

LAURA. That's Tom now.

(Al. looks at her wondering how she knows.)

I know all your footsteps. He's coming in for tea.

(Al. starts to move to door.)

Well, Al?

(Al. makes a helpless motion.)

You still want me to tell Mr. Reynolds about your moving next year?

Al. (After a moment.) No.

LAURA. Good.

Al. I mean, I'll tell him when I see him.

LAURA. Oh!

Al. (Turns on her.) What can I do?

LAURA. I don't know.

Al. Excuse me for saying so, but it's easy for you to talk the way you have—you're not involved. You're just a bystander. You're not going to be hurt. Nothing's going to happen to you one way or the other—I'm sorry.

LAURA. That's a fair criticism, Al. I'm sorry I asked you.

As you say, I'm not involved.

Al. I'm sorry. I think you're swell, Mrs. Reynolds. You're the nicest housemaster's wife I've ever run into—I mean—Well, you know what I mean. It's only that—(He is flustered. He opens the door.) I'm sorry.

LAURA. I'm sorry, too, Al. (She smiles at him.)

(Al. stands in the doorway for a moment, not knowing whether to go out the front door or go upstairs. Finally, he goes upstairs, and in the sitting room. LAURA stands thinking over what Al has said, even repeating to herself, "I'm not involved." She then repeats to the alcove and off.)

Al. (Outside Tom's bedroom door.) Tom?

(Tom moves quietly away from the door.)

Tom? (Opens the door.) Hey.

Tom. I was sleeping.

Al. Standing up, huh?

(Tom turns away.)

You want to be alone?

Tom. No. You want to look. Go ahead. (He indicates the window.)

Al. No, I don't want to look, I—(He looks at Tom, not knowing how to begin—he stalls—smiling.) Nice tie you got there.

Tom. (Starts to undo tie.) Yeah, it's yours. You want it.

Al. No. Why? I can only wear one tie at a time.

(Tom leaves it hanging around his neck. After an awkward pause.)

I—uh—

Tom. I guess I don't need to ask you what's the matter? Al. It's been rough today, huh?

Tom. Yeah. (He turns away, very upset—he's been holding it in—but here's his closest friend asking him to open up.) Jesus Christ!

(Al. doesn't know what to say. He goes to Tom's bureau and picks up his hair brush, gives his hair a few brushes.)

Anybody talk to you?

Al. Sure. You know they would.

Tom. What do they say?

Al. (Yanks his tie off.) Hell, I don't know.

Tom. I went to a meeting of the dance committee. I'm no longer on the dance committee. Said that since I'd backed out of playing the part in the play, I didn't show the proper spirit. That's what they said was the reason.

Al. Why the hell don't you do something about it?

Tom. (Yelling back.) About what?

Al. About what they're saying.

Tom. What the hell can I do?

Al. Geez, you could—(He suddenly wonders what Tom could do.) I don't know.

Tom. I tried to pass it off. Christ, you can't pass it off. You know, when I went into the showers today after my tennis match, everyone who was in there, grabbed a towel and—and—walked out.

Al. They're stupid. Just a bunch of stupid bastards. (He leaves the room.)

TOM. *(Following him into sitting room.)* Goddamn it, the awful thing I found myself—Jesus, I don't know—I found myself self-conscious about things I been doing for years. Dressing, undressing—I keep my eyes on the floor—*(Re-enters his own room.)* Geez, if I even look at a guy that doesn't have any clothes on, I'm afraid some one's gonna say something, or—Jesus, I don't know.

AL. *(During this, Al has come back into the room taking off his shirt, unbuttoning it, etc. Suddenly he stops.)* What the hell am I doing? I've had a shower today. *(He tries to laugh.)*

TOM. Undress in your own room, will ya? You don't want them talking about you too. Do you?

AL. No I don't. *(He said this very definitely and with meaning.)*

TOM. *(Looks up at his tone of voice.)* Of course you don't. *(He looks at Al a long time. He hardly dares say this.)* You—uh—you moving out?

AL. *(Doesn't want to answer.)* Look, Tom, do you mind if I try to help you?

TOM. Hell, no. How?

AL. I know this is gonna burn your tail, and I know it sounds stupid as hell. But it isn't stupid. It's the way people look at things. You could do a lot for yourself, just the way you talk and look.

TOM. You mean get my hair cut?

AL. For one thing.

TOM. Why the hell should a man with a crew cut look more manly than a guy who—

AL. —Look, I don't know the reasons for these things. It's just the way they are.

TOM. *(Looking at himself in bureau mirror.)* I tried a crew cut a couple times. I haven't got that kind of hair, or that kind of head. *(After a moment.)* Sorry, I didn't mean to yell at you. Thanks for trying to help.

*(Al finds a baseball on the radiator and throws it at TOM. TOM smiles, and throws it back.)*

AL. Look, Tom, the way you walk—

TOM. Oh! Jesus!

AL. *(Fearing.)* Look, I'm trying to help you.

TOM. No one gave a goddamn about how I walked till last Saturday!

AL. *(Starts to go.)* Okay, okay. Forget it. *(He goes out.)*

TOM. *(Stands there a few moments, then slams the baseball into the bed and walks out after Al into sitting room.)* Al?

AL. *(Off.)* Yeah?

TOM. Tell me about how I walk.

AL. *(In the sitting room.)* Go ahead, walk!

TOM. *(Walks back into the bedroom.)*

*(Al follows him carrying his face on a towel and watching Tom walk. After he has walked a bit—)*

Now I'm not going to be able to walk any more. Everything I been doing all my life makes me look like a fairy.

AL. Go on.

TOM. All right, now I'm walking. Tell me.

AL. Tom, I don't know. You walk sort of light.

TOM. Light? *(He looks at himself take a step.)*

AL. Yeah.

TOM. Show me.

AL. No, I can't do it.

TOM. Okay. You walk. Let me watch you. I never noticed how you walked.

*(Al stands there for a moment, never having realized before how difficult it could be to walk if you think about it. Finally he walks.)*

Do it again.

AL. If you go telling any of the guys about this—

TOM. Do you think I would?

*(Al walks again.)*

That's a good walk. I'll try to copy it. *(He tries to copy the walk, but never succeeds in taking even a step.)* Do you really think that'll make any difference?

AL. I dunno.

TOM. Not now it won't. Thanks anyway.

Al. *(Comes and sits on bed beside Tom. Puts his arm around Tom's shoulder and thinks this thing out.)* Look, Tom—You've been in on a lot of hull sessions. You heard the guys talking about stopping over in Boston on the way home—getting girls—you know.

Tom. Sure. What about it?

Al. You're not going to the dance Saturday night?

Tom. No. Not now.

Al. You know Ellie Martin. The gal who waits on table down at the soda joint?

Tom. Yeah. What about her?

Al. You've heard the guys talking about her.

Tom. Come on, come on.

Al. Why don't you drop in on Ellie Saturday night?

Tom. What do you mean?

Al. Hell, do you want me to draw a picture?

Tom. Ellie Martin?

Al. Okay. I know she's a dog, but—

Tom. So what good's that going to do? I get caught there. I get thrown out of school.

Al. No one ever gets caught. Sunday morning people'd hear about—not the Dean—I mean the fellows. Hell,

Ellie tells and tells and tells—Boy, you'd be made!

Tom. Are you kidding?

Al. No.

Tom. *(With disgust.)* Ellie Martin!

Al. Look, I've said so much already, I might as well be a complete bastard. You ever been with a woman?

Tom. What do you think?

Al. I don't think you have.

Tom. So?

Al. You want to know something?

Tom. What?

Al. Neither have I. But if you tell the guys, I'll murder you.

Tom. All those stories you told—

Al.—Okay. I'll be sorry I told you

Tom. Then why don't you go see Ellie Martin Saturday night?

Al. Why the hell should I?

Tom. You mean you don't have to prove anything?

Al. Aw, forget it. It's probably a lousy idea anyway.

*(He starts out.)*

Tom. Yeah.

Al. *(Stops.)* Look, about next—*(Stops.)*

Tom. Next year? Yes?

Al. Hap Hudson's asked me to come to his house. He's got a single there. A lot of the fellows from the team are over there, and—well—*(He doesn't look at Tom.)*

Tom. Sure, sure—I understand.

Al. Sorry I didn't tell you till now, after we'd made our plans. But I didn't know. I mean, I just found out about the—the opening.

Tom. I understand!

Al. *(Looks up at last. He hates himself but he's done it, and it's a load off his chest.)* See ya. *(He starts to go.)*

Tom. *(As Al gets to door.)* Al—

*(Al stops and looks back.)*

*(Taking tie from around his neck.)* Here.

Al. I said wear it. Keep it.

Tom. It's yours.

Al. *(Looks at the tie for a long time—then without taking it, goes through the door.)* See ya. *(He ends)*

*(Tom folds the tie neatly, dazed, then seeing what he's doing, he throws it viciously in the direction of the bureau, and turns and stares out the window. He puts a record on the phonograph.)*

Bill. *(Comes in to the study from the hall, carrying a pair of shoes and a slim book. As he opens his door, he hears the music upstairs. He stands in the door and listens, remembering his miserable boyhood. Then he comes in and closes the door.)* Laura.

Laura. *(Off-stage—calling.)* Bill!

Bill. Yes.

Laura. *(Coming in with tea things.)* I didn't think you'd be back before your class. Have some tea. *(He ends)*