy-got-home-all-right. And, God forgive me, I made him promise to come to school tomorrow as if nothing had happened. Stop fencing. What's wrong and what can we do?"

Dr. Shaughnessy shrugged. "I can think of a couple of things that it might be. One's called hypospadias. It's a condition when the child is born with an incomplete urinary canal. The opening isn't at the tip of the penis but underneath it. Or your 'boy' may be a female with an abnormal clitoris. Or he may be a true hermaphrodite with both ovaries and testes and a set of genitalia that would make your head spin. Or he may be a bilateral hermaphrodite—"

"You're talking damned rot, Bill." Her face was white.

"No I'm not, Lucille. Nature plays some filthy tricks on an occasional unfortunate human being. Doctors don't tell everything they know."

"What can be *done*?"

The doctor lit an after-dinner cigar painstakingly with a kitchen match from his pocket. He said at last: "Nothing, I'm afraid. Oh, there are surgeons and there's all this new endocrinology stuff coming along—but did you ever see a road gang out laying trolley track, say, under a hot July sun?"

"Yes. What of it?"

"Naturally the workmen were immigrants—Italians or Poles. Even in the hot sun they kept their shirts on. They kept their sleeves rolled down. They kept their cuffs buttoned. What I'm trying to say is that our immigrants are prudish to a degree that would stun the Old American middle class if they only knew it. The women die of uterine cancer because they're too prudish for an examination. Midwives butcher them because it isn't decent for a man to see them naked. The men take drugstore garbage for their syphilis and gonorrhoea because nobody must ever see their bodies. These attitudes are breaking up, but right now that child is completely under the legal control of parents whose strongest taboo, perhaps, is against exposure of the genitals.

"Lucille, we'll never get as far as an examination of the child. And even if, by nag-nag-nagging, we do get that far—who's to pay for treatment? But you can try."

Try Miss Glennon did. It always ended with that Slavic barrier dropping between her and the Bankows. Ilyeana would tell her with frigid politeness: "Is all right, thank you very much for troubling. But no help

needed. Is everything okay." And Theodore would tell her: "Is no worry, Miss Glennon. Is a fine boy, Steven."

And the agonizing thing was that their frozen wall of prudery prevented her from ever coming to grips with the problem in any but the vaguest terms. They could easily pretend—or perhaps even believe—that she was talking about Steven's school work or general health. She used medical terms which they did not understand and she could not bring herself to use diagrams or plain English. Beyond question they would have thrown her out of the house.

CHAPTER FOUR

STEVEN, fourteen, lay sleepless in his bed on a furnace-hot August night of 1939. I'll kill myself, he thought. I won't go back to junior high. I'll kill myself first. Only three more days' vacation and then they think I'm going back to junior high, but I'll kill myself and then they'll see.

When I was a kid in P.S. 103 I had it good and didn't know it. I wish I could go back there and start all over again. Instead of killing myself. Miss Glennon didn't let anybody push you around there. There's something wrong with me but I don't know just what it is. I bet Miss Glennon knows but you can't talk about it. I bet I'm the only kid on Bedbug Row that sleeps in a bedroom by himself. There must be something awful wrong with me but you can't talk about it. Dirty words. Drawings on the toilet walls. I don't *know*.

With ashamed fingers he touched himself under the sheet and thought: They won't talk about it. Mama and Pop just look at me and Mama gets mad and says I talk dirty and Pop gives me that phony laugh and the look in his eye—it's awful. *I—don't—know*. I wish I had a friend. I wish I had a girl. Every time I make friends with somebody new it lasts for about a week and then we aren't friends any more. It starts with them being friends and then they don't have much to say to me and then they don't have anything to say to me and

then they act like they can't remember my name. Miss Glennon couldn't do anything about that but she sure could do things about them picking on me.

There's something wrong with me and it's like people could figure it out from the way I look and the way I talk. A sissy. That God-damn story about how I wanted to sew with the girls, I been hearing it for eight years. A million people must of told me I wanted to sew with the girls once. I sure learned something from that story, though. You got to watch yourself or they'll tear you to pieces. A little thing like that and they still tell it on me. Sure I wanted to sew with the girls. What's wrong with liking bright colors and the way cloth feels? And sure I used to like dolls, and sure I like to try on Catherine's clothes—but nobody's going to know about it. I learned something.

I—don't—know! Maybe—I wish Pop was still in the Church. Drifted away, he says. Doesn't matter in America, he says. Was ignorant in old country, he says. But I wish he'd go back to the Church so I'd have somebody to talk it all over with, somebody real smart. You don't see the priest's face when you go to confession. Maybe I could do that—or would they throw me out? You got to know the words. *Father, forgive me for I have sinned?* No—*Bless me for I have sinned, Father*—I don't know the words. They'd throw me out for sure. And even if I didn't see his face I couldn't talk about it. I choke up and get red. And nobody tells me. Dirty words. Pictures on the toilet wall. I look at the other kids in the toilet but you can't see much and I can't talk about it and I haven't got any friends I can ask.

There must be something awful wrong with me. Mrs. Kretz always nagging me to sing, but I sure learned from that story about sewing with the girls. They don't

get me up in front of a bunch of kids, not to sing, not to dance, not to do anything. Tear you to pieces.

But the movie, Miss Grace Moore in *One Night of Love*—I wish I could sing like that. I must of seen it four times. *Tosca*, *Carmen*, *La Bohème*. It takes you years to learn how to sing. Maybe after I get out of high school and get a job I could save up some money and go somewhere like San Francisco and wear women's clothes and take years to learn how to sing. No—I'm not a sissy. I can't do that. I can't do that. Break Mama's heart after all she did for me. I got to be a man. But there's something wrong—

God, I wish I had fifty dollars so I could go to a big doctor and tell the nurse it's private and show her the fifty dollars so she'd see I wasn't just a kid playing a joke and the doctor would fire her if she wouldn't let me in with fifty dollars, even if I wouldn't tell her what was wrong. So she'd have to let me in and if she wanted to take my name down I'd give her a phony name.

Well, young man, what seems to be the trouble?

Doctor, it's my—No. I couldn't tell him. I'd begin to cry, I guess.

Well, young man, you seem perfectly normal to me. God, I wish he'd tell me that. But he wouldn't. I'm a sissy. And I heard the kids talking about a morphodyke and I tried to look it up but I couldn't find it in the dictionary, not even the big dictionary in the library.

Morphodyke. Adolescence. Hair growing down there. Kids get pimples and their voices crack but mine didn't. It's getting a little deeper but I still sound like a kid—or a girl. Mama's damn-fool new friend Mrs. Godowski, the damn fool. So this little Steven—when I talk to him on phone I think I talking to little girl. Dumb old Polack bitch, she tells that one around they got a good one on me like sewing with the girls. So thees lyeetle

Stiffen, the dumb old bag—why can't she talk good English like everybody else at least? God damn her.

Miss Glennon was a woman, you couldn't talk to her about things. I wish Mr. Milhouse was around all the time the way Miss Glennon was. Principal of a big junior high, he can't be bothered. You just see him at Assembly. He reads from the Bible and he tells a couple of jokes and you sing the lousy stupid school song to the tune of Offenbach's "Barcarolle," and that's that.

If Mr. Milhouse was around more and got to know your name maybe a person could go to him man to man. But he couldn't be bothered. And I guess I'd only cry. I cry too much for a boy. I get upset so easy. That time I thought of going on Major Bowes's Amateur Hour, I could sing "Danny Boy" or something like that, I tore up the letter even after I put a stamp on it. I thought about it and then I tore up the letter because I'd just cry in front of all the people and get the gong. All those people looking at me, they'd know there's something wrong with me. I got to keep away from people more. But I wish I had a friend or a girl or something. I wish I had somebody to talk to but I got to keep away from people.

He fell into a dream-haunted sleep.

CHAPTER FIVE

YOU HAD TO pick a language your second term in junior high. French, Spanish, German and Latin were available. Steven picked Latin, he didn't know why. It sounded classy. It was supposed to be hard. The German classes were full of kids who talked German at home so a Pole wouldn't have a chance. There was only one Latin teacher, you had her for Elementary, Intermediate and Advanced, so it would be kind of like a club, exclusive, with the same kids sticking together for two years.

He went into 408 and found a seat at the back. He wouldn't be allowed to keep it since his name started with B and seating was alphabetic.

A girl gave him a quick, cold look and sat down across the aisle from him and then the bell rang and the teacher came in. She was a quick, sparrow-like, white-haired woman.

"I'm Miss Reese," she said, and wrote it on the blackboard. "This is Room 408, Elementary Latin."

Two girls down front got up giggling and began to explain that they'd made a mistake. Miss Reese waved them away impatiently and they left, giggling, leaving the door open. The teacher said to the kid nearest to the door: "*Claude portam*. Or, in English, shut the door." The boy shut the door.

"I'm glad to see so many of you here," Miss Reese

told them. "Eighteen of you. You were very wise to choose Latin. People think it isn't useful, but it is. Doctors have to know it. Lawyers have to. Pharmacists have to. Wherever you go you'll find somebody who can speak Latin. Well—let's get down to work. You." Her finger stabbed at a kid who'd sat near her desk. "Pass these cards out so we can get alphabetized. Anybody who doesn't know how to fill out a Delany card, stand up."

Nobody stood up, but the girl next to Steven suddenly looked scared. She whispered as the teacher turned to a stack of books: "What's a Delany card?"

Must be from out of town. "Nothing to it," he whispered back. "Put down your name and home-room four places."

The cards came down the rows of seats, were filled out, alphabetized by another draftee and then began the noisy process of seating eighteen students in alphabetical order. The name of the girl from out of town turned out to be Sophie Dejevski, and she was seated to Steven's right in the first row, with him under the guns of the teacher's desk.

When the bell rang she looked at her program card and at Steven. "It's my lunch period," she said, "and I don't know where the lunchroom is."

"Mine too," he told her. "I'll show you. It's the top floor." The steadiness of his voice surprised him. They started out. "You from out of town?"

"Wheeling, West Virginia. They don't have junior high there. You go to grammar school up to 8-B and then you go into high—freshman class. None of this Rapid Advance One, Two, Three business. It mixed me all up at first." She spoke quickly and nervously.

"Why did your folks move?"

She pretended not to hear him. "Up those stairs?" she asked brightly.

"No. That's the 'down' stairs. The 'up' stairs are over there. I guess you can find your way. I—I got to do something." He cut across the corridor and walked away aimlessly.

Why did she have to be so snooty? If she didn't want to tell him, she didn't have to act like he wasn't there.

Melvin Moss came barreling down the corridor whistling and shoving. "Hell-lo-o-oh, Thteven!" he called, sighting him, in a lispng, girlish voice. Two kids with him picked it up and their voices followed him down the hall. His face was burning red and he felt tears about to come. But he couldn't stand and fight; there were all of them against one of him.

He trudged up to the lunchroom by the West stairs. He didn't see Sophie at the girls' end of the lunchroom, and wondered trying to distract himself whether she'd be in any of his afternoon classes. He bought milk, a ham sandwich and a piece of cake, but was too upset to eat. A couple of kids said hello and he said hello back and went to the water fountain so he wouldn't have to talk to them. They had been all right last term, no running with the pack to make fun of him, but you don't take chances.

Like that girl.

He saw her next after school, standing aside from the pushing, whooping crowd waiting for the streetcars. Her stack of books was on the sidewalk and she was puzzling over a city map.

Leave her alone, common sense told him. She'll turn on you like all the others. But she looked up from the map and saw him and smiled. She was glad to see him.

"Lost again?" he asked stiffly.

"I guess so. I know I have to change at Archer Avenue, but I don't know which trolleys go that far. Chicago's so big and spread out. I guess I'll get used to it."

"Where do you live?" he asked.

She told him and he worked out her trolley route, their heads together over the map. He felt a little dizzy being that close to a girl, her depending on him—

"Let's have a soda," he said abruptly. "You have to stand if you take the first trolley that comes along. All the kids crowd into it. Fourth-fifth trolley, you can get a seat."

"Okay," she said.

He stooped to pick up her books as naturally as though he'd done it a thousand times. She protested: "Really, I can carry them all right. We have so many on the first day—"

"That's all right," he said, books under each arm. "That's all right. The best place for sodas is Rick's Sandwich Shop. You want to stay away from the Sugar Bowl. Last term somebody found a cockroach right in a banana split—"

She made a face and shuddered. Steven laughed and talked, happier than he had ever been in his life.

In a booth at Rick's Sandwich Shop they sat and talked, taking minute token sips at their sodas, letting the balls of ice cream dissolve into a rich paste and the foam go flat. Steven wanted it to last, it was so wonderful. He told her about the school. Tips on teachers. Which courses were easy, which were hard. Tips on the lunchroom menu. How Assembly was. Detention Room when you were late. Report cards—not A, B, C, D, F like in grammar school but percentages.

She listened and said things like: "My goodness, I don't think I'll ever get it all through my head!"

And Steven realized he was hogging the conversa-

tion and asked her what the school was like back in Wheeling.

"Wheeling?" she asked blankly.

"You said you came from—"

"Oh, yes. Wasn't that silly of me? Forgetting where I came from. Of course we pronounce it different—" She giggled nervously. "Of course I'm not really from Wheeling, we didn't stay there long. We're *really* from —from—" She couldn't seem to get it out for the longest time. Finally she said: "Yellow Springs, Ohio," and giggled. "Isn't that a silly name?"

He smiled dutifully and she continued to giggle. To his horror the giggling became hysterical; she buried her face in her hands, her shoulders shaking.

Steven sat there, frozen, for long minutes. The place was almost empty—a waitress and a couple of taxi drivers drinking coffee at the counter. The taxi drivers were talking baseball or boxing or something and couldn't be bothered, but the waitress stared curiously.

"Sophie," he said, "what's the matter? Can I get you a glass of water or something?"

She looked up, her face blank, with tears standing in her eyes. "Excuse me," she said, and went to the ladies' room at the back of the sandwich shop, taking her handbag.

Steven jingled the two dimes in his pocket. What was *wrong* with her? He felt impatient and superior, and enjoyed the feeling very much.

She came back and sat down, quite composed. "I'm sorry I got upset," she said. "As a matter of fact I've been sick. I was in the hospital for six months in Yellow Springs."

"Gee, I'm sorry I kept asking you—"

"No, you were perfectly all right. You're very mature, Steven. Most boys your age aren't so mature."

"A-a-ah," he said, deprecatingly. "I'm fourteen. That's not so young."

"I'm fourteen, too. It's a very important age for a girl. It's when you begin to form permanent friendships and decide what you're going to do with your life. For instance, I'm never going to get married. I've decided that. I'm going to go into retailing. A woman can get to be a department store buyer, you know. Or maybe I'll be a dietitian. That's very important too."

"I'm never going to marry either," Steven said. "I think I might be a singer. That's a hard life. You have to work all the time, the singing comes first."

"Are you in the glee club?"

"Na-a-ah! That's kid stuff. Anything they teach you you just have to learn all over again. You got to save money and find a *good* teacher. They aren't cheap." He wished he could tell her also that he wasn't ready, not quite ready, to face audiences—that he wanted a teacher who would just be in a room with him, just the two of them, so he could build up his confidence. He had a feeling that she'd understand.

"I think that's a very wise decision," she said, nodding. "One's career is the most important thing one has, and one should be very careful about what one does with it."

The waitress was glaring at them.

"Merciful heavens!" Sophie said. "What time is it getting to be?"

He could see the clock from his side of the booth. "Three-twenty," he said. "I guess we ought to go now. Be plenty of trolley seats. I—I enjoyed talking with you very much. I hope we get a chance to do it again some time."

"I do too, Steven. I like you a lot. You're very mature."

He put down the two dimes on the counter next to the cash register and said to her as she was fumbling in her handbag: "That's all right. I got it."

He left her at the trolley stop, reluctantly returning her books. "I usually walk home," he said. "I got to build up my wind. I may go out for track next term."

Steven crossed the street rapidly and athletically and rounded the first available corner. It was about twenty blocks to home; it wouldn't kill him if he took it easy.

The blinding realization struck him halfway home. *He'd had a date.* A date was when you asked a girl out, she said yes and you paid for it. A grin like sunrise spread over his face. A date! His first! And it had been easy—fun. There weren't many kids of fourteen who had dates, he bragged to himself. Why, he could probably have as many dates as he wanted!

Sophie was a nice girl, he decided. Nervous, yes, but girls were. What had she been in the hospital for? She didn't say. "Female complaint" or something like that. There were times when the fact that there was something wrong with you didn't seem to matter so much, when the thing that was wrong didn't seem so important as it did at other times, he phrased it delicately to himself. He wasn't really a sissy if he could have as many dates as he wanted. He brooded on ways to casually drop the news that he had a date the other day. A date with a good-looking girl. Maybe what was wrong with him would go away and then nobody would point, nobody would laugh any more. Melvin Shea's gang and "Hell-lo-oh, Ththeven!" wouldn't hurt as much. Not if he had dates.

CHAPTER SIX

IT WAS a good setup. He had a girl. Kids could make fun of him for it, but he could be superior to their fun. He knew and they knew that childhood was over; it was only a matter of time before they too would be dating, agonizing over their clothes, unruly hair or the latest pimple on the neck.

The junior high school idea grew partly to avoid just that situation. In high school you come in a grubby little schoolboy of thirteen or fourteen and emerge a fully sexed, physically mature youth of seventeen or eighteen. The two groups under one roof led to tension and administrative problems which the junior high school idea was supposed to solve. It was supposed to separate the two groups—grubby little schoolboys in the junior high, mature youths in senior high. But in every junior high there were the precocious kids who passed out of the schoolboy stage earlier than most. And Steven found himself among them by virtue of having a girl.

His schoolwork, never spectacular, fell off badly, but it didn't seem to matter much. A movie date with Sophie confirmed his manhood more surely than a brilliant midterm 80 in Latin would have. His midterm card gave him a borderline 65 in Geometry, 75's in English and History, 70 in Latin, 85 in Hygiene—which was only another name for P.T. and didn't count.

He brought home the card a little scared. Pop had roared at him for a better card than that last term. Dinner—sauerkraut and boiled spareribs—was silent as usual. Pop didn't like people to talk while they ate, except for "Please pass" and "Thank you."

After dinner Pop stuffed his pipe, loosened his belt, yanked open the *Chicago Tribune* and began very slowly to read the sports page. In ten minutes he'd be asleep, Steven knew.

"Pop," he said.

Theodore railed automatically: "Don't you see me read? Don't you know I work hard all day? What you got so important hard-working man can't relax with paper?"

Steven poked the report card at him. "You have to sign this," he said uncomfortably. "It's not so good."

"So!" Theodore took the card and read it carefully. Then he grinned at Steven. "Bring me the pen and ink bottle," he said. Immensely relieved, Steven brought them. Pop turned the card over and carefully wrote his name on the back with the sputtering steel pen.

"Should get new pen point," Theodore complained. "Is only two for a cent." He waved the card to dry his signature and handed it back to Steven, grinning again. "Is not such a good card," he said, trying to be stern but not succeeding. The grin broke out. "What the hell, anyway? You have fun, you know nice girl, you grow up real American man, don't you, Steven?" He tousled Steven's hair. "But you try work harder for end-term report card, hey? You not spend all your time with girl." He subsided and waved Steven away. "Now let me read paper."

Ten minutes later he was asleep in his chair. And five minutes later Steven was on his way to Sophie's, swing-

ing the brass-bound tin box that contained his roller skates.

He couldn't quite figure out her family. He liked them, but there was something odd about them. There was Sophie, there was Mrs. Dejevski, there was Paula, twenty-one, who was a sales girl at the Boston Store. There was a Mr. Dejevski at some vague location in Ohio. Sometimes he was a traveling salesman, sometimes he was managing a store, sometimes he was in the hospital. It was fishy as hell and embarrassing when they talked about him in front of Steven: contrived little conversations that couldn't fool anybody, though obviously they desperately hoped they'd fool him. After talking about mysterious Mr. Dejevski, Sophie was always upset and giggly, though she'd not given way to hysteria since their first date.

At the skating rink everything went fine. Another precocious pair from the junior high was there, so the four of them could share the fun of being grown up. The place wasn't crowded, there were no jokers or speeders on the rink and a good time was had by all until nine o'clock. And then the other couple sought them out on the floor and said good-bye. The boy told Steven meaningfully that they were going to Grant Park to take the air, and his girl giggled.

"Come on," Sophie said to him. "Let's skate." And they went around and around while the electric organ pealed out waltzes and Steven furiously puzzled out his intentions.

There had never been anything physical in their friendship. He was ashamed of that—and he was relieved. They touched hands, sometimes they kissed mildly and it was pleasant; now they circled the floor with his arm around her—and it was pleasant.

He knew about smooching. The others took it for

granted that he and Sophie pawed each other. In smut sessions with other boys who dated he had little to say, but listened avidly. He was—different. He didn't feel as they did. "Jeez, I wanted to throw her down on the floor and rape her, the little teaser. I went home, I felt so hot, I—" Not Steven. He puzzled over it. He wanted to kiss her and be kissed; he wanted to stroke her and be stroked. He didn't want to throw her down or get her hot by kissing her in that certain spot behind the ear they talked about. He didn't want to fondle her breasts or loins. It simply wasn't in him. He was happy the way it was. And yet—

What if it should be found out that their dating was such a pale, anaemic thing? Wouldn't it mean exile from the new world of maturity, so hard won? And he could never return to the grubby schoolboy circle. It had been hell.

Smut session talk. "She was waiting for me to make the first move, of course." "Yeah, they always do, except for nymphomaniacs." "Would I like to meet one!" Was she waiting for him to make the first move? "Don't let nobody kid you, they like it as much as you do." "Yeah, they just put up a struggle to show they're good girls." "Sure they do. They *expect* it." Did she expect it? Was she waiting—impatiently, wondering what was the delay, for him to make the first move?

"A penny for your thoughts," she said.

His arm tightened around her and he led them, swooping, to the sidelines. "Maybe we ought to be going," he said, beginning to unlace the shoe skates.

"Goodness, it's early! I don't have to be in until ten. You in trouble with the report card?"

"No. Not that. I thought maybe we could stop by Grant Park on the way home."

"Oh," she said, her face wooden. She began to unlace the skates, slowly. After a pause she said: "Do you *want to?*"

"Sure," he said.

"We won't stay long," she told him. She took minutes and minutes to get the shoe skates off and packed; it was past nine-fifteen when they left the rink. Steven knew he was scared and unhappy. What Sophie was feeling, he couldn't guess. She talked little and nervously. But wasn't that part of the act? She expected it and he'd have to make the first move—or forfeit the whole new world, be scorned as a guy who didn't know how to smooch, who didn't want to—the old sissy story again.

On a bench in the park he put his arm around her shoulders uncertainly. She said sharply: "Stop it." But they always put up a struggle to show they're good girls. Feeling miserable and disgusted with himself, he cupped one of her breasts with his hand and tried to kiss her.

She pulled away and slammed him across the face with her open hand, got up and stalked down the walk to a street lamp.

Steven found he was crying. He hurried after her. "Wait, Sophie!" he called weakly. Something in his voice caught her. She stopped under the light.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I didn't mean to do it. I didn't want to do it. I just thought—"

"You thought what? You thought I was a tramp?"

"No! I thought I—I guess I thought I was *supposed* to."

"Who's been talking to you about me?" she demanded.

"Nobody! What do you mean?"

"Never mind. I forgot my skates."

"Gosh, so did I. Let's go back and get them. I won't try anything. I promise."

They went back to the dark bench. She picked up her skate box, hesitated, and sat down with it in her lap. Steven sat down too, not close.

"Nobody talked to you about me?" she asked sharply.

"No. Really, no. What's there to talk about? Nobody told me you were a pushover or anything like that. How could they? You don't go with anybody but me."

She said bitterly: "I go with you because I somehow thought you'd be a gentleman. I was sure I wouldn't have any trouble with you. Trouble I don't want. I thought I'd be safe with you. I can't see where I was wrong. What got into you, acting like that?"

"I told you. I didn't want to act like that. I thought maybe you wanted me to and it was up to me to make the first move." She was so jumpy about people "talking" that he didn't dare blame it on what he heard at the smut sessions.

"You thought wrong—Steven." That was better. "I don't want to do anything like that. Not ever. *Not ever!*" She put her elbows on the skate box and buried her face in her hands, sobbing.

There was a sudden terrifying flash of intuition.

He asked in a frightened whisper: "*What's all this about your old man?*"

She looked up, her face tear-streaked, and said: "Don't hold it against me, Steven. You can't tell anybody about a thing like that. I'm not a bad girl. And they got him locked up now. He must have been crazy, he was so drunk. I was in the hospital there for six months and we came to Chicago to make a new start. Everybody there knew about it and they looked at me like I was dirt, but it wasn't my fault. Dejevski's my aunt's name, I won't tell you what our real name is.

But they kept it out of the papers. Thank God at least for that. They kept it out of the papers."

He put his arm around her shaking shoulders, not this time in an imitation of lust. "I won't hurt you," he said. And she accepted it gratefully for the comfort it was.

"You won't tell anybody, will you?" she asked, and immediately answered herself. "No, I know you won't. I knew it the first time I saw you. You're understanding. And I needed a friend. Somebody who'd like me but not—not—"

"It's all right," he said. "I won't."

She dried her eyes and they got up and walked slowly out of the park. She said abruptly: "I'm not being fair to you, am I?"

"Yes you are!"

"I wonder. Just—being friends—isn't enough for most boys."

He said, rashly and bitterly: "I'm not like most boys. Not any more than you're like most girls."

"What do you mean?"

Suicidally he went on. "There's something wrong with me. I'm a—sissy. I always have been. I sound like a girl on the phone. I used to play with dolls until I was ten, even though they tried to take 'em away from me—" He stopped short. The next words were unthinkable. He could never say them to anyone, ever.

"Maybe," she said, "that's why I like you, Steven. A couple of people who have something wrong with them ought to get along. Like two cripples leaning on each other."

"Don't say cripple!"

"I—I just mean it as kind of a figure of speech. I'm very sorry if I offended you."

"It's all right," he mumbled.

"And we'll stay friends?"

"Always," he said.

He coolly kissed her good night at her door and walked home. Walking, he thought: The poor kid. But I'll never tell anybody. I'd die first. I guess she really doesn't want to smooch after a thing like that, with the painful memories and all. What a bastard her old man must of been! I hope where they got him locked up they give him just enough bread and water so he's hungry all the time and just misses starving to death. What a bastard.

So I've got a girl and I haven't got a girl. The poor kid. Worried about being unfair to me. Isn't that like her? She's sweet, even after what she went through. But it isn't unfair. I just want to be friends with her. I didn't want to do that stuff. I felt dirty while I was doing it. The other guys get so hot and I can't understand it.

Because there's something wrong with me. But nobody will ever know.

CHAPTER SEVEN

IT WAS from his friendship with Sophie that Steven got his real education. Being driven by the need for companionship and the fear of losing it, he learned to be forbearing and generous and kind beyond his years. There were quarrels that interrupted the friendship now and then, with both of them equally guilty of the greed and mule-headedness that caused them. Then Sophie would be snippy; cold and spiteful and have a couple of outside dates; Steven would be boorish and unforgiving and make up to a couple of other girls. But it never lasted. One day he or she would smile tentatively passing in the school corridor and the hatchet was as good as buried. Avid necking was the rule among their schoolmates and they wanted no part of it. The physical part of their relationship attenuated over the years to the cool good-night kiss and nothing more; it was even rarely that they held hands in the movies. Occasionally a perverse storm of passion would blow up in one or another of them, but it always ended in a moment, with a backlash of fear, disgust and shame that left them both shaken and wondering.

Money helped. The years might not have been happy ones if Steven had passed through his crisis of maturity in 1931 and 1932 rather than 1939 and 1940. The big defense buildup was beginning to roll; it began with heavy industry, and that meant Chicago. After an agony

of soul-searching in 1939, Theodore Bankow gave up his seniority at the Union Stockyard and took the Illinois Central to Gary, across the state line in Indiana. The hiring boss at the U. S. Steel plant judged him strong, intelligent and docile, and took him on as a puddler's helper. The hiring boss knew what was coming—crazy money at the shipyards, crazy money at the plane factories, crazy money in electronics. The company soon would desperately need a hard core of loyal, unimaginative, stay-put elder men.

Theodore Bankow didn't understand the forces behind it, but he realized that his years of toil had been crowned with unimaginable success. It was a longish ride to and from the plant every day, but the Illinois Central—everybody said it was the best suburban service in the country—took the pain out of that. And every other Friday Theodore came home with an unbelievable one hundred and forty-five dollars in his wallet.

And it didn't stop there! From helper to puddler, from puddler to section man, from section man to ladle gang boss to craneman!

Theodore took to wearing a vest on Sundays.

They stayed in Bedbug Row, mostly for the same reasons that Theodore had been hired. He was a stay-putter, they knew every inch of the five rooms, a dozen little shelves had been put up each for a special purpose, each cup had its hook in the pantry and each soup plate its space on the shelf. And, Theodore would say trying to justify it: "Is not possible to last forever the job. Come like 1929—poof! And we be glad we have cheap place comfortable so sweating out depression with few bucks in bank." But he didn't really believe it, and not many bucks got into the bank. He grumbled when deductions for defense bonds came along, but put his

name on the line for the suggested percentage of his salary and then felt virtuously frugal.

There was a washing machine, a new refrigerator, an electric stove which Mrs. Bankow despised, carpets, furniture and clothes. It was the sorrow of Theodore's life that the owner of Bedbug Row, a shadowy crone called Phelps, wouldn't go halves on a real bathroom with an inside toilet. But he was damned if he'd put it all in at his own expense. "Is not right," he would protest to Miss Phelps when she came tottering around on the first of every month for the rent. "Am now substantial man. Is not right for have to go out in back to crap where everybody can see! Galeski-the-Plumber says for only hundred eighty-five dollars can——"

And Miss Phelps would squeak dimly: "Oh, no. Oh, no. Can't do that. Everybody hears about it, everybody wants it. Like painting. Oh, no." So Theodore sulked and painted the outhouse and bought a fancy marbleized seat for it.

There were lots of Theodore Bankows in Chicago and their paychecks trickled down to the retail level. Sophie's mother started a dress shop and it prospered.

There was a dark side to it. Michael Bankow, twenty years old in 1940, graduated from Chicago Junior College, a free and very low-grade municipal institution, having done well by its standards in a pre-engineering course. Theodore had somehow got it into his head that time-study man at U.S. Steel was just the job for his oldest boy. He wanted him to go on to Carnegie Tech for night classes that would lead to it. But Michael enlisted in the Navy instead. What the hell—why wait around to get drafted and stuck in the Infantry and carry a pack?

He got boot training at Great Lakes and was back every weekend, in civilian clothes. Then one day he was

gone—gone to join a battleship at a place with the romantic name of Pearl Harbor.

The whole thing threw Steven into something like a panic. For the first time it was solidly brought home to him that one day *he* would register for the draft. One day *he* would be classified. And that meant he would stand naked before doctors and God alone knew how many other people and his secret would be gone. He thought wildly of leaving town. He quarreled with Sophie. And then, with new maturity, he did something about it. He went to the library.

Steven browsed through the furlongs of card index. "See Teratology," "See Hermaphrodite." "See Anomalies." "See Endocrinology." The librarian didn't even look up when he nervously poked three request slips at her. While he was waiting for his number to flash on the annunciator board, he screened his face with a newspaper he was too jumpy to read. But his number flashed and a page shoved the books at him without comment.

He took them to an isolated corner table and got to work, with frequent trips to the dictionary. He knew nothing of research methods and, in fact, barely knew how to read a book. How to read books like these he did not know at all. He ignored their analytical tables of contents, which would have saved him hours. He got lost in the bramble patches of their indexes. He somehow had the notion that appendixes didn't matter and weren't worth reading. He studiously pursued footnote citations, which actually weren't worth reading.

A quoted passage told him:

"Due to the similarity in the development of the male and female sex organs, it is not surprising that incomplete development or overdevelopment of the organs of either sex does occasionally occur.

Such developmental abnormalities should not create intense curiosity and excitement with much newspaper publicity of the individual's malformation, but should be interpreted in terms of embryological development. It is not remarkable that an occasional case of malformation occurs, but it is remarkable that normal cases occur so frequently."

He stumbled through an account of something called the Wegener-Sparre-Elbe case, snickered incredulously, decided it had nothing to do with him and skipped the rest of it.

And he found an anatomical plate labeled: "Hypospadias with bilateral cryptorchidism." In English, the urinary canal opening at the base of the organ, and a pair of undescended gonads. It might have been drawn from life, with him as the model. Avidly he ran down the references in the index and pored over other anomalies of the body.

He rose at last, turned in the books and walked out of the library, through its glittering bad mosaic work. He walked along the lake front and past the great misty flower of the Buckingham Fountain, waving in the breeze. He saw none of it, and started from his daze when a blown spray from the fountain drifted wetly across his face.

Things weren't so bad after all, it seemed. He had found what he wanted. Hypospadias with bilateral cryptorchidism. A man after all, even though part of the manhood was buried in the body instead of hanging outside it. ". . . susceptible to surgery, which is required where parenthood is desired, since . . ." A man after all. He had found what he wanted. Hypospadias with bilateral cryptorchidism, and "it is not remarkable that an occasional case of malformation

occurs." And it was susceptible to surgery—good deal.

He had found what he wanted. He had not found the truth about himself, not the smallest part of the truth, but he had found what he wanted.

CHAPTER EIGHT

HE WAS having dinner at Sophie's place; she had asked him specially. He suspected the worst. One of her unpleasant traits was a sort of needless cowardice; she had a way of breaking bad news in company, like a kid not showing his report card until there were guests in the house. Probably she had something up her sleeve and wanted Mrs. Dejevski and her sister around when she told him.

It came when she was washing the dishes and he was drying. "Steven, I'm going to Commercial High. It's all settled. And I wish you'd come too."

"All settled?" he asked.

"I saw my faculty advisor today and it's down in black and white."

"Nuts," he said angrily and not too loud. Mother and sister were in the living room.

"It was the only sensible thing to do. I'm not going to go to Arts and Sciences. Why kid myself? That's for people with money that can go on to college. At Commercial I can learn typing and shorthand and get myself a good job anywhere. If I went to Arts and Sciences what would I learn? More Latin. And then I'd just wait around like a dope, maybe working in a store, and pray for somebody to marry me. What're you going to Arts and Sciences for anyway?"

"I can go on to Chicago Junior College."

"And then what, for heaven's sake?"

"U. of C., maybe," he muttered, ferociously wiping a dinner plate.

"Maybe," she said skeptically. "Maybe they'll let you in and maybe you can pay five hundred bucks a year tuition and maybe you won't flunk out with all those smart prep-school boys setting the pace. And *then* what?"

"How should I know?" he demanded. "Pop talks about me being a time-study man for his wonderful steel company. Me, that can't add two and two and get the same answer twice. My faculty advisor keeps nagging me to make up my mind what to do. What *can* I do? I guess I'll get me a job like everybody else and work at it and save some money." Saving had been very much on his mind lately. Saving for an operation.

"If you went to Commercial," Sophie urged, as if it were a particularly generous bribe, "you could get to be an accountant."

"Wouldn't that be dandy," he said morosely. "Hell. I know what I'm going to be, and so do you. A soldier. For a whole stinking year I'll be a soldier."

She nodded gravely. "That Roosevelt," she sighed. Her family read the *Trib*.

"Oh, I don't know," Steven said. "My brother Mike's keeping his spirits up. Of course he's on a battleship and that's a good deal compared to a destroyer or something like that."

"We need the Navy," she said. "A Navy second to none. But drafting all these boys for the Army is just plain stupid. Where are they going to fight? It's so *stupid*. *Who* are they going to fight?"

Steven didn't feel ferocious about it. Pop was an

interventionist, in fact, for only one reason: his boy Michael defending his country at Pearl Harbor aboard the *Kansas*.

They finished the dinner dishes and joined her mother and sister in the parlor.

"You sing something for us, Steven?" Mrs. Dejevski urged.

"No," he said. "I have a little cold. I'm sorry." He didn't feel up to it, not after the slight spat with Sophie. Mrs. Dejevski loved his voice, and Paula, the sister, was a fair accompanist on the upright piano. He sang Polish songs learned from his mother to please Mrs. Dejevski—and also in a deliberate attempt to steel himself to singing before larger audiences. His voice had deepened; it was no longer childish. But he knew that neither was it masculine. He had tried, in private, to achieve the chesty resonance of a male singer, and it was not his. His best register only came out in head tones, which sound grotesquely inappropriate from a man, and in a man are called "falsetto." The fact that he could hit them sweet and true made no difference. Men sing from the chest, women from the head—one of the firmest conventions in the set of conventions that is music.

"Too bad about the cold," Mrs. Dejevski said comfortably. "You sing so nice." He had broken her of adding "Like a girl." He had not broken her of graciously telling him: "You always so neat, Steven, never sloppy, never need shave." She was so right. He never needed a shave. His face had a light blond down which had never turned to stubborn whiskers. Every couple of weeks or so he lathered up and scraped off the lather with a razor, but that was in the same spirit with which he smoked an occasional cigarette—unnecessary, but

expected by others and himself. He supposed the beard would come later.

Graduation came, and they sang the lousy, stupid, sloppy, pirated school song. Steven was surprised to find that he sang it for the last time with a lump in his throat. They hadn't been such bad years. Everybody was nice to the graduating class, even teachers who had been rats for twenty-four months.

In the Year Book Steven's picture looked good, and the words beside it were all he could wish for: "Steven Bankow, Voted Best-Dressed Boy, Member of Greeting Committee. 'He doesn't say much, but when he does it's worth listening to.'"

Caps and gowns, commercial imitations of learning's ancient symbols, were worn at the graduation. The boys and girls told each other that you wore the tassel of the mortarboard on the left when you went into the hall and on the right when you went out.

In the audience, German parents snooted the Poles, and a few Old American parents, crackers up from the South to cash in on the growing heavy-industry boom, the first of a great invasion, snooted them both.

Among the graduates some of the girls were sniffing, as if it were a wedding or funeral. Steven was choked up himself, but shed no unmanly tears.

Mr. Preble, the Chairman—and entire staff—of the music department yawned over his fortieth graduation ceremony at Hoffmeyer Junior High. He supposed he'd live through it. Last year he had survived a horrid scandal that blew up when he roared at a band rehearsal: "What the hell are you doing back there—belching through the trombones?"

His eyes, roving in a flight from boredom, landed on the Bankow kid, who had stubbornly refused to go out

for the glee club in spite of a fine ringing voice and what Mr. Preble suspected was absolute pitch. Probably ashamed that his voice hadn't cracked yet. Like Phys Ed teachers plagued with kids who faked heart attacks, appendicitis, anything to get out of stripping down in the locker room because they were ashamed of their immaturity. They just didn't know that different people developed at different rates, and if anybody tried to talk turkey to them the shriek went up that it was sex education and you can't do that. Sex education belongs in the home, tra-la, and kids keep faking heart attacks and appendicitis and Bankow wouldn't go out for glee club because his voice hadn't broken as early as the other kids'. Ho, and hum.

Theodore Bankow, in the audience, was being annoyed by the drawling conversation of a hillbilly couple behind him. The man said: "Chrise sake, Bettyanne, y'all wannit me ta come so Ah come, but Ah be gaw-damn if'n Ah'm gonna en-jaw mah-se'f."

"You hush up, ya dame-fool. Ah sweah Ah nevah seen—"

Theodore was torn between desire to turn and snarl at the couple and—fear. They were unaccountable people, and knife play had begun to show up at the steelworks. He thought of them as a kind of white Negro—alien, primitive and violent. And the certain knowledge that these strange folk considered themselves an infinity above him and all other Poles was gall in his mouth. The other day he had shown one of the crackers at the plant how to operate a dial telephone. The man actually had never used one before. Unbelievable!

He wrenched himself away from these disagreeable thoughts and considered the back of Steven's head. Sure, everything had turned out all right. Everything.

He thought of the murderous Madame Klopff who had wanted to end Steven's life; thank God he had been wise enough to pay no attention. He had told her it would go away, that Steven would become a normal boy, and surely he was a normal boy now. He had not seen Steven naked since he was three, but surely since then everything had become normal. Sometimes he wanted to ask him, man to man, in the American fashion, but his throat had closed up at the prospect. To talk about such things—impossible.

But still, after a scare like that, you used Them Things. And you didn't have any more babies. And you couldn't look a priest in the eye. It was a terrible sin—it was a lot of terrible sins. A terrible sin maybe three times a week for sixteen years—ooh! He thought of the Hell painted on the wall of the church back in Lodz and his forehead became damp. But you can make General Confession any time, if the priest gets to you fast enough. What you had to watch out for was swinging girders that could pulp your head in a second, leaving your sins unconfessed. You had to watch out for the girders, and electric lines, and slick spots on the plant floor where you might skid, and a million other death traps.

Behind him the crackers continued to bicker, and he heard somebody say: "Will you please be quiet?"

"Whut the hell's it to you, Dutchie?" the man drawled. And the conversation continued, rather more loudly.

Sure, Steven was a good boy. And he had a good girl, that Sophie. Nice, sensible kids, not wanting cars or getting into trouble.

Mr. Milhouse said: "The graduates will now sing the Hoffmeyer Junior High School Song. If you please, Mr. Preble."

Mr. Preble raised his baton over the scratch band, robbed of its graduating members, and the graduates stood on the rehearsed signal.

The pirated music of Jacques Offenbach's "Barcarolle" floated the silly, sentimental words. Steven sang them as if they were sweet and true, for to him at least they suddenly were.

CHAPTER NINE

DURING the second Grant administration the Chicago school board took the plunge and established a co-educational high school. They recognized that co-education was a sounder preparation for life, that it would make for better social adjustment among pupils, that it would encourage boys to be manly and girls to be womanly. Having recognized all this, they located the girls' branch in one wing of the school, the boys' branch in another, and built a sturdy brick wall between them. This was so there wouldn't Be Any Trouble.

By the third Roosevelt administration affairs at the Chicago Co-Educational High School of Arts and Sciences had changed little. The anomaly of the brick wall was perpetually on the verge of being rectified, but never quite made it. The brick wall was breached, figuratively, for very small, specialized classes. There was one class in Calculus for precocious whizzes who could double up on the regular Math Major course, zip through Elementary, Intermediate and Advanced Algebra and still cry for more. That class was truly co-ed, boys and girls in the same room taught by one teacher. But in the main the old tradition held, and there was rivalry—"healthy rivalry," apologists called it—between the boys' branch and the girls' branch.

Steven entered as a junior, which eased the shock of passage into a new society. And yet he was a junior who did not, for weeks, know where the auditorium was,

where the gym was, or any of the other intricacies of the huge, moldering old granite building which freshmen and sophomores scuttled around so surely.

Academically it was all about the same—tired men and women spoon-feeding bored adolescents the words they would later regurgitate onto their examination papers, either to pass or fail.

In English there was a Junior Speech to work up, a four-minute effort on a given topic to be researched, written, memorized and delivered.

In Math there was Intermediate Algebra—a couple of jury-rig ways to solve quadratic equations and a lackadaisical effort to get across some unrelated stunts in the domains of analytic geometry and theory of number.

In history there was the Civil War, in which the North had been wholly righteous and the South had been a passel of black-hearted, slave-lashing fiends in approximately human form.

In Latin there was Caesar, his Commentaries, an undistinguished helter-skelter notebook of dubious authorship which had survived almost two thousand years because parts of it were written in such simple-minded Latin that a schoolboy could read these parts without too many trips to the dictionary.

There was Phys Ed—five relentless hours of it a week. But there was no swimming. Steven had made very sure of that before he picked his high school. Arts and Sciences was not equipped with a swimming pool as newer schools were. The required number of hours of swimming instruction were given in theory. The gym classes were solemnly shown how to swim and then got down on the hardwood floor and practiced. It was hard to keep a straight face, but the required curriculum was satisfied at Arts and Sciences in this way.

Steven's attention was first drawn to Joe Lieber at one of those grotesque swimming lessons.

"This is very vally-ble and important," the instructor droned. "You got to keep the same rhythm all the time, one operator gets off, the next gets on wit'out inner-uption."

The teacher had demonstrated the Schaefer prone-pressure method of artificial respiration and drafted a boy to be a "drowning victim" on the hardwood floor. Then he lined them up to practice respiration and changing operators.

Steven in his turn straddled the grinning victim, pumped a couple of times, and the instructor said: "Hokay, good. Now duh next, and don't innarupt the rhythm, see?"

The next boy took over smoothly, pumped a couple of times and fainted. There was a rhubarb in which the instructor completely lost his head. Steven figured the most useful thing to do was get out of the way, and he did, wondering why the victim had abruptly stopped grinning, in fact had gone dead white, when the guy who fainted got on him.

He saw the victim sit down shakily on the floor after extricating himself from the milling crowd and went over. "You all right?" Steven asked. "Should I tell the teacher you're sick too?"

The victim, a pleasant-faced, gangling lout with red hair, said: "No! I'll be okay. It's just—" He stopped.

"Just what?"

He blurted out: "The guy that fainted—did he have a rock on him!"

Steven didn't get it at first. Then he said: "Oh." Then he said: "My God!"

The drowning victim said: "Keep it to yourself, kid. You don't tell anybody, I don't tell anybody. If anybody

kids me about this I'll know where they got it—and I'll break your arm, so help me!"

"I won't tell anybody," Steven said hastily.

"You better not. Jesus. I'm gonna take a shower, right now. To hell with whether the period's over or not. I'm gonna take a shower."

Steven wandered back to the storm center where the hysterical teacher was trying simultaneously to rub the hands of the boy in the faint, give him a drink of water and yell at everybody to keep calm. The boy in the faint was the only calm person there. Steven studied his face with agitation. It was a face not unlike his own—good, regular, small features. And it was the face of that legendary thing, a fairy, a pansy, a queer, a homo.

That night was one of the rare times when he tried to smooch with Sophie. She tolerated it impatiently for a few moments and then there was a bitter quarrel.

"You know I don't like it," she wailed. "It scares hell out of me. And I don't believe you really like it either. Why do you have to paw me?"

She was right. He didn't like it, either. But he snapped: "What do you think I am, anyway—a fairy?"

"Oh!" she said, shocked. Her instinct was to stamp out, but an older instinct would not let her. She had caught the note of trapped agony in his voice.

"What's the matter, Steven?" she asked gently.

"Nothing," he said at first. Then he told her about what had happened in the gym. Then he told her about the torturing self-doubts that had wrung him since then.

"It doesn't mean a thing," she said. "I know you. You wouldn't do anything like that, no matter what you think when you get to feeling low."

"No?" he asked, and then it came out. "There's something else. I'm not normal. Physically, I mean. I need an operation." The words wrenched his throat as they

came out after fifteen years, like vomit. And then he felt calm—committed. Whatever would happen with the secret out would happen. He wasn't carrying it alone any longer.

She was looking at him, waiting for him to say more. Steven realized sickeningly that she didn't understand, that before she could understand he'd have to nerve himself up to the wrenching act of confession again.

"Not normal how?" she asked at last. "What kind of operation?"

He couldn't tell her. The burden still was his alone. "Hell," he said wildly, "I was kidding. Can't you tell when I'm kidding after all these years? What a hell of a wife you're going to make some unlucky guy!"

Then she could laugh. Her forthcoming marriage was a joke they never tired of, a complicated joke involving Mrs. Dejevski and the sister. Steven and Sophie knew that she would never marry; Mrs. Dejevski and the sister were drifting into the assumption that she would marry Steven. And it was strange, but sometimes Steven and Sophie talked as though they were right—a sentence here or there about where they'd rent a flat, what kind of furniture they'd have, how big engagement rings were a silly waste of money they'd need. At these times they hardly knew whether they were joking or not.

It was late when Steven crawled into bed that night. As always, he felt better for the hours spent with Sophie, but he found that sleep was slow in coming. When he closed his eyes he could see the girl-pretty face of the boy who had fainted, motionless and pale against the dark gymnasium floor.

I'm not like that. I'm not. Something's the matter with me, but it's not like that. A simple operation . . . "nothing remarkable," it said in the book. I'm a man. I just

want a chance to prove to them all that it's true. And I've got a girl. I couldn't—

Even in the darkness his thoughts made him uncomfortable, self-conscious. It was almost a physical thing, as if knowing, jeering eyes probed his most secret weaknesses and doubts.

Sophie—the only one, the only girl, the only friend I've got. And she didn't understand tonight. Not one word of what I was trying to say. I thought maybe she would—but, my God, if I can't really understand it myself, how can I expect her to?—I wonder how *he* feels about himself. Oh Jesus, if only there were someone, some way—

He tossed and turned, his thoughts fretful and incomplete. And finally he slept.

Steven didn't want his arm broken, so he didn't tell anybody but Sophie about the incident in the gym. It was two days before people were telling him about it. Evidently the red-headed drowning victim had a loose mouth. The name of the boy who fainted was Joe Lieber. It ran like wildfire through the school. In Latin class while somebody was construing a sentence from Caesar the phrase occurred: "*homo est liber,*" which means "man is free." The pun was too good to pass up and somebody hoarsely whispered his own translation: "Lieber's a homo." The class guffawed, the teacher scowled and had to pretend that she didn't see the joke.

The first Chapel—that was what they called Assembly here, and it made Steven feel grown-up and collegiate—was a revelation. The high school auditorium had a balcony, like a State Street movie palace. At either side of the boxy stage were phalanxes of golden organ pipes, and the organ itself was at stage right—a huge golden-oak archaism with three manuals, full

pedals and row after row of stops. When Mr. Hensold climbed to the bench and slipped his shoes off Steven snickered with the rest. But the first tremendous G Major chord went through him as if he'd taken a long gulp of melted butter laced with brandy. Steven had little respect for the pipe organ until then. But this organ lived.

That wasn't all. After the G chord Mr. Hensold gestured to the glee club in the first four rows; they stood and paused and sang "America the Beautiful." The usual way for high-school glee clubs to sing "America the Beautiful" is with ragged attack, mumbled diction, passable pitch and harmony and no comprehension of the words and music. The other way for high-school glee clubs to sing "America the Beautiful" is the well-oiled-machine, Prussian-drill-sergeant way: perfect attack, diction mangled by overemphasis on tone, far too many careful crescendi and diminuendi, too many overlong and overdramatic rests and no comprehension of the words and music. Hensold's glee club had managed to find a third way between the slovenly and the Prussian. Steven listened in a daze and knew that was for him. They could laugh their heads off at his too-high voice and falsetto tone; he wouldn't give a damn. What he wanted was to work with those people. They had the right idea about singing. He barely heard the Bible-reading by the principal, the little address of welcome, the announcements, the pep talk by the assistant principal.

The next day during his study period he got a pass and went to Mr. Hensold's office. He had to wait, but he didn't have to wait alone. There was a slim blond boy cowering in a chair in a corner. Joe Lieber.

CHAPTER TEN

AN ADENOIDAL GIRL, one of the students who earned pin money and glory by working during study periods in the department offices, bustled in. "You boys waiting for somebody?" she asked.

Lieber cowered deeper into his chair. Steven said: "I want to see Mr. Hensold about joining the glee club."

She dug through the desk and came up with a smeary mimeographed form. She poked it at Steven and said: "Here. Use a pencil."

He got out a pencil and filled in name, home room, class, vocal range—he paused and put down "tenor"—and other items that were harder to answer honestly. Play piano? No. How many years? None. Play violin? No. How many years? None. Other instrument(s)? None. Piano at home? No. Sight-reading? No. Music theory? None. Voice training? None.

Steven put the pencil back into his pocket, slowly and despairingly. No chance. There couldn't be. He tried to hand the form back to the adenoidal girl, but she was busy with Lieber. He put the form on the desk and waited to catch her eye so he could tell her not to bother.

She was saying to Lieber: "I can't give 'um verbal messages. Whyn'cha write him a note or wait until he comes in?"

Lieber said in a strangled voice: "Never mind. I'll see him some time—"

Mr. Hensold barged into the office with an outside portfolio under his arm. He said to the girl: "Hi, Grace." And to Lieber: "Hi-ya, Joe. Waddya know?"

Grace snorted with laughter and Lieber said: "I want to resign from the glee club. I could've just not showed up but I thought I owed you the courtesy of mentioning it."

Mr. Hensold looked thoughtful and said: "That was considerate of you, Lieber. Come into the office."

The door closed behind them. Grace noticed Steven and the mimeographed form. She said: "Give it to 'um when you go in," and started to do her nails with a manicure kit from a desk drawer.

Steven waited five minutes; Lieber came hurrying through the outer office into the corridor. Mr. Hensold said to Steven: "You want to see me? Come in."

He looked over the form and Steven waited miserably for a derisive laugh. It didn't come. Mr. Hensold said at last: "Most of our young men have a little formal training before we get them—" He went to a black upright piano that filled one wall of his small office and sounded a note. "Sing *ah* and hold it," he said.

Steven tried to match the note, flatted badly and produced only a strangled approximation of "*ah*." His heart was thumping and he felt sweat trickling down his ribs.

Mr. Hensold seemed to ignore the flop. He stroked the key again and sounded the note himself, an octave below, in a pure, rich basso, soft but big. Steven felt the relaxed power; he knew that the tone could swell, evenly and without loss of purity, until the windows rattled. The man let it die to nothing—almost nothing—and then cut it off clean. "Like that," he said to Steven, and stroked the key.

Steven let it out; it came clean. It was one of his head tones, with the quality imparted by resonance from the vocal cords up. It was the sound of flutes, violins and women. It was not the sound of trumpets, men and kettledrums. But it was clean and pure, and like Mr. Hensold he let it die and cut it sharply.

Mr. Hensold's face was inscrutable. He touched the key and ran up and down to it again: do-mi-sol-do-sol-mi-do. "It may be too high for you," he said, "but try it anyway."

It wasn't too high. Steven scaled the octave easily and returned surely. Fluty head tones; no resonance from the chest. Mr. Hensold played the chord and then struck it one tone higher. Steven sang the exercise one tone higher, and then another tone higher and then another. Mr. Hensold whistled.

"Sometimes," he said to Steven, "voices get misplaced. Usually they get placed too far down here in America. Lots of people walking around talking a very bad basso without any timbre or character who ought to be talking a good resonant baritone or a good clear tenor. You've heard them. Fellow talks like the Van Buren Street elevated line when he ought to be talking like an alto sax. Know what I mean?"

He suddenly hit the keyboard three staccato blows, a simple chord and its octave below repeated twice. "Greatest entrance music in opera," he said. "Gounod's *Faust*. Red fire on stage, hell breaks loose in the orchestra. Zingo! Up pops Mephisto with a sneer and he sings: '*Here am I!*' You try it, Bankow." He hit the three chords again.

Steven knew he would fail. The first note came out pure; he dropped to sound the twice-repeated octave and hit the low note accurately but dead.

Mr. Hensold pounded the chords. "Again," he said.

Again the low notes were palpably artificial, palpably unnatural, forced and unpleasant. "Again," Mr. Hensold said, six times. At last: "Voices *stretch*, you know. In most cases. That's really all there is to this business of misplacement. A bad habit—a fix you get into, psychologically and physically. In most cases. Could you practice an hour a day developing your lower range?"

"Yes, sir," Steven said worshipfully. "Am I in the glee club?"

"Oh, yes," Mr. Hensold said absently. "Can't let a voice like yours get away. Not even if I have to teach you your parts by thumping them out with one finger. But the sooner you pick up some theory and sight-reading, the better. I see you don't have a piano at home. Do you have any friends with pianos?"

"No," Steven muttered. He thought savagely: They sure take things for granted. What the hell would a piano be doing in Bedbug Row? First cold winter you run out of kindling, you'd chop it up for firewood.

"Well," Mr. Hensold said, "how about a music teacher? It isn't my job to recommend outside instruction, but a voice like yours—it doesn't come along every day."

"Don't think we could afford it," Steven said. Pop made good money but somehow there were so many payments always due—and it would cut into his time with Sophie. And he wasn't going to spend time at her apartment vocalizing, piano or not.

"Too bad," Mr. Hensold said. "I see you live at 3500 South. That happens to be near one of the other glee club boys; he's quite good at piano and theory. If he could coach you—Lieber. Do you know him?"

"Wasn't that him in here before? I thought he was quitting."

"I talked him out of it. He has a beautiful tenor—"

"Not Lieber," Steven said. "Lieber's out. Positively out."

"Listen," Hensold said, his voice suddenly a snarl. "Listen, you little—" Then his anger fell away from him. "All right, Bankow," he said tiredly. "I guess we can't do anything for you. If you can make arrangements for a piano come around."

Steven, stunned, started automatically for the door. There were hot, sudden tears in his eyes.

"Wait a minute," Mr. Hensold said, in the same tired voice. "What's the deal, Bankow? I guess you heard dirty stories about Lieber."

"No," Steven mumbled.

"You can come clean. You heard a dirty rumor, didn't you?"

"What if I did?"

Mr. Hensold sat at his desk, looking as though he'd like to put his head in his hands. "What if you did. My God. What if you did. So you heard a rumor about Lieber and now you won't associate with him. Because somebody said something, you're too good for him. He knows piano and harmony and counterpoint and enough orchestration to write a sonata but he's not good enough for you. Is that right? Have I got it straight, Bankow?"

Steven said nothing.

"Well, Bankow? Does it feel good? We have fifteen hundred pupils here and you sure picked the winning side. Fourteen hundred and ninety-nine against Lieber. With odds like that, you can't miss, can you? Somebody starts a rumor and everybody chooses up sides until it's a nice, democratic fourteen hundred and ninety-nine to one. I hope you're proud of yourself, Bankow. I hope you remember which side you were on if it ever happens to you. I admit I could have picked a couple

of other guys to coach you besides Lieber. I also could have snickered at him when he came in to resign and accepted his resignation. Purged the glee club of an alleged bad influence on the strength of a rumor."

"Look—" Steven said.

"It didn't cost me anything. Not so far. Maybe somebody'll start a rumor about me because I intend to treat Lieber like a human being. Maybe the school board will think of the rumor when promotions come up and I'll be passed over for somebody who kept his nose clean. But anybody who'd let a thing like that influence him to rebuff a sensitive boy at a critical stage in his growth isn't human. I don't know what kind of a thing he is, but he isn't human."

Mr. Hensold did put his face in his hands then. "I didn't mean to run on like that, Bankow. I apologize for telling you my troubles. But—" He looked up again. "But I can't help saying this: If it ever happens to you, remember which side you were on when it happened to Lieber."

Steven said: "Mr. Hensold, I'll work with Lieber if you think it's a good idea." He knew it was more than a rumor. He knew also that for most of his life he had been on the short end of the fourteen hundred and ninety-nine to one. He knew how it felt.

He met Lieber at the next glee club rehearsal. Mr. Hensold introduced them and suggested the coaching arrangement. Lieber was pathetically eager to take the extra work on. Steven neither liked nor disliked him. He had an overpolite, stilted way of talking—as though, Steven thought, he composed his sentences in his head complete before he uttered them. He was what you called a German, as Steven was what you called a Pole.

Mr. Hensold asked Lieber whether he could coach

Steven at his home, and the boy said warily: "I'd be happy to, Mr. Hensold." And to Steven: "Would three to five on Wednesdays be convenient for you? That is my only free afternoon. I have piano, violin and harmony the other school days."

"Be fine," Steven mumbled. Today was Wednesday. "Meet you after school under—at the trolley stop."

He saw Lieber wince and knew he had been caught out. "Meet you under the clock," he'd started to say—the clock in the marble lobby where you met people after school. But they might be seen there, so he'd switched it, none too gracefully.

The glee club rehearsal was one hour of vocalizing, so there was no strain on his nonexistent sight-reading. Among the tenors his voice did not sound too fluty. There were a couple of freshmen whose voices had not broken yet; his was deeper than theirs. The hour passed quickly.

Lieber was leaning on the railing near the trolley stop, his nose in a piano score. He showed it to Steven—Chopin's "Revolutionary Etude." "I'm learning it," he said. "I like Chopin's excitement and fire." There was a note of insincerity which Steven was smart enough to detect and understand. Chopin was Polish; he was Polish. He was being buttered up.

"You couldn't prove it by me," he said bluntly. "My old man works for U.S. Steel in Gary. Us Bankows don't know from Chopin."

Lieber said vaguely: "Gary? That's interesting. Let's catch this streetcar."

He lived at 3500 South, as Steven did, but the difference between 3500 *South Halsted* and 3500 South Skokie was the difference between two worlds. He took Steven to an apartment house of fifteen floors, with a

canopy, doorman and elevator. The doorman and elevator man said: "Hello, Mr. Choseph," to him, deferentially. Both were elderly men and both had ripe Katzenjammer Kids accents. Steven realized that it was one of those apartment houses that a million dollars couldn't unlock to an Italian, Jew or Pole.

"What does your father do?" he asked Lieber as the boy unlocked his apartment door.

"He's a pol."

"Huh?"

"In the waterworks. Deputy Commissioner of Construction and Maintenance." There was a picture in the living room of a man who looked like Paul von Hindenburg. "That's him," Lieber said. He went directly to the piano, a huge black Bechstein grand, its top uncluttered by photographs, scarves or statuettes, and opened it. "Put your books anywhere," he said, and looked at his watch. "My mother'll be back in an hour and she'll probably try to make us eat something. Let's use the time we have. Here's an elementary harmony text I'm through with. We can work from that and you can take it home with you as a loan to study."

His manner had changed. He had shucked off shyness and apprehension. He knew exactly what he was doing. For an hour he led Steven through the beginnings of musical notation, with copious illustrations on the piano. Toward the end he was calling out notes and Steven was plunking them uncertainly, but without making mistakes.

Mrs. Lieber showed up on schedule, a pouter pigeon of a woman, with many chins and a soft accent, faded almost to nothing after thirty-five years in America. "Hello, Steven," she said gaily. "Bankow? That sounds something like a Jewish name, doesn't it?"

"Bankowski," he said flatly. "Polish."

She threw up her hands. "Ach! Poor Poland. Terrible to think of. Invaded by the Russians. Thank God the German Army stood ready to stop them or they would have swept to the English Channel."

That wasn't the way Steven had heard it, but he said: "Yes, ma'am."

"You boys come and have some cake and milk, and Steven, you tell me about yourself. I never see any of Joseph's friends."

"Mama," Lieber said, "we just have another hour and then I have to practice—"

"Hold the mouth!" she snapped at him, and then, graciously, to Steven: "So you're a singer, Steven? I used to sing myself—" She startled him by letting loose a two-bar slice of *Die Walkuerenritt* in a blasting soprano. Her faced turned red as she sang. "Now you," she ordered.

Steven looked helplessly at Lieber, who barely shrugged. Almost inaudibly, then with growing volume as he began to enjoy it, he sang her a very dirty old Polish song about a woman who asks her confessor a certain delicate question. The quite incongruous melody was a lilting mazurka. He looked soulful and folded his hands before him in concert stage fashion as he concluded.

"Lovely," she sighed. "Lovely. They are wrong who say the Poles are without art or beauty. What do the words mean?"

Steven said: "It's about two young lovers who meet by a bridge in the evening. And then one night the girl doesn't show up so the boy throws himself into the river and drowns. The girl shows up late because her father locked her in. She sees the boy's body floating on the water so *she* jumps in and drowns too."

"Ach, how beautiful!" Mrs. Lieber sighed. "United in

death they stand. You must write it out for me some day. I want to learn it. Then when my friends tell me the Poles are animals I will tell them they are wrong, the Poles can be taught like any other people. I am," she said proudly, "a liberal in such things."

"I'm glad," Steven said. He looked at Joe Lieber and said: "And don't forget Chopin." Lieber hung his head, blushing hotly.

Over cookies and milk in the kitchen she asked Steven what people thought of Joseph in school; whether Joseph shouldn't be ashamed to be so thin and puny, whether Joseph should go out for athletics or run for School Council President—wasn't it strange that such a vigorous fellow as Joseph's father should have sired such a sickly boy? Through it all Joseph sat and crumbled cookies between his fingers until his mother snapped: "Don't play. Eat."

He said: "I'm afraid I'll vomit."

Instantly she was a wet, billowing cloud of solicitude that enveloped her son, hiding him completely from sight. She ran to the medicine chest, she wanted to call the doctor, she wanted Joseph to take a hot bath immediately, she thought he ought to lie down for a few minutes, what had he eaten today, he had such a delicate stomach, not like his father—

Mercifully the phone rang, calling her away on some errand. She left trailing injunctions for her *Liebchen* to rest, bathe, take medicine, call the doctor if he felt worse.

When she was gone, Joe Lieber took a pack of cigarettes from his pocket—the navy-blue Paul Jones pack with a sailing ship on it; the school kids' smoke, two for a quarter—and deliberately lit one. He inhaled deeply. His hand was shaking and he wouldn't meet Steven's eye. He said: "Do you ever feel like hopping a freight?"

"Yeah," Steven said, ashamed for him.

"She liked you. She's very sentimental, about dogs and music and poetry. That song about the two young lovers, and you were *in*. She thinks I'm cold and ungrateful for all they do for me."

Steven told him what the song was really about.

Joe Lieber laughed hysterically. "That's good," he said. "That's very good. I've got to remember that. You put one over on her, all right. But wait'll you meet my father. *Der Vater*. Nobody puts anything over on him. I get straight 90's on the report card and Excellent from Herr Mueller for piano and Herr Jacobi for violin and Herr MacDonald for harmony or he takes the razor strop and skins me alive."

Steven was stunned. He'd been whaled himself a time or two for such things as stealing pocket money and window-breaking. He'd been slapped when his father was tired or depressed and he bothered him. He'd even seen his mother clouted in the jaw when Pop came home with a skinful and she nagged him. But the cold-bloodedness of a beating with a razor strop over school grades was frightful.

Joe Lieber went on in a monotone: "And there's nothing you can do about it."

Steven exploded: "Anybody tried that on me, I'd tackle him with a piece of lead pipe!"

Lieber laughed, shaking. "Let's get back to the piano. We have—" he glanced at his watch "—twenty-five minutes before I turn you out so I can do three hours of Czerny before dinner."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE STORY about Joe Lieber died down in the course of the semester. Some music majors who had dropped Lieber like a hot rivet were emboldened when they saw Steven associating with him at no cost but a few routine sneers. They picked Joe Lieber up again and could be seen talking counterpoint and orchestration with him in the lunchroom. Steven was automatically drawn into the crowd. It was months before he could keep up with their shop talk, but he continued to plug at his weekly coaching sessions and the texts he borrowed. Door by door, music opened to him.

He wasn't afraid to ask. Some of the boys were snobs. More of them were craftsmen who would teach their craft and extend fellowship to anybody who could prove he had mastered it.

Steven wished it had been perfect. He wished that Mr. Hensold had been right, that the story about Joe Lieber was only a story. But it wasn't perfect. Something happened one afternoon that he didn't like—a single drop of poison in a clear cup of water.

Lieber had been talking about Mahler's *Resurrection Symphony* for weeks; he had it on order from London. He sweated out each sunken convoy, but the disks finally arrived. He told Steven: "I've heard it only once, four years ago at the St. Louis Festival. Busch con-

ducted. This is supposed to be better. I wanted you to hear it with me."

Like a religious handling sacred instruments he stacked the records on the Garrard changer and turned on the enormous Capehart. He sat beside Steven on the Biedermeier sofa.

Steven was horribly bored through the first movements. He glanced at Lieber and found him raptly listening to the music; thereafter he peered about the living room, wishing it would end, occasionally caught by a theme or variation. The last movement, he thought, was boring him too, and then he found he was sitting forward on the sofa, tense, waiting and anticipating while the slow, tremendous crescendo built, it seemed endlessly—to what climax and resolution? What could justify the enormous groundwork; how could any capital be carved worthy of such a pediment?

And then the symphony ended, he hardly knew how, but he leaned back profoundly satisfied and enriched. And then he saw that Joe Lieber was holding his hand—almost clutching it, while still bent forward, his eyes half closed, toward the Capehart. For a moment he felt a warm current of pity, yes, almost of sympathy, flow through him. Then he yanked his hand away and said harshly: "Cut it out."

Lieber started from his daze. "I beg your pardon," he said in a frozen voice. "I didn't mean to annoy you." They talked for a while about the symphony and then Steven left. Nothing like it ever happened again. Nothing more was necessary to keep the friendship from deepening below shop talk and surface congeniality.

Sophie liked Joe Lieber. He didn't like her. Steven brought them together a couple of times, but always after that Lieber had an excuse.

"He's a busy guy," Steven had to stall Sophie. "Piano and violin and theory. He's writing a concerto for piano—he wrote a sonata already, but a concerto's harder. You have to follow a million rules."

"Too bad he can't come around. I wish you knew more boys like him. I guess his people have a lot of money. I guess he'll go to Northwestern."

"Nope. Some Lutheran college I never heard of in Missouri."

"That's dumb. If you get a degree, you want to get it from somewhere that means something. You get a degree from Hohokus Tech, who knows what it is? Maybe it's a free city college anybody can get into. You get a degree from Northwestern, everybody knows your folks had money and you have manners."

"His people are very strict."

She laughed. "Mom thinks she's strict with me. I let her think so."

Steven told her about the razor strop, with grim satisfaction. Sophie was wide-eyed and horrified. "I guess," she said, "that's the German of it."

"I thought you thought the Germans weren't so bad—they were going to teach the French discipline."

"I never said anything like that! What I said was, the French were weakened by the forty-hour week so they couldn't defend themselves, just like America."

"But I thought you thought America wasn't in danger."

"Well, it isn't. But we have to be ready for emergencies."

"Do you call the *Robin Moor* an emergency?" The *Robin Moor* was an American merchant ship sunk in the North Atlantic by a German torpedo.

"Absolutely not. Those men are paid to take their

chances. When it comes to plowing under every fourth American boy, *that's* an emergency."

Steven exploded: "For Christ's sake, who's going to plow under every fourth American boy if it isn't Hitler? Can't you see—?"

But at just that moment she too began: "Can't you see—?"

They both stopped and after a pause one of them said: "Bread and butter," and the other grinned and that was that until the next time.

War and the draft were very much on Steven's mind. His physical abnormality now had a name, which was comforting. Hypospadias with cryptorchidism is far less terrible than a vague "something wrong." He did nothing about it, which is not surprising. Everybody knows somebody who dropped dead of the heart murmur he had been meaning to see the doctor about for ten years. Every woman knows the woman who lost a breast or a life because she felt the cancerous lump in her breast or saw the untimely blood, knew what they meant—and waited, and waited, and waited. Every doctor knows the truculent patient with the frightened eyes who tells him: ". . . sure I noticed it, doctor, but I didn't think anything of it at the time, but now I notice . . ."

Hypospadias with cryptorchidism — a cowardly thought had crept into his mind. Would they draft him as he was? Maybe they would, and they'd operate on him free. That would be good. But maybe they'd turn him down, a 4-F. And maybe, he thought in his cowardice, that would be better.

It came very close, closer even than his brother's enlistment in the Navy, one Wednesday afternoon. Mr. Hensold said to the glee club: "This is the last rehearsal

I'll conduct, and I doubt that many of you will be here when I come back. I've got my Greetings, and I'm taking a week off to wind up my affairs. Miss Menafee will be acting department head during my absence and she's expressed a wish to take over the direction of the glee club. I know you'll give her the same fine co-operation and hard work you've given me."

He shook hands with each of them, giving each a personal word. To Steven he said: "You've made fine progress in theory, Bankow. If you keep at it, music can become a very rich, rewarding part of your private life. Good luck."

"Good luck to you, Mr. Hensold," Steven said, dazed. He seemed so old! How could they draft him?

Only after rehearsal did he think over Mr. Hensold's remark. Only after wrangling with himself for an hour could he admit what it had been. "Music can become a very rich, rewarding part of your private life. Fine progress in theory." It was a gentlemanly way of telling him his voice hadn't stretched to include those masculine chest tones and that Mr. Hensold thought it probably never would.

Bitter medicine. Thinking back, he realized that for six months he'd been fooling himself nicely, by such tricks as singing softer when the music dropped below his range and making the most of it when he could. But he hadn't been fooling Mr. Hensold.

Miss Menafee was a new broom, a splendid pianist, erudite in musicology and educationally a half-wit. She combined the Boys' Glee Club and the Girls' Choir and thought it would be best to have those boys whose voices had not yet broken sing with the girls. Among them she numbered Steven. He quit the glee club without giving notice.

Sophie wailed: "Oh, Steven! And you were getting along so fine!" She was blaming him, not Miss Menafee.

Joe Lieber said to him in the lunchroom: "I can't say I blame you. That woman plays Liszt like an angel—I caught one of her concerts when I was a kid—but she doesn't have any leadership. The glee club is going to be a shambles in a month. God! I'd quit too if my folks would let me." He paused and said: "Of course there's no reason for us to break up the coaching arrangement."

"Yes there is," Steven said. "Hensold as good as told me I'll never have a voice. Not a man's voice, at any rate. He told me I've made fine progress in theory—period."

"Hell," Lieber said. "There was a time when a voice like yours would've been appreciated even if you can't sing 'Asleep in the Deep.' The *castrati*—"

"What's that?"

"Eunuchs. Boys who were castrated to keep their voices from breaking. An Italian specialty up to the eighteenth century. Not worth it to the poor guys, I suppose, but what singers they must have been! Didn't you ever wonder about all that eighteenth-century-and-earlier vocal music? All the fancy trills and jumps and runs and shakes that everybody sings so badly nowadays? That was written for the *castrati*. They could train them from four years up, and the training wasn't lost when they got to be thirteen or fourteen because their voices didn't break."

"Excuse me," Steven said, and left the table. He felt faint and sick to his stomach. Every time he sang, then, there was the chance that somebody would guess his secret. *Castrato*, a high-voiced eunuch. He had to have that operation. He had to find out what it would cost, who could do it. The hell with whether it was dangerous or not. He had nothing to lose. He could never sing

again, that was certain. Not until he had the operation and his voice deepened to a man's voice.

In Army camps across the country the legend O.H.I. O. appeared on latrine walls and barracks. It means "Over the hill in October," the expiration date of the first draft. Congress couldn't ignore it. Surely next time the draft extension would fall through.

Nazi submarines continued to prowl the North Atlantic, now in search of bigger game than merchant vessels. Two torpedoes plowed by the U.S. destroyer *Greer*, and Roosevelt ordered Navy vessels to shoot raiders on sight.

The next U-boat didn't miss. Southwest of Iceland the U.S. destroyer *Kearny* was torpedoed with the loss of eleven sailors. Roosevelt said: "The shooting has started."

Theodore Bankow thanked God that his eldest boy was not aboard a flimsy destroyer but an impregnable battleship. He thanked God that his eldest boy was not stationed in the stormy, war-torn Atlantic but the mild Pacific, as peaceful as its name.

CHAPTER TWELVE

ONE NOVEMBER MORNING, with the end-term exams and the Christmas vacation looming, Steven was unprepared in Latin class and knew his number was about to come up for recitation. There wasn't any graceful way out of it, not with a teacher like Mrs. Werner. You told her you were unprepared and in any other class you'd get a zero for the recitation and a warning. From Mrs. Werner you got the zero, all right, and: "Try it anyway. Let's see how good you are at sight translation." And then you struggled and sweated over the subject and object and dependent clauses and the God-damned idioms for maybe ten minutes.

His hour struck; Mrs. Werner studied her cards and said pleasantly: "Bankow, I don't think we've heard from you for a while. Take the next two lines."

He got up, gulping and peering at the textbook as though the cryptic page would turn into lucid English if he stared at it hard enough. It didn't.

Somebody came in and everybody looked. Mr. Bannerman, the assistant principal—bold, worried, shambling. He went straight to Mrs. Werner and there was a mumbled conversation. Mrs. Werner said: "Bankow, will you please go with Mr. Bannerman. There's something about your records to be straightened out."

"Lucky s.o.b.," came in a whisper from behind a book.

Steven grinned and asked: "Should I leave my books here, Mrs. Werner?"

"Better take them with you, Bankow," Mr. Bannerman said. "You may not be back before the period's over." Steven picked up his books and followed Mr. Bannerman from the room. He wasn't scared yet.

He got his first ride in the school's one elevator then. It was for crippled students and elderly teachers. Steven wondered as the little cage rose to the fifth floor why Bannerman used it. He seemed healthy enough. "What's about my records, Mr. Bannerman?" he asked.

"It will all be explained," Mr. Bannerman said, not looking at him. He led him into the principal's office, or what was called the principal's office—actually the clerical center of the school, with a dozen desks filled by clerks, a dozen chairs always filled by waiting students and parents. Steven hesitated at an empty chair. You always had to wait outside on one of these deals—

"Come on," Mr. Bannerman said impatiently. He led Steven into his own office and then into the principal's private office. It was breathtakingly furnished. A carpet. A huge dark oak desk, unlike the varnished pine boxes at which teachers and clerks sat. Oil portraits of the present and past mayors of Chicago. Chairs that matched the desk.

Four people were waiting there. Behind the desk was Mr. Riker, the principal, a harumphing walrus, white-haired and smelling powerfully of liquor. Steven had never seen him at such close range before. At the side of the desk sat a man of middle age with a brush haircut and military mustaches. He had his face half turned from Steven, but the boy fancied he had seen him before. Two younger men in dark suits sat on chairs against the paneled wall. They were staring at Steven, and there was no chair for him.

"This is Bankow, Mr. Riker," Bannerman said. "I'll see that you're not disturbed." Steven turned as the assistant principal left, and then he was frightened.

The walrus barked at him hoarsely: "If you know what's good for you, you won't lie to us." He consulted papers on the desk. "I see you're sixteen, Bankow."

"Almost seventeen," Steven said faintly. "In a couple of days—"

"Old enough, anyway, to understand the very serious consequences of certain acts."

"I don't know what you're talking about, Mr.—"

"I told you not to lie to me!" the principal roared. "We happen to have documentary evidence of your filthy misconduct. I have the moral health of fifteen hundred young people to think of. I would not hesitate to have you imprisoned any more than I would hesitate to have a cancer cut out by the surgeon's knife. These gentlemen—" he indicated the two dark-suited men—"these gentlemen are police officers. Things will go easier with you if you give us a full account of your corrupt activities, with the names of your partners. If you persist in being stubborn and insolent, I shall have no choice. You will be taken to jail and booked as a common pervert."

Steven began to cry, helplessly. The detectives looked disgusted beyond words, and the man with the brush haircut turned on the boy, his eyes blazing. "Yah, you filthy swine!" he exploded. "You corrupted my boy, you drove him to his death and now you stand there sniveling like a woman! You should be castrated, you should be hung, they should burn you alive for what you did!" He was almost screaming.

One of the detectives said: "Take it easy, Mr. Lieber—" and went to put a restraining hand on his shoulder.

Steven recognized him then; he had seen only pho-

tographs of Joe's father. "Joe's dead?" he asked wonderingly, through his tears.

The detective said: "He killed himself last night. Mr. and Mrs. Lieber found plenty of evidence that he and you have been playing around. You'd better speak up, boy. This is serious. Who else is involved in this business? We know it's never just two. You can speak up. We've heard everything."

Joe's dead, Steven said to himself. Well—he's out of his mess for good, I guess. Unless it's all true about suicides going to hell and burning forever. No; I guess it isn't true. He was just hounded into it. And his old man's real sore. Maybe because he can't beat him with a razor strop ever again when he comes home with an 87 average on his report card instead of 90.

There was the business in the gym. There was the time Joe tried to hold his hand. They wouldn't get that out of him. He owed that much to Joe. "There was nothing," he said. "Absolutely nothing between him and me. No playing around. I don't do things like that. I have a girl—Sophie Dejevski, she's a junior at Commercial High. Joe just coached me in music. Anybody who says anything else is a liar."

Mr. Riker roared at him that trying to brazen it out with insolence would get him nowhere. The detective was friendly and persuasive. Between the two of them they bounced Steven back and forth like a ping-pong ball; he was crying again after five minutes and telling them about the thing in the gym and the Mahler symphony incident. The two detectives exchanged a satisfied look, and Mr. Lieber said hoarsely: "You liddle swine. Worse you are than I thought. You hound my boy to his death and now you stand there and say *you're* clean and *he* was filthy. Oh, you liddle swine! You—" He began to howl specific accusations at Steven,

saying he had done this and that to Joseph. It was gutter language, and the principal looked uneasily at the door before the detectives cooled the father down.

Breathing heavily, Mr. Lieber said to them: "All right. But that I couldn't stand. My boy was a fine young man. Such things he could not have in his head unless they were put there. He was corrupted and I am going to get the beast who corrupted him and put him where he belongs—" He glared at Steven, who was by this time quite numb with shock.

The alternating third degree went on for a half hour. Names were flung at him that he didn't recognize. They asked him things like: "How about the men's room in the park? You were seen there, you know. We're just trying to make things easier for you, kid—"

That particular cast of the line confirmed his suspicions. Steven had learned young about public rest rooms in parks. He hadn't been in one for years, not even when his bladder was full to bursting. These guys were fishing. They not only had nothing on him but they knew it, and were pounding away in the hope that somehow he'd be scared into volunteering. He told them as much, faintly.

The detective said calmly: "All right, kid. I told you Mr. and Mrs. Lieber found evidence. Keep your hands down and I'll show you some of it."

He held a sheet of letter paper before Steven. He read snatches of scribbled prose. It was a letter, undated. To "My Steven." From "Your Joseph." It quoted a scrap of poetry:

*O swallow, sister, O fleeting swallow,
My heart in me is a molten ember
And over my head the waves have met.*

It spoke, vaguely, of kisses and desire.

Steven told them steadily: "What can I say? If he

wrote it, he never sent it. I never got a letter from Joe in my life. I never sent him a letter in my life." He heard his own voice ringing strangely clear and thin in his ears.

The detective said: "There were more like that, kid. Some of them plenty hot. You don't want that kind of stuff published in the papers, do you? I don't want to get tough, but do you know what the penalty for sodomy is in this state? One to ten years, boy, and a felony on your record for life. If you play ball we can get the charge reduced to juvenile delinquency. If you hired the smartest lawyer in Chicago and paid him ten thousand bucks for an opinion, he'd tell you exactly what I'm telling you: play ball. You've broken the law and you're going to pay for it, make no mistake about that. If you're stubborn, we'll throw the book at you, and that's the way it is—"

The room spun around Steven giddily and he felt a thump on his forehead. Quite without any sense of an interval he heard voices in the middle of a conversation. He was lying down. They hit me, he thought. No, I fainted. Hell of a stunt. But I guess it could happen to anybody. What're they saying? That's Joe's father.

"Damn you, I say he corrupted my boy and you will see that he pays for it!"

"Mr. Lieber, that kid's clean as a whistle. I hate to say it under the circumstances, but I think your boy had kind of a crush on him and wrote those letters to work it off. We've run into other cases just like it. We gave him a good going-over and he didn't crack. Are you satisfied, Mr. Riker?"

The principal harumphed: "We may have done the boy an injustice. We may have. Naturally I was forced to take every measure. Such things must be nipped in the bud; an entire student body was menaced by an ap-

parent ring of perverts. But I must say that provisionally I am satisfied with the examination—”

“Riker, Gott-damn you, this vill cost you your chob!”

The walrus rasped: “Big talk for a Deputy Commissioner, Mr. Lieber. Mighty big talk. Naturally I understand that you’re upset by your domestic tragedy, but I don’t care to hear any more such threats. You might be surprised if it came to a trial of strength. Gentlemen, how’s the boy?”

Steven thought it a wise time to open his eyes. “What happened?” he asked.

The talkative detective told him: “You passed out, that’s all. Well, son, have you decided to talk?”

Steven sat up and found that he had been put on a leather couch in the assistant principal’s office. “Nothing to talk about,” he said. “I told you everything.”

The detective shrugged. “Then there’s nothing we can do for you, I’m afraid. Go on to your classes. We’ll get in touch with you when we’re ready. If you come to your senses before then, you can reach us through Mr. Riker. It won’t be too late—I hope.”

Faking to the end, Steven thought, as he swung through the corridor. God—poor Joe! That’s what it meant to be different; that’s what it meant to be different and noticed.

The newspapers!

Suddenly a new terror joined the swarm that clung to him always, the swarm of terrors and tensions that sometimes threatened to pull him down as they had pulled down poor Joe. What if he opened the *Chicago Tribune* this afternoon and found his picture in it, his name, with passages from the pathetic unmailed letters? Leave town, he thought numbly. The only thing to do. Go someplace where they don’t know you. Your name and picture in the papers as the guy who drove a queer

to suicide. Who'd stop to think? Who would say: "Just because Lieber was queer doesn't mean this Bankow guy was queer." Who wouldn't answer a demurrer like that with: "Ah, they're all alike. Sure Bankow must be a queer."

The thought of thousands, even millions, pawing over the possibility was paralyzing. He leaned against the corridor wall for a long minute, and then walked down five flights of stairs to the lobby, and to the door.

A senior, the door monitor stationed at a card table, asked amiably: "Where do you think you're going?"

"I have to see a paper."

"A *paper*! Let's see the pass."

"I haven't got a pass. But I have to get out. I have to. It's absolutely essential."

"If it's so essential you can go get a pass at the office."

Steven thought of making a run for it and then walked slowly to his math class. He had prepared for it, but wasn't called on. Gym was next, and then lunch. He got out of the building with the crowd of kids who lived in the neighborhood and ate lunch at home. They were supposed to show passes, but there were too many to really check. Steven flashed his Athletic Association card in his palm and got by.

He scoured the neighborhood for a newspaper and found one five blocks away at a cigar store. He yanked it open and tore through the pages. Nothing. His heart sank like a plummet. They hadn't got the story yet. He'd have to wait for the next edition, another eternity.

He started at the front page again and turned each slowly and carefully. The story was on page twenty-seven. One column, two inches.

WATER COMM'R SON, 16,
SHOOTS SELF TO DEATH

The only child of Deputy Water Commissioner Otto Lieber, Joseph, 16, was found dead early this morning by his parents in his bedroom in their apartment at 3500 South Skokie Ave. The cause of death was a single bullet wound in the head. A Luger pistol owned by Mr. Lieber was lying nearby, with one shot fired.

The parents, prostrated with grief, had no explanation for the tragedy. No notes were found. Mr. Lieber said Joseph was a brilliant student majoring in music at Arts and Sciences High School. "It must have been an accident while Joseph was cleaning the gun," he said.

Lieber, 46, has been associated with the city water department for twenty years, rising from a draftsman's desk. He is a graduate of the Hamburg Technische Hochschule, Germany. His wife is the former Lotte Kraemer, who sang operatic roles on the Italian and German stage.

Steven laughed with hysterical relief until the loungers in the cigar store stared at him.

That night he did not sleep.

Joe and I, he thought. Joe and I. We each walked our tightrope and Joe slipped and fell off his. It's sad, it's tragic, it's horrible, but he's out of it now and he must have wanted awful bad to be out of it. The mother who slashed at him and smothered him by turns. The father who hated him enough to beat him. The pair of them that turned him into an unwilling monster, tortured by a desire that meant—

It's a felony in this state, kid. One to ten years.

And still his own tightrope stretched endlessly before him. Socially accepted, he was. One slip and the story would race like a brush fire through the school,

incinerating him. He wanted to howl with protest into the night, but it lay bottled and curdling inside him.

What if they knew? God, what if they knew? It would be Bankow the freak, the queer. Nobody would pause to think that Bankow the freak was also Bankow the singer, Bankow the friend, Bankow the junior-classman, Bankow the English major. All these categories would be forgotten for the category that would give them a cheap thrill and destroy him utterly.

"It must have been an accident while Joseph was cleaning the gun." The sanctimonious bastard, the pol, the Nazi, the whipper, the sanctimonious bastard!

Steven began to cry very quietly, filled with the tragedy of Joe Lieber and himself. Crying, he thought, as he caught himself in the act. One of the things you can't do, under penalty of being torn apart and maybe forced to have an accident while you're cleaning the gun. It doesn't sound like much. You can't cry. Also you can't urinate when there's anybody around. It doesn't sound like much. Also you can't sing. They've taken that away from you too, *castrato*. It doesn't sound like much. Also you make your voice gruff, you don't let it slide up into the flute range where it belongs. Also you cultivate an artificial, square-shouldered walk. Also you talk about the school teams and the Chicago Bears and the White Sox so they think you're a sports fan, but sports bore the life out of you. It doesn't sound like much. Also you have these occasional God-awful scuffles with Sophie that leave you feeling wracked and dirty instead of calm and clean, the way you wanted to feel.

Neglect any of these things and you could sense the wolf pack closing in on you, first with rumors, then with gags behind your back, then with gags to your face.

Sticks and stones can break your bones, but names can lead you to have an accident while you're cleaning the gun.

He thought, insanely, even then there's no peace for me. Blow my head off to keep my secret and that's the way I'd lose it. Undertakers, medical students, friends and relatives gathered around—

There was a lunatic picture in his mind of his body lying naked in a coffin, all its shame exposed. Get hold of yourself, he said, frightened. They don't do that. You *know* they don't do that!

This isn't anything you can't handle. It isn't anything you haven't handled for seventeen years. It's hard, it's tricky but you ought to be pretty good at it by now. Get hold of yourself! Think! The Lieber thing would die down over the Christmas vacation.

And then there would be something else and it would start all over again . . .

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

STEVEN slumped in the new overstuffed chair while the radio droned a Sunday-afternoon football game. He didn't even know who was playing who. He had to get out of the whole stinking mess. That was all he knew. The idea of leaving town had grown in his mind to obsessive proportions. He was seventeen now, and that was old enough for him to be on his own. When you're seventeen you can even enlist in the Army, with your parents' consent. Not that that would be any answer. Physical exams, shower rooms—impossible to keep his secret. He thought, quickly and guiltily: I should get operated on and then enlist before I get drafted. The Air Force needs men. I couldn't get to be a pilot, you have to be a college graduate for that. But there's lots of other things. Mechanic. Weatherman. Radioman. This new R.D.F. rig Mike wrote about in his last letter from Pearl Harbor. He said they were training lots of guys on that at Great Lakes. But I better not try the Navy. Everybody jokes about it—maybe there's something behind the jokes. The rear admirals. The guy who got his head stuck in a porthole—before he got loose his shipmates owed him four hundred dollars. One Joe Lieber, poor s.o.b., was enough in his life.

Somehow the facts had trickled through the school. Somehow he was vaguely, cloudily linked with what had happened. Students he knew slightly he suddenly

did not know at all. Students he knew well he now knew only slightly. Some people had asked him what the *real* story on Lieber was. He'd referred them to the *Chicago Tribune*.

And he was capable of working up a sweat about the detectives now and then. The way it does when you have something on your mind, it kept popping up in the movies he saw, the newspaper stories he read, the conversations he held. Frame-up—frame-up—frame-up. The whole city seemed to conspire to remind him that such things had happened before and could happen again. To him.

But *would* it be a frame-up? Had he, without knowing it, encouraged Joe? How did you know what was really in your own heart? He had a vague awareness that there was something called the subconscious. It gave you inferiority complexes and things like that. You didn't know it was there, but it yanked you around like a puppet on strings. There was nothing you could do about it except get psychoanalyzed. Sometimes he could contemptuously dismiss the subconscious as a lot of bunk, sometimes—as on gloomy Sunday afternoons in December—it scared him the way God used to when he was a little kid. Even if you left town, hopped a freight, it traveled with you. Did he have the subconscious of a queer?

Sophie told him no. But what would a woman know about it? He thought guiltily of leaving her behind when he hopped the freight. Damn it, was he engaged to her? He didn't know, and he was sure that she didn't either. Mrs. Dejevski seemed to think they were, and Pop was beginning to wonder. Sophie had been to his birthday party last week, and Pop had made heavy jokes at which she dutifully laughed. Sophie was coming over for dinner again tonight. Sensible girl. He

understood that there were dames who insisted that you call for them at their door, even if you were only going to take them right back to your place. Of course he'd walk her back home after dinner.

Somebody was scoring a touchdown on the unheard football broadcast. Pop shifted and muttered on the sofa. A nice, gloomy Sunday afternoon. All the time in the world to drive yourself nuts worrying. Was the operation dangerous? How did you tell a good surgeon from a bad one? Did surgeons keep their mouths shut about who they operated on and for what? It'd be real sweet if he was forty years old with a wife and child and somebody published a medical book with his name and picture in it, saying here was a typical case of hypospadias. That'd be enough to run you out of town. Best thing to do is change your name right after the operation. Ten or twenty years later you'd forget half the time you ever had another name. And it wouldn't be like you were ashamed of being Polish. You could pick a new name that was Polish too.

A nice gloomy Sunday, like that suicide song they used to have. It wasn't really music at all, just the propaganda that put it over. It was just the old do-sol-mi-do vocal exercise but in a minor key. Somebody sure made a pile of easy money on that one. And Mom's in the bedroom doubled up as usual, Pop's snoring on the sofa, Katie's out with one of her wise-guy boyfriends, Pete's probably out sticking up a liquor store or shooting craps, Mike's in Hawaii and I'm here chewing my nails. I wish to hell Sophie would arrive. I wish to hell somebody would knock on the door—anybody.

Somebody did; widowed Frank Oswiak from downstairs. He was pretty drunk and he had a newspaper-wrapped jug in his arms. He was going to be in real trouble some day with his bootleg *zubrovka*; in sum-

mer the whole back yard stank of his casually concealed mash tubs.

"Present for your pop," he said indistinctly.

"He's asleep, Mr. Oswiak."

"I'll come in and set down a while. Lonesome down there. Steve, I ever tell you how he carried on the night you were born?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll tell you." He got to laughing in the middle of the story and woke Pop up.

"Drunken bum," Pop scolded as a matter of routine. "You heehaw so loud tired man can't get his sleep to work tomorrow."

"You sleep too much anyway, you canned Polish ham. I brought you some stuff."

"Good. I hope better than last. Last stuff tasted like your horse was awful sick. Steven, get us glasses."

"Okay, Pop. Don't get fried—Sophie's coming to dinner."

"Listen how these American boys talk to their father!" But Theodore was grinning.

Somebody made a three-yard gain on the radio and then it went dead.

"WE INTERRUPT THIS PROGRAM TO BRING YOU A NEWS FLASH. JAPANESE AIRPLANES ATTACKED THE HAWAIIAN ISLANDS TODAY WITH BOMBS AND MACHINE GUN FIRE. THE NAVY SAYS THAT SOME DAMAGE WAS DONE AND THERE WAS LOSS OF LIFE. THESE ARE ALL THE DETAILS AVAILABLE AT THIS TIME. KEEP TUNED TO THIS STATION FOR THE LATEST DEVELOPMENTS. WE REPEAT THE FLASH—"

They repeated the flash and then the radio began to play a dance record.

Steven stood with the two glasses in his hand, speechless. Frank Oswiak, suddenly sober, said quietly: "The Japs must be nuts. We can wipe them out in a month."

Theodore said only, with a pale face: "*Michael*." Then he went to the bedroom to tell his wife.

Sophie rapped gaily on the door, walked in and said: "Hi, everybody. What's new?"

They sat around the radio, all of them, through the afternoon and night.

There were analyses of the shocking news by various commentators.

Theodore didn't want analysis, he wanted facts. Facts about the battleship *Kansas*, facts about who was killed in the attack. Facts about Michael.

They never came over the radio.

Theodore sat, looking shrunken and old, waving people to silence if they uttered a word.

Theodore at last fell asleep in the chair by the radio. He slept like the dead; they didn't wake him to go to work in the morning. He stirred dazedly in the chair at eight-fifteen and waved away talk about breakfast, turning to the radio again. At eight-twenty the telegram came. The Secretary of the Navy regretted to . . .

Theodore crumpled it in his hand, threw it on the floor and silently poured himself a cup of coffee. His wife sobbed brokenly in the bedroom; Steven and Pete stood by in silent agony for the old man.

He finished the coffee and turned on them: "You gonna sign up for your brother." Theodore sat down heavily in his kitchen chair, his head averted from them.

"Sure, Pop," Pete said softly. "Today."

Theodore sat, waiting. "Steven?" he asked heavily, at last.

"Pop," Steven said uncertainly. "There's—" He couldn't say it. For God's sake, what was wrong with the old man? He must know! He arranged for him to have an unheard-of bedroom of his own, so he must know!

"Well?" Theodore said with a growl in his voice.

"Pop, they won't take me! You know that!"

Theodore turned to him. "You gonna sign up for your brother," he said softly. "I tell you to sign up, you sign up. Don't you back-talk you father. Get coat on. We go downtown. I got to sign permission."

"For God's sake, Pop!" Agonized pictures spun through Steven's head of his shame exposed before a hundred, a thousand jeering doctors and recruits in the huge enlistment center. It would blaze like wildfire through the city—the freak that tried to enlist—

A stunning slap on the side of the head sent him spinning against a wall. Theodore was standing over him, his unshaven face bristling and his eyes red with rage. "Get coat on!" he roared. "What kind American man you call yourself? What kind son, what kind brother? Get coat on!"

Steven struggled to his feet. "Pop," he said almost in a whisper. The old man *knew*; was he forcing himself to forget? "Pop, they won't take me," he said. "I've got something wrong with me. Be reasonable, will you?"

Theodore struck him to the floor again. "Reasonable!" he snarled. "Reasonable! Are you American man or are you no American man? Answer!"

"All right, Pop," Steven mumbled between bruised lips. "I'll get my coat."

They went downtown in grim silence on the Archer Avenue car. Pete went to the Navy recruiting station on

La Salle. Theodore shook hands with him when he got off the car and Pete wished Steven luck.

The Army recruiting station was a madhouse. By midmorning the clerks had run out of forms and were using improvised ruled sheets of paper. The confusion kept some of Steven's bitterness from surfacing. He understood what his father was doing; a two-year-old could understand it. But that didn't keep it from being a futile ordeal for him.

Pop filled out the last of the permission forms and said to Steven: "I wait for you on the corner." He turned away rapidly. Of course he knows about it, Steven thought. The look he gave me—*don't let me down, boy. Show me I had real American man for son.*

Dear God, thought Steven, in agony for the old man, if only I could!

The physicals were as frantic as the clerical work. Young doctors were sweating to keep up with the endless lines. You took off everything except your shorts, checked your clothes in a basket and hung the tag around your neck.

Eye-Ear-Nose-Throat was over in seconds.

Urine specimen in a wide-mouthed bottle with your number on it.

Blood pressure taken and scribbled down on a yellow card that you noticed was traveling from station to station with you.

Neuropsychiatric, the sign said. Here is where I get the axe, Steven thought glumly. The doctor asked: "How do you feel about enlisting?"

"Okay, I guess," Steven said.

"I see you bite your nails."

"Yes, I do."

"Get along with the girls all right?" the doctor asked.

"Okay, I guess."

The doctor made some rapid checks on the yellow card and said, not looking at Steven but at the next man waiting: "All right. Next station."

So he had passed neuropsychiatric.

Orthopaedic was rising on your toes, bending at the waist, lifting your arms. If you could do these things, you were okayed.

Rectal disorders was dropping your shorts, bending over and spreading your cheeks so the doctor could look for piles, fissures or fistula. Steven didn't have them. What he had was mounting, sickening tension waiting for the awful farce to end.

Hernia examination was a doctor hooking his forefinger into your groin and telling you to cough. At this station Steven's condition was finally noticed, but it wasn't the hernia man's business. He waved Steven on to Genito-Urinary.

The G-U man looked at Steven, at his watch and at the line of men piling up. He looked about twenty years old. "Christ," he mumbled. "Anomalous genitalia." He looked at the yellow card and told Steven: "I don't know what to do. The directives are very unclear. I ought to consult—" He shot a glance around the huge, sweaty room, and everywhere he looked he saw doctors up to their ears in examinees. He asked Steven: "What are your personal feelings about this situation?" He was eyeing the pile-up that was stacking in front of his station while Steven mumbled something or other to the effect that he thought the doctor should use his best judgment.

The G-U man said: "The directives are *very* unclear. Tell you—damn it, I hate to turn down anybody *now*. And you're signing up to kill Japs, not water them . . . it seems to be hypospadias with cryptorchidism. I'm

putting that down and it'll be up to the evaluating officer to decide how it weights your general medical picture." He scribbled and said: "Next station."

Steven got back his clothes at last from the laundry basket which had raced ahead of him to the end of the line. He dressed slowly while a sergeant called out names. When your name was called you went to a desk.

He went to the desk and saw in a daze that the immensely fat lieutenant colonel of the medical corps was handing him his card stamped ACCEPTED FOR UNLIMITED SERVICE. The lieutenant colonel jerked his thumb to a door.

Accepted. Accepted. Accepted. He couldn't get it through his head. It felt good. He felt doubts and tensions lifting from him by the second. It hadn't been too hard. Surely he could keep his secret in the Army if they were letting him in. Surely there were dodges, ways and means. Accepted for unlimited service. Pop would be happy about it. He was kind of happy himself. A man—no damn doubt of it. A man.

It did not occur to him that the lieutenant colonel, on the busiest day of his life, had failed to look at the card section for genitalia, except to note that no red-penciled disease was scribbled there.

In a small auditorium-like room Steven and some forty other young men were sworn in as soldiers of the Army of the United²States by an infantry lieutenant. He urged any of them with things on their mind—like felonies or fraudulently claimed citizenship—to come forward and talk it over with him in private; something could certainly be arranged. Nobody came forward. They were given typed and fingerprinted identification cards and orders to report in seventy-two hours.

When Steven found his father waiting on the corner and told him he was in, the old man embarrassed him by

breaking down and crying right there in the street. When he recovered he took Steven to a bar and ceremoniously drank three whiskies with him.

They made Theodore mellow. "Now you soldier, Steven, when you going to become husband? When you going to marry Sophie?"

"Before I report to camp," Steven said precisely. "I have seventy-two hours. I think I can make it if we go across the state line to Indiana and you and Mom come along."

"You not kidding?" Theodore gasped.

"No, Pop. I'm not kidding."

He wasn't. A soldier and a husband. Any doubts that he was a man would be purged from his heart forever.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

“SOPHIE—” Steven said in the darkened parlor. Mrs. Dejevski rushed in. “Excuse me kids, I’m terrible sorry but the portable radio don’t work all of a sudden—” She fumbled with the dials of the parlor radio.

The voice of F.D.R. said, steadily, into the darkened room: “We don’t like it—we didn’t want to get in it—but we are in it, and we’re going to fight it with everything we’ve got.”

“Ladies and gentlemen, you have been listening to the President of the United States—”

Mrs. Dejevski reached out and turned the radio off gently, wincing at the little click it made.

“I’m sorry I butted in on you kids,” she said. “I wanted to hear.” She got up.

“Wait a minute, Mrs. Dejevski,” Steven said. “I guess you ought to hear this too. I enlisted in the Army this morning. I want Sophie to marry me before I leave. That’ll be 6:00 P.M. Thursday. We can cross the state line to Indiana—Michigan City’s a good place. My folks will come along because I’m a minor. You’ll have to come along for Sophie.”

Mrs. Dejevski began to cry. “Marry her,” she said. “Marry her! Why not? Everything falling to pieces, why not marry her? Get something out of life before you get

cut down. Oh, my God, marry her!" She ran from the room, ponderously sniffing.

Sophie was sitting there, frozen-faced. "It's up to you," Steven told her.

She said: "I've been wondering for three years what I'd say when this happened. Steven—you've got to swear one thing to me. Swear you'll be—gentle."

"I swear it," he said.

"Then the answer's yes." They didn't kiss. On each of their faces was the puzzled, apprehensive look of somebody being rushed into something without enough time to consider.

Wednesday morning the five of them, in Sunday best, got on at the Illinois Central Thirty-fifth Street Station and went to Michigan City, a summer resort town, site of the famous Lake Michigan sand dunes, an art colony and the Gretna Green of the upper Midwest. They had to stand in line at the city hall for the marriage license. There were other couples there; many had arrived from Chicago on the same train as they. About half of the prospective grooms were in uniform.

Seeing them, Steven felt panic for the first time since his swearing in. If they could get married in uniform, so could he. Surely there would be time after he reported, only a day or two that he could get off if he told them he wanted to get married—

But the other half of his mind coldly said that he should get it over with. He was a soldier now, just as much as the kids who already had their uniforms. There was a uniform ready and waiting for him; he just hadn't put it on yet.

But I wish I had time to tell her about—about—

Hypospadias. Don't worry about a thing. You passed the Army physical, didn't you? They wouldn't have let

you in if you weren't pretty normal, would they? Just a simple operation, some day when you get the money saved up. It looks like the Army isn't going to volunteer the operation; at least it wasn't mentioned. But that card in your wallet means you're a man—Pvt. Steven (NMI) Bankow, A.U.S., ASN 3576059. Nobody can argue about that any more, ever.

He found himself signing forms hastily. Mom, hunched over with her eternal bad stomach, was crying so hard from emotion that Pop had to guide her hand when she signed.

There was a directory of wedding chapels on the wall. It had been agreed during the train ride that the ceremony would be performed by a judge, with the vague understanding that there would be a religious ceremony later. The clerk told them affably that there were plenty of fine ministers and justices of the peace in town who'd be glad to accommodate them. Why, right down the street his good friend Reverend Parker—

They fled from the heresiarch and took a taxi which took them to a J. P.'s marriage factory. It was over in ten minutes and Steven coolly kissed his bride.

Steven nervously and inexpertly puffed a cigarette, waiting for word from Sophie in the bedroom. Pop had given him a hundred dollars for the wedding night. Surprisingly, Sophie had taken over. She thought a parlor, bedroom and bath in the Palmer House would be expensive but nice, and it was only for a day. She thought dinner at Ireland's Restaurant, in the near north side, would be nice, and it was. She thought seeing *Tin Pan Alley*, first-run at the State, would be nice before they went to the hotel, and it was.

And now Sophie was getting ready for bed and he

was smoking nervously, fiddling with the sash of his rayon dressing gown.

He hummed the "Sheik of Araby" to himself and choked it off with a scared look at the door. *Castrato*. People would guess—

He almost laughed. There was nothing to guess. The Army had okayed him and the final confirmation would come any minute.

Sophie opened the door; she was wearing something white and voluminous. She looked petrified. "Steven," she said, "could you phone Room Service for something to drink?"

He thought of movies and said: "Champagne?"

"Pint of rye," she said. "It would be nice."

He phoned Room Service while Sophie sat stiffly at the writing table. "It was a wonderful dinner, wasn't it?" she asked.

"It sure was. I don't know how you know about those places."

"I read about it. I looked around but I didn't see the mayor. He's supposed to eat there a lot. Lots of politicians eat there."

"The shrimps were very good. Kind of a wise-guy waiter, though."

"I guess they always try to high-pressure people into ordering lobster."

"It was a wonderful movie," he said.

"Yes, wasn't it?"

After five minutes of glacial conversation a rock-faced old bellboy arrived with glasses, a pitcher of ice cubes and a pint of Canadian Club with the seal broken. Steven tipped him a dollar.

Sophie took the bottle, dropped two ice cubes into a tumbler and filled it almost to the brim with whisky.

"Hey," Steven said, "that's too much for me."

She sipped it and made a face. "I'll take it," she said, and poured a half-inch into the other tumbler.

He sipped and said: "Good. Imported." (It tasted like kerosene, as far as he was concerned.)

Sophie took a gulp from her glass, shutting her eyes, and then another. There were only dregs left. "Whew," she said, and coughed.

"I'll get you a glass of water from the bathroom," Steven said hastily.

When he got back she had poured herself another huge dose of the stuff and was sitting at the writing table again, looking a little limp and glassy-eyed. "Funny," she said.

"What's funny? Here, here's the water."

"Just funny. Thanks." She took the glass of water and put it down beside the whisky. "Why did I marry you, anyway? Why did you marry me?" She gulped at the whisky.

Steven said feebly: "We were in love, Sophie."

"Love," she said, and giggled. "Funny. You know what love is? Love's being thirteen years old in a printed flannel nightgown in your snug little bed. Love's the door busting open downstairs and the feet going upstairs, bump—bump—bump, and you wonder if he's going to fall down on the landing and pass out. Love—love's—" She swayed a little and finished her drink, choking. "I know what love is," she mumbled. "You son of a—" She pitched forward onto the carpet, limp.

"Sophie!" he gasped. "For God's sake—" And began to dither around her. She was as relaxed as a sandbag. He managed to lift her—she weighed only about ten pounds less than he did—and staggered with her into the bedroom. He dumped her over his shoulder onto the

bed. She sprawled and mumbled something or other, opening her eyes briefly.

What'll I do now? he wondered dully. What comes next? Be gentle—she made me swear it. But I'm a man. I'm supposed to want to throw myself on her. But I don't.

He covered her and went back into the parlor, leaving the door open in case she called or got sick. People did get sick sometimes after they poured down almost a pint of whisky—and Canadian Club was 90 proof—in a few minutes, on top of a sea-food dinner.

He sat down in the comfortable club chair and presently fell asleep in it.

Steven reported at the induction center at 6:00 P.M., which was the civilian equivalent of 1800 hours on his mimeographed order. You answered the roll call with your first name.

"Bankow!"

"Steven!" he yelped. He was going to do this thing right. He was going to be a soldier and a good one.

They shunted him into an olive-drab bus that said **CAMP GRANT**.

The bus, jammed to the roof, ground its gears and started to roll through the early December dusk.

The busload of men wound up on the second floor of a two-story barracks at midnight. They were members of Provisional Company 507, Camp Grant Reception Center. A fat corporal who lived in a cubicle at the end of the barracks showed them how to make their beds, advised them to shave in the latrine downstairs before they went to sleep, and went yawning back to his privacy.

He was their sheep dog through the rest of the day,

herding them to breakfast in a gigantic mess hall, to a shed for three training films—Articles of War, Military Courtesy and the ghastly Venereal Disease movie—and to the mess hall for lunch. Not many of them could eat.

At 7:00 P.M. they filed into a long shed and soldiers hurled equipment at them. By 8:00 P.M. the last of them staggered out of the shed, still in civilian clothes but tottering under two barracks bags stuffed like balloons with helmet, gas mask, overcoat, leggings, legging laces, shoes, socks, long underwear, blouse, caps, shirts, trousers, canteen, rifle belt, first-aid kit, haversack, fatigue shirts, fatigue pants, fatigue hats of blue denim, mess kit, towels, washcloth, canteen cup, knife, fork and spoon.

Their fat corporal got them to the mess hall in time for a late, cold supper and then back to their barracks, where they collapsed. The corporal hectoring them: "You men'll be expected to look like soldiers tomorrow and this barracks'll be expected to look like a barracks. You'll fall out in fatigues, *shaved*, and clean the barracks up from five-thirty to six-thirty. It'll be inspected by a company officer—"

He looked at the door and yelled: "Tench-hut!"

They struggled from their bunks, wearily. A young first lieutenant with the Medical Corps caduceus on his lapel said: "At ease, men. This is a short-arm inspection. Get 'em out."

Steven heard the words and at first didn't understand them. Short-arm inspection. A million novelties had been flung at him during the past twenty-four hours and a mention of short-arm inspection was one of them—something that would be explained later when there was time. He stiffened with horror as he realized what it was.

Christ, he thought dazedly as the lieutenant and sergeant methodically worked their way down the line of men toward him. Christ, I can't do this! He swayed and gripped the iron foot of his bunk to keep from falling. The voice of the lieutenant was coming closer, but he could see nothing. A gray haze stood between him and the barracks.

"All right," the lieutenant said. "Okay . . . okay . . . Get that cleaned up, soldier . . . all right . . . all right . . ."

He was standing before Steven with a look of martyred patience on his face, tapping his foot. The medic sergeant snapped: "Get it out, soldier."

Steven said to the lieutenant: "Sir, could I—"

The lieutenant said: "Get it out, soldier."

He stood there numbly.

The lieutenant said slowly and patiently: "I said get it out. You want to start your military career with a special courtmartial for disobeying a lawful order?"

Through the long barracks men were peering and muttering. Their fat corporal suddenly yelped at them: "You men are at ease! That means eyes front and your mouths shut. Any more trouble and I start taking names."

Pale and sweating, Steven exposed himself.

The medic sergeant said softly: "Jesus!" and the lieutenant said: "Ump. Drop your pants and shorts, soldier." Steven did. The lieutenant took a long look and said:

"Christ's sake, man, how did you get into the Army? Sergeant, take his name." He passed on to the next soldier, taking the sergeant's flashlight.

Steven rearranged his clothes and slowly gave the sergeant his name and serial number.

The inspection ended, the corporal bawled: "Tench-hut!" again and the two medics left. A crowd formed around Steven at once. They kept a respectful distance. "You got a dose, Bankow?" "Hey, Steve, can I borrow your toothbrush?" "Don't worry, kid, you ain't a man until you've had it." "No worse than a bad cold, Bankow—haw, haw!" "One thing, anyway—they can't bust you from your rank." "You shoulda stayed off West Madison Street, Bankow."

He didn't answer any of them. He didn't care whether they were gloating over his supposed bad luck or offering rough sympathy. He just sat on the edge of his bunk feeling that the world was about to end.

"Break it up," the corporal said. "Break it up. Now tomorrow morning the bunks have got to be tight, the floor has got to be mopped, the butt-cans have got to be empty, the window sills and rafters have got to be dusted, the fire extinguisher has got to be shining, the latrine has got to be spotless, the windows have got to be washed inside and out. The first three men at that end of the barracks will be responsible for the floor—"

It was a hell of a thing to ramble on about while the world was coming to an end.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THEY FELL OUT in blue denim fatigues with their hatbrims turned up all around, looking like farmers. A red-faced staff sergeant called the roster, consulted a slip of paper and yelled:

“Bankow!”

“Here!” Steven bawled from the ranks.

“Bankow, report to the orderly room after breakfast. Corporals, take charge of your platoons.”

There was more sympathy for Steven from his buddies. One ghoul tried to tell him about gruesome details of the treatment for gonorrhea, but the rest indignantly shut him up.

Steven found the orderly room after breakfast. A clerk there looked him up, said oh, yes, and told him to report to Colonel Hennings at the base hospital. You got the bus to the base hospital at the head of the company street.

At the reception room of the base hospital, which was a large group of the two-story wooden barracks connected by open cloisters, he was told to wait. The receptionist, a dull-looking WAAC Model-T corporal asked if he wanted something to read and gave him U.S. Army Basic Field Manual 21-100. He let it lie in his lap and watched the clock while patients and staff came and went.

His name was called at eleven o'clock. The WAAC

told him to go to room 56. "You can't miss it—there's a big sign sticking out into the corridor. It says Genito-Urinary."

He found the door and knocked. The first lieutenant of last night's short-arm inspection let him in. There was a lean, white-haired lieutenant colonel sitting at a white enamel desk.

Steven summoned up vague memories of the military courtesy movie. He saluted and stammered: "Sir, Private Steven Bankow reporting as ordered to —to—"

The colonel returned the salute and said: "Never mind that stuff, soldier. Let's see what's wrong with you."

"Sir," the lieutenant said, "this is Bankow, the fellow I told you about last night. I thought—here's his jacket." He laid an envelope before the colonel, who studied the contents swiftly. They included the card that had followed Steven through the induction center. "Hypospadias," the colonel mumbled. "Oh, fine! Take down your britches, young man."

Steven did. The colonel stared, poked and probed and grunted. "Take your shirt off. Undershirt too," he said. Steven did, and the medical officer jabbed his chest repeatedly with his thumb. When Steven winced, he stopped. "You don't shave much, do you?" he asked.

"About once a week, sir," Steven said.

"Ever seen a doctor about this business?"

"No, sir."

"Get along all right with the girls?"

"Yes, sir. I'm married."

"Not according to the forms here," the lieutenant said suspiciously.

"I was married the day before yesterday, lieutenant. After I was inducted."

"I don't suppose the marriage has been consummated?" the colonel asked.

"No, sir," Steven said. "Not yet. She was so nervous—"

The lieutenant laughed sharply. "You can get dressed," the colonel told Steven. "I don't know what they could have been thinking of at the Chicago Center. There's going to be one hell of a stiff letter written about this. The paperwork involved in a medical discharge—"

"Discharge?"

"Yes," the colonel said. "You don't belong in the Army, fellow."

Steven struggled into his denims. "Sir," he said frantically, "you can't discharge me, I've got to stay in. My brother was killed by the Japs at Pearl Harbor. It'll break my father's heart if—"

The lieutenant snapped: "That's enough, soldier! At ease!"

The colonel waved him away. He had been listening to Steven curiously. "Fellow, don't think I'm hard-hearted, but you can't snow me. I'm Regular Army. My job's to keep the fighting men in condition and weed out anybody who'll never make an efficient fighting man. I'm afraid that means you."

He glanced at the forms from Steven's jacket. "Bankow, you can do a job for your country outside in industry—and you'll get better than recruit's pay for it. We can't take a chance on you. Externally you're a case of hypospadias with cryptorchidism. Internally you're—I don't know what. And I can't tell without an exploratory operation. For instance, I'm not giving away any military secrets when I tell you that those undescended gonads of yours are unusually prone to develop malignant tumors."

The lieutenant looked alarmed. The colonel turned

on him and lectured: "For God's sake, Rosenberg, don't give me dirty looks and don't worry about my doctor-patient relationships. It's in every pathology textbook and Bankow here is obviously an intelligent fellow who'll get around to reading up on his trouble."

He said to Steven: "Where was I? Oh, yes. But the main reason I'm going to have you discharged is psychological. Maybe you thought you could keep your trouble secret, but if you did, you were wrong. The facts would come out, and your life would become hell on earth. In the Army men are very often bored. They do a great deal of gossiping and kidding. They are very often under great tension, and that's when feelings of resentment and inferiority explode. And they can cripple a fighting man just as effectively as a Jap bullet. At no cost to the Japs. You may not know that the Army refuses to accept enlistees who are extremely ugly. Extreme ugliness is a perfectly valid reason for keeping a man out of the Army. He'd be kidded unbearably, and after say a year of unbroken kidding he'd be placed in a position where his effectiveness depends on teamwork with the people who tormented him. Nine times out of ten, he'd be an ineffective. In cases like yours, Bankow, I figure the odds at ninety-nine times out of a hundred. Like it or not, there you are."

Steven had caught the word "psychological." He said faintly: "You're not going to give me a Section Eight, are you? I'm not out of my head, sir."

"No, nothing like that, Bankow. You'll be discharged for medical reasons in the best interests of the Army. There doesn't have to be anything specific in the papers you get. Now you report back to your orderly room. We'll try to get this thing cleaned up as fast as possible. Don't brood about it. Have a couple of 3.2's at the beer garden tonight. They'll calm you down."

That night Steven bloated himself on PX beer but it didn't seem to have its usual soothing effect.

What next, dear God, what next? What will be the next thing to go wrong for me? And just when it seemed that at last everything was going to be all right—that it really wasn't going to matter. So here I am again, right back where I started from. What a fine figure of a man! Steven the misfit, the freak. How can I tell Pa about this? What can I say to him? Damn him, anyway, he got me into this in the first place.

And Sophie— Well, what about her anyway? She's my wife, isn't she? I've been entirely too easy with her. Damn her too. I'll show her. I'll show all of them, including that snotty lieutenant and that know-it-all colonel.

And in the back of his brain, reeling and heavy from the beer, over and over again came the thought: But how can I show them? How? Oh, God, tell me how.

He sat about the barracks for a week while the rest of the provisional platoon was out on K.P. or close-order drill or taking aptitude tests. He was told to be patient and stick around the barracks; the papers would come through shortly. It was a mystery to the rest of the platoon, and he didn't enlighten them.

On Friday morning an orderly room messenger told him to turn in his government issue to the supply sergeant and report to the company commander in his civilian clothes.

The company commander, an ancient National Guard major with World War I ribbons and wound chevrons, said awkwardly: "I have your discharge papers here, Bankow. Er, it's a good idea to have them photostated and registered with your town clerk. That way if you

lose the originals the discharge is officially on the record. Understand?"

He shook hands and said abruptly: "Good luck, Bankow."

Steven saluted and walked out with the papers clenched in his hand. He had thirty dollars, paid to him the day before. His first and last. He picked up his suitcase in the orderly room, walked to the head of the company street and took the bus to the camp gate and railroad station.

"The pass, soldier," a uniformed civilian watchman demanded at the gate. He showed him the discharge certificate. "That'll do it," the watchman said. "Good luck, kid."

An old-fashioned train was standing in the station, chuffing sluggishly now and then. It was the weekend-pass train to Chicago, familiarly known as the Green Hornet or the Galesburg Rocket. Each car had a smoking compartment with bits of knurled metal on each chair-arm to strike kitchen matches on. The upholstery was a dusty ancient green plush.

Steven bought a ticket and settled himself in one of the green plush seats. The train would stand there almost empty until six-thirty, when the camp loud-speaker system played "Retreat" and "The Star Spangled Banner." Then a thousand permanent-party men would storm the camp gate and claw for seats on the train. It would roll off and be in Union Station, Chicago by eight-thirty. The Camp Grant commandos would be relaxing with their families or kissing their girls or drinking ice-cream sodas or getting drunk with North Clark Street women by nine.

Warmish air circulated sluggishly through the Galesburg Rocket; Steven huddled in the green plush against the December afternoon chill. He thought he would

never be warm again. He thought there would never be a hole he could crawl into, never any arms that would hold him and guard him. Whatever he touched fell to ashes—King Midas in reverse, he jeered. The Bankow touch.

Kill yourself like Joe Lieber? Maybe. Maybe.

A sort of sullen defiance was edging out the despair that gripped him.

He was a man, no matter what the Army said. He was a married man with a wife—his face burned as he thought of his wedding night. She got drunk and passed out. And he, like a jerk, didn't lay her then and there to break her in. So she had notions. She'd get rid of them once she had a real loving. Lots of girls had notions. She wasn't so high and mighty she could afford to play hard to get, not with anybody. He knew what had happened to her and he'd married her anyway. Not every man would be that understanding and forgiving, he assured himself. It was a hell of a way to treat an understanding, forgiving, but still virile, guy like him. Getting drunk and passing out!

The God-damned Army and that damn-fool colonel didn't know what the bleeding hell they were talking about. He would prove that as soon as he got to Chicago. In spite of her notions.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

STEVEN STOOD for a moment in the middle of the vast marble plain of the Union Station. Two station M.P.'s who thought he was looking guilty as hell about something strolled over and one asked to see his draft card, please. He showed the discharge, they thanked him and strolled away.

One said to the other: "You and your bright ideas. A hunch you got."

"I got a hunch yesterday and we got a deserter, didn't we? And that punk sure looked like he had something on his mind."

Steven climbed the marble stairs to the street and found himself in the center of the darkened used machine-tool district. Giant lathes and multi-spindle drill presses shouldered each other's dark hulks in shop windows. But down the street was West Madison—the Egyptian brownstone pillars of the station and the glitter of countless bars.

He hefted his suitcase and walked slowly through the winter night to West Madison Street. The pavement was cobbled and the curbs broken; their stone fangs were traps for the stumbling bums who lurched from one glittering saloon front to the next.

Farther west the tone of the street took a fast nose-dive. There were dark little clipjoints, there were busted movie theaters with the seats ripped out, turned

into enormous barrooms that blazed with strings of 250-watt clear bulbs. BIGGEST BEER IN TOWN 5c; LARGE GLASS OF MUSCATEL 10c; SHOT AND BEER SPECIAL TODAY 20c. IF YOU ARE JUST KILLING TIME KILL IT OUTSIDE.

A neon sign at the door of a filthy brownstone house: HOTEL \$1.

He went in. There was a withered old man behind a railing that nipped out a corner of the hall. "I want a room for tonight," he told him.

"Double?" the man wheezed.

"Yeah. My wife's coming in later."

The man gave him a dirty school composition book open to a half-filled page. *Mr. and Mrs. Smith, City. John Brown and Wife, Chicago, Ill. Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, Wash., D. C.*—the line had been half-heartedly scratched through and the next line said in the same hand: *John and Mary Smith, City.*

He wrote: *Mr. and Mrs. Steven Bankow, Chicago, Illinois.*

"Two-fifty," the man said. He paid him, and the man made a note on the register. "Room twenty-five, right up the stairs. Right at the top."

"Key?" Steven asked.

"Nuh. You don't need a key. The door locks from inside."

Steven went up the dark stairs and clawed for a dangling light cord. He found Room 25. It was about eight by ten, with a chair, a freshly made iron bed, a splintering wardrobe leaning against the wall, and a sink with one faucet. A clean but ragged hand towel hung on a bar and a small cake of green soap that smelled of carbolic stood on the sink's edge.

Steven checked the latch, dropped his suitcase and went down to the hall. There was a pay phone there;

he asked the withered clerk what the address of the place was. The man told him and asked dully: "You going to stay all night?"

"Yes," Steven said, and called Sophie's number.

She answered, and knew his voice. "Steven! Is anything wrong? Are you in any trouble?"

"No. Everything's fine. I'm in Chicago. In a hotel. I— I got a weekend pass. Are you glad to hear from me?"

"Of course I am! Why did you get a hotel? Why don't you come right up—"

"I didn't want to see a lot of relations and in-laws. I had a rough time at camp."

"Oh," she said. And then, slowly and unwillingly: "Where are you staying?"

He gave her the address. "It's kind of dingy but it's cheap and clean. You could take the Archer car down to West Madison, transfer to the Madison line and get off right on the corner."

"Oh," she said. "Mom's out tonight—"

"You could leave a note," he told her. "I haven't got much time, after all."

"Was it very bad in camp?" she asked.

"I'll tell you when you get here," he said. "Got the address? Take it down." He gave it to her again and said: "'Bye." He went up to his room and waited.

He turned the light off after a while; it was a naked bulb strung from the ceiling and hurt his eyes. Three saloons across the street had blinker signs. THE HOUSE OF LOU ROTHSCHILD. THE ORIGINAL HOUSE OF ROTHSCHILD. THE OLD ROTHSCHILD HOUSE. They blinked on and off in a baffling periodicity. The original House of Rothschild was one second on, quarter-second off. Lou Rothschild was one second on, half-second off. Old Rothschild was one second on and an immeasurably brief blink off between

seconds. He tried to guess when next they'd flash in unison, but couldn't figure it out. That was math, what he couldn't get through his head. And even if he knew all the math in the world, even if he could predict each combination of the blinking signs until the year 2000 A.D. it still wouldn't do him any good.

He added it up. Seventeen years old, in school since you were six. Call it ten years. Count out sick time, summer vacation, Christmas, weekends and holidays, let's call it 150 days a year in school, from nine to three with an hour out for lunch. He scratched the sum on the dark wall and was mildly astonished to learn that the Chicago school system had educated him for 7,550 hours. He felt he ought to have more to show for it than he did.

He was different and he didn't know what to do about it. Wasn't everybody different more or less? Couldn't one of those 7,550 hours have been spent telling him—and everybody—how to get along when you're different? And that being different isn't so important that it has to be gaged about and laughed over by the ones whose difference is still hidden? An hour like that, he brooded, might have saved Joe Lieber and the music he would have written some day.

But his baggage of Latin, English, math and history had nothing in it he could use. He was aware that he was going about this business of solving his difference the wrong way. There must be, he thought vaguely, something better I can do about it. But I don't know what, and I don't know whether anybody knows what. And I have to do something, so here I am.

He stared dully at the three blinking signs and tried not to think.

She knocked on the door after about an hour. He turned on the light and let her in. She kissed him nerv-

ously and said: "This isn't a very nice place you found, Steven. A man scared me when I got off the streetcar, I think he was drunk—"

"Take your coat off," he said. "I'm sorry it isn't a nicer place. But you can't have the Palmer House every night. That was something special, after all. Our wedding night."

She took her coat off and dropped it on the chair. "I'm sorry," she said. "I didn't think I'd pass out. Please, do we have to talk about it?"

He showed her his medical discharge. Uncomprehendingly she read the front and back and asked: "You—you aren't in the Army any more? Are you?"

"No," he said. "In the best interests of the United States Army I was discharged for reasons of health."

"What reasons?" she asked. "Are you sick? I thought they gave you free medical attention in the Army—"

"I'm not sick," he said. "I'm a freak. They never should have let me in. I tried to tell you once but you were too—simple. You didn't know what I was talking about. So I'll show you."

"Steven!" she said indignantly and looked away.

"Look at me," he said. "You're my wife, after all. Take a good look and if you think it makes any difference you're wrong, and I'm going to show you that too. And you can't get drunk and pass out this time because they don't have room service in this flea bag. Look at me! *Look at me!*"

She did, blushing, with her hand to her mouth, and turned away again. "All right," she said faintly. "I looked." And he realized that it meant nothing to her. It was even possible that she had never seen a man before. The horrible scuffle that had scarred her heart must have been in darkness. And not one of her 7,550 hours of education had taught her the shape of a man.

He twitched out the light cord and threw her on the bed, fumbling at her clothes.

"Steven!" she hissed frantically. "No! Please! Don't—"

She began to fight back, with fists and nails, sobbing wildly under him. A raking pain down his face made him draw back. What am I doing and why? he thought in disgust. A wave of humiliation, of mingled pity for himself and, to his own surprise, for the terrified girl on the bed, engulfed him. He sat there for a moment, feeling sick and utterly hopeless, and then got up stiffly. Sophie cowered on the bed. He didn't touch her. He went to the wardrobe and got his coat by the light of the blinking Rothschilds, picked up his suitcase and walked wearily from the room, down the dark stairs and into the street.

He walked and walked and walked down West Madison Street in the winter wind, a light snow powdering his shoulders. Thoughts circled around his head like flies around a lamp, poisonously shining, fat green flies that never stopped their crazy buzzing.

That did it, I guess. We're through now, I guess. The Army doesn't want me, Sophie doesn't want me, my old man won't want me now. I got to get out of town now or think of her every time I see an Archer trolley, every time I see a movie, every time I see a street I know. I got to get out of town, this town that doesn't want any part of me. Maybe things are better out West. Or East. Maybe there are things to see that'll maybe make me forget they don't want me and why they don't want me.

He found himself in one of the glaring giant bars, shouldered by stewbums and gandydancers. "Whisky," he said, and drank it. It had no taste, it had no meaning, but it made the buzzing green flies slow down a little, uncertainly. Maybe things are better out West. Big

aircraft plants. Big money. Send some to Pop, maybe write him when he cools down. Send some to Sophie, my wife. He laughed harshly and the barman glared. "Whisky," he said. There was \$23.50 in his pocket and the flies were buzzing not so loud now.

Send them some money after a while, send them a letter, let them know he could hold down a job, make big money, even if he couldn't—even if he was—

He shuddered and signaled the barman to drown the poisonous-green, buzzing flies.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE YEAR was a haze of cheap wine and hangovers. Boxcars, bullpens, hitchhiking twice across the country. The aircraft plant job on the Coast he held for a week before his trembling fingers let the polished gage block fall to the concrete floor. The hash-house and cafeteria kitchens, the greasy dishes in mountainous piles that sometimes turned his stomach and haunted his dreams. The fights that he always lost or ran from. The surface-grinder he ran at the mile-long C. E. plant in Bridgeport until his bleary eyes betrayed him. The inspector came charging out of his chicken-wire cage waving one of the tank telescope mounts, straight to Steven's machine.

"You stupid son of a bitch," he yelled at Steven, "you ought to get the Iron Cross! You ground these God-damned trunnions five thousandths under your tolerance—final operation before hardening and painting! By the time these things reach you they're worth a hundred and seventy-five bucks apiece and you have just ruined six tote-boxes full of them!"

The foreman had showed up. "What's the matter, Miltie?"

The foreman almost got brained by the brandished scope mount. "What's the matter?" Miltie raved. "All this drunken bum had to do is put the mounts in the jig, jack up the table and turn the machine on. Once a day

it gets real complicated—he has to get a diamond from the tool crib and dress the wheel. That's too much for a man of his caliber. So he jacked up the table five thousandths too high and dreamily ground six dozen mounts into scrap. Sully, you got any bright ideas of how to get the metal onto the trunnions again? Or are you going to kick this wino out into the gutter where he belongs?"

"Take it easy, Miltie, take it easy. Six dozen? Six dozen? That's bad. Look, Bankow, how'd you like to work on the burring bench for a while—"

It wasn't easy to get fired in those days, but he managed it by not showing up at the burring bench. He couldn't see the little sharp edges he had to scrape off with the three-cornered scraper. He couldn't hold the scraper steady, even though the handle was wrapped with bicycle tape. It was easier not to show up; it was easier to drop into a restaurant and mutter: "Need a dishwasher?" They always did and they didn't expect much of him.

He drifted to New York City in the winter of 1942.

Steven was nursing his head in the negligible backstage of Wasserman's Dime Museum on Fourteenth Street. Upstairs it was a penny arcade and shooting gallery. The Museum in the basement was entered through a turnstile at a cost of fifteen cents. It was just a large room with a platform around the walls divided into ten stages, varying as to props and drapes. Once you were through the turnstile, you could stay forever, if you liked. The show was always on, one performer always out on one of the stages. Renaldo the Great, the Museum's current magician, had just finished his turn before an apathetic crowd of fifteen and retired to the skimpy canvas compartment where Princess Leilani dressed for her sedate hula dance to a Lani MacIntyre

record on the phonograph. Princess Leilani, a nice girl from Harlem named Jones, was resting comfortably with her feet up. She was on next, after Sailor Swensen got through bending a steel spike with his teeth, straightening it with his hands and hammering it into an oak plank with his gloved fist.

"You always bitching 'bout something, Renaldo," she said agreeably to the magician. "If it wasn't gas rationing it'd be something else."

"That, my dear," he said grandly, "is the mark of a true carnny." He produced an orange silk handkerchief from his breast pocket and dragged it through his cupped hand. It came out electric-blue. Princess Leilani yelped with laughter and Steven smiled his dutiful smile. He was wondering if he could get to the bottle he had cached in the toilet and whether he could keep down a drink if he took one.

Renaldo remembered he was sore and moaned: "But summering out in a penny arcade fractures me, my dear. Gas rationing the carnies—what's got into those lunatics in Washington? If carnies aren't an essential industry what is? Don't carnies keep up the morale of the manure-kickers and apple-knockers? And if they don't have morale how are they going to keep growing sausages and steaks and things to feed the Army?" He tried to palm a half dollar and it fell to the floor.

Steven bent over, his head throbbing, and picked it up for him.

"Thanks," Renaldo the Great said. He put the coin in his pocket and then dramatically spread out his palm. It was still there. Steven dutifully gave him a weak grin.

Wasserman stuck his gargoye head into the enclosure. "Is the boy here?" he asked, and saw Steven. "Look," he said, "you get paid to sweep up and make change, not sit around. Excuse me if I'm intruding."

Steven took his broom and shuffled out of the dressing room down the steps from the stage. Wasserman yelled at him sometimes but it didn't matter. He swept, he kept the toilets reasonably clean, he made change for the handful of moviola machines downstairs, he went for coffee, sandwiches and beer for the performers, he got paid. It was better than greasy dishes. He'd been with the Museum for a month. He didn't see any reason why he shouldn't stay there forever. He bought two quart bottles of California sherry for a dollar-fifty every night after work and drank one of them in his roach-infested little room before he could sleep. He started on the other when he woke up, took it to the Museum with him and worked on it through the day. He didn't eat much.

He pushed the broom ahead of him carefully, minutely studying the little moraine of cigarette butts, candy and gum wrappers and dust it raised before it. He studied such things, he counted tile in a restaurant wall, he read alternate letters in signs to see if they made anything like a word. The big thing was not to think about people and always have something ready to take the edge off. The little terminal moraine crawled before the broom toward the men's toilet where he had a three-quarters full sherry bottle high up and back on one of the flush boxes.

"Boy!" Wasserman puffed at him, struggling with a two-by-four framed photostatic blowup. "Give me a hand. We got to get it upstairs to the front. My God, it's dusty! I haven't had it out since '38."

There was a stock of blowups in the storeroom of the regulars who kept showing up at the Museum to do a month or two. They were mounted outside the penny arcade on the street wall. Steven put down his broom and gave Wasserman a hand.

They got it upstairs and into the street; then Wasserman sent Steven for the ladder. He brought the ladder, Wasserman told him to put the picture up, smelled his breath and countermanded his order. "Not that I give a God-damn about your worthless neck," he told Steven, "but I don't want you should fall from the ladder and sue me." He scrambled up and Steven handed him the picture.

When it was up he finally looked at it. It said OSCAR-OSCARINA, the HALF MAN-HALF WOMAN PHE-NOMENON. The picture was very old-fashioned and highly retouched. It showed what looked like a half man in a leopard skin tunic pasted down the centerline to half a woman in sequin pants and bra with tassels.

"Who's that?" he asked Mr. Wasserman.

"An old freak," he said, puffing after his descent. "She's been doing her turn here off and on since 1920. She hasn't been around for a few years. It ain't much of an act, not in New York." He held his hand over his heart, still puffing. "So don't stand here, put away the ladder and go sweep. Sweep!"

He put away the ladder and swept into the toilet where the bottle of sherry was. Princess Leilani was doing her lackadaisical hula as the thick stuff with its faint taste of paint gurgled down his throat.

Oscar-Oscarina arrived the next day at noon. Renaldo the Great and she appeared to be old friends. The magician embraced her and held her off at arm's length for a survey. "You old bat!" he said. "I thought you were dead. Remember Galveston and that drunken cattleman in the casino? Remember Terre Haute and the preacher with the cops? Remember—?"

"I remember," Oscar-Oscarina sighed. "Too God-damn much I remember." She had a Parisian accent,

the kind that sometimes sounds more German than French. In street clothes she was a fattish old woman wearing too thick make-up. "What kind crowds you get in this crumb joint? Is anybody else working an after-catch?"

"Crowds are crowds," Renaldo said. "No other after-catches, unless you count Sailor Swensen. He tries to sell his spike for a dollar after he ties it into knots. He got a drunk yesterday. The field is yours, princess, to rip and tear. Only I still say you should change your name. You sound like a musical instrument."

"Funny man like always," she sighed.

Steven watched her first performance at one o'clock. They rigged a curtain for her; when it was drawn you saw on the little stage a battered gilt dressing table and mirror, with Oscar-Oscarina sitting at it in a blue dressing gown, turned half from the audience.

When she got up and turned full-face you were startled because you suddenly saw she had half a man's haircut and half a woman's hair-do; her face was half made up and half not. She started twiddling with the blue dressing gown to give you the idea that she was going to strip and show her flesh, and kept up the twiddling through her talk.

She explained that she was born in Paris, had baffled medical science, she was half a man and half a woman. She thrust one leg through the dressing gown and showed that it was smooth and hairless; the other was dark and hairy. Then the arms. Then she took the dressing gown off and she was wearing the half leopard skin, half trapeze artist set of the poster. Her figure was nauseating with rolls and bulges.

On her alleged masculine side she had a flabby fat-old-man's rudimentary breast. She kept twiddling at the dressing gown and explained that in the interests

of science she was permitted to exhibit her condition to adult audiences. First she was sure that the persons in the audience would be interested in having a picture of her in a plain sealed envelope. She would appreciate it if they did not open the envelope until they left the museum. The picture showed a *full* front view of her and she was sure they would find it of great scientific interest—the twiddling redoubled—and that it would interest and surprise their friends who were not able to come today to see the exhibit of her condition which would take place immediately after the sale of her pictures at only twenty-five cents for a *full* view of the medical curiosity which had baffled scientists of three continents.

She got four dollars from a crowd of twenty-odd; once she had to shake her finger at an overeager buyer who started to open his envelope. "Ah-ah! Not here, please! I am selling these to you gentlemen on the understanding that you will honor an agreement." And everybody looked with scorn at the louse who almost failed to honor his agreement, including several who loudly said: "Sure I know it's a fake, but it's worth two bits to find out what *kind* of a fake."

After milking the last quarter Oscar-Oscarina, twiddling like a mad thing, thanked them for their kind attention and introduced Princess Leilani, who undulated onto the adjoining stage while the phonograph played a hula. The crowd automatically shuffled leftward, Oscar-Oscarina pulled a cord, and the curtain drew across her segment of the stage.

Some of the audience opened their envelopes then and found they contained *full* front views of Oscar-Oscarina in her leopard skin and sequins outfit; in fact it was the same picture that stood outside the Museum enlarged. But there didn't seem to be anybody around

to complain to and Princess Leilani gave every indication of going into an interesting series of bumps and grinds. (But she never did.)

Steven waylaid Renaldo the Great and asked him: "Is Oscar-Oscarina a fake?"

"We're all fakes, my boy—every one of us. You didn't think I was a *real* magician, did you? Dear me, no! I do it by sleight of hand. Thought you knew."

Steven laughed perfunctorily. "What I mean is, is there anything wrong with her or is she just an old woman with a funny haircut?"

"My boy, she is an authentic hermaphrodite. If you caught her act out in the sticks where the law can be persuaded to look the other way, you'd see what I mean. I suppose your keen young eye was not deceived by the arm and leg routine; she just shaves one arm and leg and gets a good tan on the other. It's a surprisingly effective gaff and it does give the suckers of this noble city something for their money, even though prudery and the cops forbid them to receive full value."

"Is she—sensitive about it? I mean, can I talk turkey to her? I have a special reason."

"Naught-y—naught-y!" Renaldo grinned. "You'd be wasting your time, though there was a day—" He archly lifted an eyebrow.

"I don't want to fool around with her," Steven said sullenly. "I want to talk to her."

Renaldo said: "You asked whether she was sensitive. No; I shouldn't say so. She's *had* it, my boy. As the British say."

Oscar-Oscarina gave Steven a quarter and said: "Get me a bottle of beer. When you come back you can tell me what's on your mind."

He got her the beer with a detour to the men's toilet for a slug of sherry. He was almost trembling with excitement in spite of his alcoholic saturation. He brought the bottle of beer to her curtained-off stage where she sat in the blue dressing gown, wryly waiting.

"Miss—" he began, and hesitated, "I don't know what to call you."

"You may call me Miss Loiseau," she said.

"Miss Loiseau, can you keep a secret?"

She upended the beer bottle. "I can try."

"Oh. Miss Loiseau. If you wanted to, could you dress like a man and call yourself Mister? I mean, would it make just as much sense as dressing like a woman and calling yourself Miss?"

"Yes," she said. "Just as much sense."

"I have a condition," he said. "Hypospadias with bilateral cryptorchidism." She nodded recognition. "Or I thought I did. Now—Jesus, Miss Loiseau, I don't know! I thought I was a man. Everybody thought I was a man. But—I caught your act and suddenly I got this idea. Everything always went wrong for me. Everything. Jesus, I don't know. Could I be—what you are? Is it possible? I don't have to shave, I cry easy, I used to be afraid I was a homo. I got married, but I couldn't—you know what I mean. I got married but I didn't want to—you know. I thought I did, but when I caught your act I suddenly got this idea." He was trembling uncontrollably.

Oscar-Oscarina got up and came back with a canvas camp chair. She made him sit down.

She said: "Maybe. I don't know. But if there is any slightest possibility, you must leave nothing undone. That I do know. I was afraid as a little boy in the Twelfth Arrondissement of Paris. That, you must realize, was actually in the nineteenth century. Nothing could be done. Now perhaps something can be done. I have

read a great deal about such things. There was a Danish case. This hermaphrodite lived as a male into middle age and was married. I suppose the tensions became unbearable. He gave himself up to the surgeons. They determined that he was essentially female. His external genitalia were approximately male as I suppose yours are, but his sex glands were ovaries as well as testes."

"What happened?" demanded Steven.

"He died on the operating table after enduring great agony. It seems that surgical management of these things is difficult, uncharted and dangerous. Of course that was some years ago. One presumes the risk is less nowadays—or one hopes it is. Sometimes I, even I, think of an operation—

"But that is foolish, of course. For you it is not foolish. From a long life I tell you this: find out what is wrong and do something about it. Decide and act before it is too late and you are like—"

She didn't finish.

The dressing gown had slipped from one shoulder; she had gestured in her excitement. He saw the flabby-old-man breast with its rudimentary nipple and studied the coarse-pored face, half caked with powder, half dotted with sparse, white old-man's beard. The foolish mouth, half smeared with lipstick. The hair, an unreal purple-black under the light, with a quarter-inch of white showing at the roots.

"I hope I have helped you," she said, looking at the floor, her accent very thick.

"Yes, Miss Loiseau," he said. "Thanks very much." Tears blinded him as he passed through the curtain down the steps from the stage. A sailor hanging on a moviola machine that showed strip-teasers thrust a quarter at him and said: "Five nickels, Jack. This one any good?"

"They're all good," Steven said, and went on into the men's room. He got his bottle of California sherry down from high and to the rear of a flush box and emptied it in a toilet bowl. Decide and act.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE PERPETUAL CRISIS of the American hospital system was never more grave than in the spring of 1943. The armed services had denuded hospitals of doctors and nurses. War plants robbed them of the attendants, cooks and helpers who work behind the scenes. Hospital wages are always absurdly low.

Steven found himself surrounded by alcoholics, narcotics, thieves and perverts, male and female, who had drifted into hospital work as the lowest level of employment the country offered. The doctors knew all this, gritted their teeth and bore with it. They passed out slugs of paraldehyde to the drunks who tottered in with morning shakes, hoping that they'd get a day's work out of them. They watched the morphine stores as well as they could, and when the stuff kept evaporating they sighed and kept working.

Against such a background Steven shone like a bright star of hope. He entered Morningside Nonsectarian Hospital as a male ward attendant. In a month he was supervisor for his floor. He averaged eighty hours' work a week, what with filling in for drunks and irresponsibles who failed to show up. In three months he had somehow become the secretary of Dr. Anthony Russo, the hospital's staff pathologist.

In the spring of 1943 a staff pathologist did not expect his secretary to know typing or shorthand—that would

be sheer daydreaming. Russo was thunderstruck and almost suspicious when Steven, in addition to his almost dawn-to-dusk job, doggedly began to practice touch-typing from a self-instruction book.

Steven made very little money since most of his overtime was unauthorized. He didn't need much. What he wanted was facts, and he got them. He lived with Stedman's *Medical Dictionary*, Adami's great *Pathology* and the latest *Gray's Anatomy*. He was often sent to the library of the College of Physicians and Surgeons for books, and there he committed his only dereliction. He would stay an hour on a ten-minute errand, familiarizing himself with the big library and making reading lists for himself. Russo felt relieved at this sign that Steven was human; he thought he was loafing.

On a typical day Steven would do everything from balancing Russo's checkbook to sharpening the twelve-inch butcher knife for a post-mortem in the chilly basement morgue. He learned to embed tissue in paraffin for the microtome; he learned to stain and prepare sections for the microscope. He took dictation—letters, reports, forms—from the ediphone machine; he trotted after Russo on his endless rounds of the wards and rooms with a pad and pencil for case notes; he made coffee; he filed; he filled inkwells and sharpened pencils and replenished supplies and did urinalysis, Wassermanns and A-Z pregnancy tests; he fed the mice, rabbits and guinea pigs and cleaned their cages. Russo, in a happy daze, simply accepted his miraculous good luck and drove Steven like a galley slave.

On a sweltering July day there seemed to be a clear moment. Russo had put in eight hours since 6:00 A.M. and was leaning back in his swivel chair to snatch a few minutes of rest. He was forty and diabetic. He had a

wife and eight children in New Haven; what with the wartime trains and his overload, he hadn't seen them for two weeks.

Steven laid a batch of autopsy reports on his desk to be signed and said: "Doctor, I want to quit. Is two weeks' notice all right?"

Russo sat up looking stricken. "I'll hate to see you go, Bankow," he said. "Is it the money? I was thinking about something. I should have suggested this sooner but—how about ten dollars extra a week out of my own pocket? I believe that's against the hospital rules for some reason or other, so you'd have to keep quiet about it."

"It isn't the money," Steven said. "I want to work for some other doctors. An endocrinologist and a surgeon."

Russo stared at him. "Who are they?"

"I don't know. I mean I want to pick out a good endocrinologist first and work for him and then I want to work for a surgeon."

"What is all this?" Russo asked petulantly.

"I mean," Steven stammered, "the work's very interesting here, but it's mostly histology and while that has some special interest for me, I've got to find out about endocrines and surgery." He added defensively: "It's a personal matter."

Russo said: "Make me a cup of coffee, will you, Steven?" He seemed to be looking at him and seeing him for the first time.

Steven brought him a cup of black coffee and the cream bottle, which stood on the refrigerator shelf beside such items as beakers of polio virus. Russo said: "I may be a lab man without a bedside manner, but something tells me that you are a young man with a very sizable problem. I heard the other day about a fel-

low who thought he was a homosexual. He brooded about it for a couple of years and decided that what he ought to do was amputate his penis. He botched the job badly, and of course that was the wrong way to go about solving his problem." He poured cream into his coffee and sipped it.

"I know," Steven said.

"If there's anything you'd care to tell me," Russo said, "it would be a professional confidence, of course."

Steven said bitterly: "That means you'll only tell it to everybody in the medical profession." This was one of the unwelcome things his medical education had taught him.

Russo screwed up his face and whistled. "*Whew*. That one hurt. That's true much too often. But—"

"I'm a hermaphrodite," Steven exploded. "Or I think so. I've got to find out. That's what I'm doing here. That's why I've been working my guts out. I've got to *know*."

"Well," Russo said. "And what did you have in mind?"

"I think I may be a pseudo-hermaphrodite. I guess there ought to be an exploratory operation and then surgery and endocrine therapy. Whatever it takes. I've had eighteen years of hell and confusion out of this. It's got to come to an end. One way or the other."

"Let me talk to Baker about this," Dr. Russo said. Baker was the man who usually did abdominal surgery for Russo. He got *five thousand dollars* for a hysterectomy.

"All right," Steven said. "Tell him I haven't got any money but I'll give him a note, with interest. The way salaries are up in New England, I could pay him off in two years, easy. I have it figured out."

"I'll tell him," Russo said. "And—meanwhile—you withdraw your resignation, I suppose."

He talked with Baker, a lean man who looked like a movie version of a great surgeon.

"It's a dangerous business," Baker said irritably. "It's like cutting into a completely unknown animal. How do you know even generally, where the arteries lie. Hemorrhage! How do you know where the major nerves lie? Paralysis!"

"That Scandinavian case—" Russo murmured.

"Bungled! Botched! I'm completely familiar with it; the patient should *not* have died."

"Thoughtless of him."

"And another thing—the legal angle. You tell me this fellow's eighteen; he can't give consent to a major operation. We've got to have an adult next-of-kin."

"Ah," Russo grinned, "that's if he's a male. But if he's a female, he's of age."

Baker laughed and said: "By God, you're right! By the way, did you say he was your secretary?"

"I did."

"Look, Tony, I've got to have a reasonable fee. I've let you get around me repeatedly, but I've got to have a reasonable fee. Of course it's interesting, of course it's research in a way, but my time's not my own to do with as I like."

"I suppose," Russo murmured, "they'll call it the Baker Resection in the textbooks . . ."

Baker looked pensive and more like a great surgeon than ever. "I suppose they would at that," he muttered.

Baker and Russo looked down at Steven in a hospital bed after a prolonged digital examination. Steven was

sweating; they had used a painful catheter and speculum.

Baker said: "I want you to understand exactly what the prospect is. I would open your abdomen to explore. If, as appears certain, your sex glands are ovaries instead of testes, I will proceed with surgery." Bluntly he went on to describe the job of whittling and sculpturing in the living flesh that would lie ahead, the possible transplants of intestinal membrane which would demand weeks of immobility while the graft took.

"You must understand the very real element of danger. The operation may run as long as four hours. At any time I may run into hemorrhage or paralysis. Operative shock is an unknown quantity always. I can't even give you the comfort of telling you that the odds are even, or two to one, or a hundred to one. We can do that in operations that have been performed thousands of times, but we can't on unique cases like yours."

"I've got to know," Steven said.

The surgeon went on coldly: "If membrane transplants are made and fail to take, the whole business will have to be done again—and may fail again. And through every second of the operation and your convalescence you'll be in danger of peritonitis. And peritonitis can be a killer."

He had made up his mind to see this thing through, hadn't he? So what was the point of all this talk about transplants failing to take and peritonitis? If he were not a man but a woman, inconceivable as it seemed to him, any certainty would surely be better than this life-long doubt.

Dr. Russo said to him: "Well?"

Steven took the pen and release from the hospital table and shakily signed the form.

Baker broke into a grin, looking for the moment less

like a great surgeon than a small boy who has found a clock and knows where he can lay his hands on a screw-driver. "Then that's it, Bankow," he said. "Tomorrow at nine." He strode out.

Dr. Russo took the form, folded it and put it in the pocket of his white lab coat. "He's a good man, Steven," he said. He gave him a white pill and a glass of water. "This'll calm you down. You need a good night's sleep. I'll see you tomorrow at nine."

As soon as he was gone Steven gulped down the pill. God, how he needed something to calm him down! Self-doubts swarmed and clustered about him. The terror of the knife, the terror of screaming headlines in the papers, the terror that told him he couldn't sing, that he was kidding himself about a career. Worst of all, the terror that they would take away his manhood, such as it was, and leave him an empty shell. The thought of loving a man was grotesque and obscene. *He was a man! He had been a man since he was born! And they were taking that away from him—*

But he had to know. Would it be worse than not knowing? He couldn't answer that one. All he knew was, he had to know. The horrible face of the side-show freak haunted him, floating grotesquely against the white ceiling. That was something he must never be. Never. Never. Better a hollow shell, a counterfeit of a woman than that.

His sleep was troubled with the face of the freak and glittering, bloody scalpels. Tomorrow at nine.

It was like floating on a warm, calm sea. The air was hot and drowsy but the smell was not a sea smell. It was a smell he knew, medicinal and antiseptic, the smell of a hospital.

Then dimly he remembered. There was something he

had to know, a question he had to ask. He tried to turn his head, but somehow it wouldn't turn, and something seemed to be wrong with his eyes.

A face, disembodied, blurred around the edges, but a face he recognized, hung close to his face.

"Dr. Russo?" Something was the matter with his mouth, too. He was having such a hard time making the words come out.

"Yes?"

"What—?" He tried to say more, to make it clear what he meant, what he wanted so desperately to know.

And then the warm black sea closed over him again, but not before he saw the lips move, heard the words:

"You are a woman."

When Steven woke again, he was lying with his legs in an elevated position in what seemed a special bed in his old hospital room, and his head felt achy and light but reasonably clear. Dr. Russo and Dr. Baker were in low-toned conversation standing at the foot of his bed. He closed his eyes again, remembering with a sort of agonized wonder the last words he had heard Dr. Russo speak.

The exploratory operation was over, and he, Steven Bankow, had been found to be a woman.

Christ! what a hideous joke it all was. For eighteen years he had fought the bitter struggle for his manhood, borne the secret shame and doubt, and open jeers, the looks and words of ridicule and contempt. Now what did it all add up to? So sorry, but there's been a little mistake. It appears that you're a woman. You're wrong again, and eighteen years of painful effort are gone just like that. Better luck next time.

The tears, always too easy, came into his eyes. And with them came the thought, not without its comfort,

that if all this were true, and not some nightmare he was going through, he needn't feel ashamed any more to weep a woman's tears.

The two men turned at the sound of his half-strangled sob.

"How do you feel?" Dr. Baker's voice was cool but with an underlying note of solicitude.

"Is it—is it true I'm a wo——?"

Dr. Russo nodded his head, very slowly.

"But what—how—?"

The doctor sat down, lightly, at the foot of the bed. He said softly, "Of course you have questions, Steven?"

Yes. Millions. But how could you ask them? They strained language to the limit; language wasn't made to ask the questions that boiled inside him. They sounded like lunacy or like dirty jokes. Will I be a real woman? Will I be able to have sexual intercourse? What about children? What about—Christ, it was awful even to think about it, but no worse than his past eighteen years!—what about my, uh, figure: will it change?

He stammered some of this, his face burning.

Dr. Baker said slowly: "I'm no prophet, Bankow, but I've consulted on your case and I'll try to give you the general picture. Will you be a 'real woman'? Well, you'll have a woman's genital conformation. If that makes a person a real woman, the answer is yes. Will you be able to have sexual intercourse? If sexual intercourse means, will a man be able to use you for intercourse, the answer is yes. Children? No. If you had any thought of conceiving and bearing children, forget it. The uterus we found was infantile. The fact that you've never experienced anything resembling menstruation indicates that your ovaries aren't functioning, except to secrete enough hormones to give you a serious personality problem. That brings us to your figure. For a long time

you'll be taking this and that endocrine preparation. We'll probably bury a pellet of estrogen in one of your buttocks to diffuse through your system. There will have to be a great deal of fiddling and adjustment of dosage because the endocrines are still imperfectly understood and have a lot of peculiar side effects. But you'll have a woman's figure. I doubt that you'll ever give Miss Chili Williams serious competition, but you'll have a woman's figure."

Steven asked the last and hardest question.

The surgeon said: "I wondered myself, Bankow. The whole ethics of performing the operation seemed to depend on it. I've asked some big psychiatrists about it. The answer is: it's up to you. You want to know whether you'll enjoy sexual intercourse and have a normal woman's sexual instincts. It's up to you."

Steven was jarred by the answer. Everything had been smooth sailing; everything was in the hands of this wise, competent man. It was unfair! And he said so.

The surgeon shrugged. "It's not my field. My answer to the question, before I researched it, would have been a flat no. I still maintain that 'no' would be the right answer in the case of, say, a dog or monkey. But my head-feeling friends tell me that human beings are entirely different. They also point out that there are people who experience sexual pleasure from being walked on, having their hair stroked, having their thighs pinched and so on.

"The point is, *it's up to you*. If you want on every level of your mind and personality to experience sexual pleasure in the fashion of a normal woman, then you will. If you only *say* you do and on some unconscious level you really want something else, then you won't. Or so my head-feeling friends tell me."

"We'd better let the patient have some rest," Dr. Russo said. "There'll be plenty of time for answering questions."

Steven knew that he was still under the influence of sedative. That the numbness he felt in his groin was pain held under control. The words repeated themselves in his brain—*It's up to you*—but he felt utterly passive. There was only one direction for him now. Let them do with him as they pleased.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

AFTER THE first operation came two weeks of hell on earth for Steven. He was under sedatives much of the time and under restraint all of the time. On the special bed they had rolled from the fracture ward into his room, they trussed him up, his legs elevated and spread wide. The great wound in his groin was repacked daily. The object was to keep it from healing. Baker needed access to his transplanted tissue.

They had found ovaries and a vestigial twinned testicle. The latter had been removed. There was a rudimentary uterus and a fibrous, shriveled blind canal attached to it. Baker had cut it out, selected a tube of living tissue and transplanted it to the uterus. A strap of tissue still connected the transplant to its original location. The strap of tissue would keep it alive until it had—or had not—grown into its new site. When it grew in—or failed to grow in—the strap could be severed and the next operation proceed—or the first operation be repeated. Meanwhile the wound stayed open. Meanwhile, Steven was immobilized so that no accidental voluntary movement of his would wrench the transplant—more delicate than a day-old seedling sending its tendrils into loose soil—from its new site. Immobilization meant exactly that. His daily needs were taken care of by glucose injections, catheterization, and bedpan.

Baker came around once a day to inspect and repack the wound. He wouldn't let Steven talk to him. Russo came around when he could, friendly and smiling.

It was a delirium of morphine, boredom, agonizing muscle cramps, bedsores beginning to itch at his hips, gas pains and the humiliation of the feeding and sanitary routine. One day they trundled him back to the operating room and he was put under so Baker could sever the strap and sew up the great incision. It should have been a moment of triumph. Instead it was just more of the delirium. Sometimes Baker was Oscar-Oscarina. Sometimes Russo was his father. Sometimes a nurse was Sophie or Joe Lieber.

He woke in a normal hospital bed. The fracture-ward monster was gone. Russo was there, taking his pulse. It was bliss to be lying flat. The dull ache in his groin and the bulky dressing wound around it were oriental luxury compared to what he had been through.

"That's that," Russo said. "Fire Two."

Steven was used to things not making sense any more. He whispered: "Can I talk?"

"Talk, sing, shout," Russo said cheerfully. "When it hurts, stop and rest. You're over the first jump, Steven. How do you feel?"

"Good. Compared to before. Can I look?"

"Nothing to see except what they call a beautiful suture. But if you want—" Russo spun the crank that elevated the head of the bed and swiftly removed the dressing. Steven looked down on himself. He had been shaved for the operation, there was a great stain of gentian violet antiseptic painted on him, there was a long raw-looking scar held together with metal clips. Otherwise he was as he had always been.

Russo replaced the dressing and cranked down the bed rattling: "The next one, he goes in from the out-

side. No more incisions. Just sculpture. Give you a couple of weeks resting up and then the next operation and that's it, except for the hormone therapy. We're consulting a couple of people on it now. You're getting your wish, Steven. I suspect the removal of that twinned testicle is the real beginning of your hormone therapy. Estrogen from the ovaries and testosterone from the testicle were battling it out in your bloodstream. There won't be any more of *that*—"

He left, still bubbling cheerfully.

There won't be any more of *that*, Steven thought. Now whatever I am, I'm not a man. They've cut it out with a scalpel and tossed it into a tin bucket and it went out with the garbage. That's the end of eighteen years of Steven Bankow. Am I supposed to cheer?

With horror he thought: God, God! What have I let them do to me? My manhood's lying somewhere on the city dump, decaying and feeding maggots!

What have I given up? What have I let them make me into? He told himself frantically: I'm still *me*. I'm still Steven Bankow. My God, what's happened? Did I think there'd be a miraculous change? I'd come out of the ether calm and adjusted and ready to take up life as a woman? I'm still myself—and God, what a fool I was!

They warned me! They couldn't have warned me plainer. *It's up to you*, they said, yeah and I signed the paper and now what am I? Next they'll whittle and carve on me until I don't look like a man outside and I'll still be me, Steven!

What have I done?

It was fifteen minutes to midnight. Miss Lorna Craffy, a mail-order "practical nurse" who was doing the work of five R.N.'s who had been commissioned officers in the Army and Navy, scurried into the cubicle of the

physician on duty. His name was Walter Vincenzo, he was twenty-three, asthmatic and carried the hospital on his official shoulders between 10:00 P.M. and 6:00 A.M.

He looked up from behind a mountain of reports and snarled something at Miss Craffy.

"It's the Mystery Man, doctor," she said. "He wants out."

"Tell him to wait until morning," Vincenzo snapped, and went back to his reports.

"He wants out *now*," she said. "He says he knows his rights and he'll sign an against-advice form and he says he wants to get out right away and he doesn't give a God-damn what Dr. Russo will say."

"Tell him to wait until morning," Vincenzo said.

"He says he'll walk out in his nightshirt if I don't bring him his clothes, doctor."

"God!" Vincenzo said. If you stopped him from walking out in his nightshirt he could sue the hospital and his, Vincenzo's can, would be in a sling. If he walked out in his nightshirt he'd be arrested and the hospital would get some bad publicity. Vincenzo would still be wrong.

Vincenzo pawed through the files, found the mystery man's card and trotted to the elevator, saying over his shoulder to Miss Craffy: "Get his clothes."

The card said that Russo was the patient's physician—who ever heard of a pathologist being anybody's physician? Surgeon was Baker. *Money*, that meant. "Bowel resection" three weeks ago, "cosmetic surgery" scheduled for next week. Who ever heard of bowel resection followed by cosmetic surgery?

The Mystery Man, Bankow his name was according to the card, was wound up like a spring and began to holler at him.

Vincenzo said: "Mr. Bankow, you had a major oper-

ation not so long ago and your own physician has scheduled you for another. Obviously it would be against his advice for you to leave. I can tell just by looking at you that you're in an abnormal, hysterical state. It's against *my* advice for you to leave. Legally you have us by the throat, so if you insist on leaving, sign this form. If you change your mind and come back, I'll tear it up. I'm sorry I haven't more time to spend on this, but I'm hours behind on my work. Miss Craffy will be in presently with your clothes."

Bankow scribbled his name on the form and Vincenzo stalked out in a rage. Rich kid, he thought, sneering. Let him drop dead on the street if he insists.

Steven, walking down the dark street, belted his polo coat tighter around him.

He felt almost overwhelmingly the impulse to turn around and walk back. He didn't. Walk back to what? he sneered inwardly. The next operation, the one that cuts me off from my life, the one that turns the tide forever, the one that leaves me a lying hollow shell, shaped like a woman, incapable of being one.

A bar and grill's neon sign blinked ahead. *That* was what he wanted. And needed. It had worked once for a long year. The nausea, the hangovers, the rotten, filthy taste of booze itself, the stinking stewbums you took up with—they weren't good, but one thing was good. Whirling down in the slow spiral until you fell somewhere as the blackness closed in on you. Then you could forget what you were, and that was what counted: forgetting.

He went in. To forget. Five dollars in his pocket, and that was enough. He slid onto a stool at the darker end of the bar. There were four other people there—a middle-aged couple, drinking bottles of beer and quarreling

in low, vicious tones. A handsome kid with a shot glass and a chaser glass in front of him. He looked a little drunk. A girl with a bunch of dimes in front of her, drinking tap beer.

"Whisky," Steven said to the barman.

"Chaser?"

"Water."

He mixed them and drank. Another couple came in, laughing, and they went to the other end of the bar, where the overhanging lamps from the so-called dining room threw more light.

Steven watched them. They were young. The girl was pretty. She picked up her glass and Steven thought he saw a wedding ring. She was lefthanded. The man was tall, even sitting down. The light hit the top of his head and made him look blonder than he seemed, walking by two minutes ago. Steven watched them, with an attention almost fierce.

The bartender stood there a long minute before he said, "Another?"

Steven nodded, his eyes still going the length of the bar.

They were a nice couple, he thought. They were probably still in love. And maybe that night, when they got home, the girl would wait in bed, and her husband would make love to her.

He picked up his glass and for a brief half-second, he looked over the top of it, straight at the man, and for a flickering fraction even of that little time, he wondered how she would feel when her husband made love to her.

What am I thinking, he thought. *I came here to forget.*

But forgetting was an active thing. It meant, first, remembering, so that he'd have something to forget. And he didn't want to remember.

It touched him like a soft breeze in early April. It

was just a whisk of a touch, but it was good. *He didn't want to remember.*

My God, he thought. That's what's been wrong. *I've always wanted to remember. I was always so sorry for myself.*

He had all the right to be sorry, he knew. He had been a freak, and still was. He had known a thousand, maybe ten thousand people, and of them all, he was the only one who was the way he was.

But still, he argued gently, the whisky warming its way through him—still, each of them, each of the ten thousand he had met, talked to, seen in buses, pushed up against in school corridors, married, argued with, sang for, each one of them was different, in his or her own way.

His or her, he thought grimly, and he choked back a bitter laugh.

But that other part of him was not through, and once more he felt the pleasant touch inside, and his thoughts rolled on, gently, softly. They each were different. Sophie was different. Something dirty had happened to her when she was young, and now there was a stain inside her some place. Joe Lieber was different, Christ, he was different. And now he was dead.

But they were freaks, too. They didn't count.

How about the rest of the ten thousand? And he shook his head solemnly. He just didn't know. He didn't know what went on in their tired souls. He didn't know how they thought or how they felt, not really.

He looked up sharply, as a girl's laugh floated true and clear from the other end of the bar, and her head was thrown back. Steven could see the lovely white line of her throat, her hair brushing the sides of her face.

And then her husband reached over and with his

finger, he traced that line, from throat to chin, and Steven, watching, shivered.

How did she *feel*? He didn't know. He never knew. She was as different from him, as unique in her way, as he was from her.

And then he remembered: *It's up to you.*

He had come out that night, straight to this bar and this whisky, to forget.

But there was nothing to forget. He wouldn't remember.

It was up to him. He turned his back and he walked out of the bar, into the street, and he turned his steps back to the hospital.

THE END



her.maph'ro.dite (hur.maf'ro.dit), n. (From L., fr. Gr. hermaphroditos, so called from the myth of Hermaphroditus.)

1. Biol. An individual having both male and female reproductive organs.

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