

Amusedly she began, "Well, I might be persuaded—"

Ray cut in sharply. "Sherry, I think you'd better go."

She felt a small shock in her nerves. She knew Ray didn't mean Detroit. Sherry knew it too. He looked long and reproachfully at his host. Then he turned back to Necia.

"So I'm dismissed, my sweet. I told you I'd lost my confidence, and this is the way it shows. I always say the wrong things in the right place."

She was flushed with embarrassment. "I'm sure Ray was joking."

Sherry shook his head slowly. "No joke." He stepped close and pressed his cheek against hers in response to her sympathy.

"You—you don't have a hat?" she attempted.

"No. I'll just run along without calling a taxi. I'll need a long walk now. Goodby, dear girl. I—I know what I've missed in life when I see the likes of you. Goodby, Ray. Sorry I live so much in the past."

She waited till the door closed before she marched before her husband with blazing eyes. "I don't think I have ever, in all my life—"

He stopped her words gently with a hand over her mouth. Endearingly he grasped both of her upper arms.

"Don't say it, Necia. Wait till sometime when you know better. Sherry was an emergency in my life. A war-housing emergency, yes, and another variety also. I'm glad you didn't understand. There are things a man wants to remember

always, and there are things he wants to forget completely. You've made me forget wholesomely—until tonight."

Her anger was melting fast before his implied wisdom which she did not comprehend. "Sherry was only clowning," she protested softly.

"Let's call it that. Native clowns never mature. That's the fairest criticism I can offer for him."

"Darling — are you sure you weren't a little jealous of his small pats and praises of me?"

Her tall husband smiled at her for the first time this evening. "Could Sherry ever take my place with you?"

She laughed in a whisper at the ludicrous idea. It was her admission of error. "But I *would* like to paint his picture in oils, and perhaps sew on his buttons, and even scrub behind his ears."

"Exactly. He hasn't grown up. So he's still a boy."

She admitted, "I never wanted to grow up. No woman does."

"Now you're closer to the truth. Sherry isn't equal to responsibility. He likes to attract attention. He wants breakfast in bed, and a pressed shirt ready for him, and theater tickets on the dresser."

"But he's really not a fool," she insisted. "Anyone can see that."

"He's not a fool, no. He can't help being the way he is." Leaning down he kissed her lips.

She whispered impishly, "I can understand that kind of a fool, because I'm one myself."

one

magazine

THE HOMOSEXUAL VIEWPOINT

14TH YEAR

JUNE 1966

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" . . . a mystic bond
of brotherhood
makes all men one."

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magazine

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June 1966

4 THE YOUNG BATHER A Poem by Martin Armstrong

5 THE KEY a story by John Paul Tegner

10 Half A World Curt Merrick

13 DINNER FOR THREE a story by Flint Holland

Fragment II

I took your spirit home
And laid it down to rest with me.
It soon entwined with mine as one
. And thus we slept
All night long . .

by Sten Russell

EDITOR RICHARD CONGER

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The Young Bather

Down by the water a boy stood there,
Stripped to bathe, on a rock shelf narrow,
 Sweet curved, spare,
 With clustering hair,
Pure as a lily-bud, slim as an arrow.

Over his back in the freezing warm
Shine and shadow danced free and fickle,
 Then, palm to palm,
 Of each lifted arm.
Sweet and slight as the young moon's sickle.

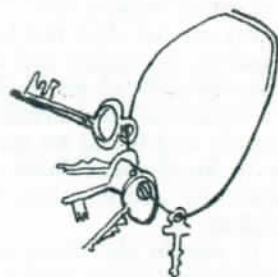
He dived. And seeing that child of May,
A whim of beauty, a wonder of slimness.
 I nigh could pray
 That the gods would slay
And keep him there in the weedy dimness.

But lank and dripping his brown head rose;
He crawls ashore and the leafage severs,
 And the branches close
 On a form that goes
With all things else down the years great rivers.

To think that the glory must leave his head,
And his young, white beauty must all forsake him;
 I had almost said
 That the gods were dead,
Did it not need the hand of a god to make him.

Martin Armstrong

the KEY



by John Paul Tegner

"Hintonville," I wrote in my diary at an early age, "an ugly name for an ugly town."

A tourist might have found it neat and charming. An artist might have called it picturesque, with its shady streets and its old-fashioned brick storefronts. But to me it had an ugly, twisted soul. I was born in Hintonville. For the first eighteen years of my life I was trapped there.

Our house was a gingerbreaded monstrosity on the proper side of the tracks. Father worked in the local bank. Mother was an invalid. She had never been well after I was born.

She spent her days sitting up in bed, a colorless wisp of a woman with her hair in a long, thick braid. Sometimes she sang to me. There was a pathetic air of gaiety about her.

Alone with my mother, I was allowed to make as much noise as I liked. With my father at home, it was understood that the house must be quiet.

"We mustn't disturb your father, Jimmie," my mother would say. "He works so hard."

I think she was afraid of him, as I was. He was a big man, tall and very straight, with a curiously rasping voice and piercing eyes. I felt that he could see through me and that he despised what he saw.

The first time he ever punished me I must have been six or thereabouts. He had just come from the bank one evening, when the telephone rang. Dropping his keys on the hall table, he hurried to answer.

I had the keys in my hand when he returned. He gave me a box on the ear that sent me reeling.

"Don't ever touch my keys again!" he said.

Screaming with pain and fright, I ran upstairs. Mother tried to comfort me. "Was there a little brass key on the ring?" she asked.

I nodded.

"That's why he was so upset," she said, her voice darkly bitter. "He was afraid you might take it and get into his precious secret drawer."

"What secret drawer?" I asked.

"The one in his desk. He doesn't know I know about it, but I do."

"What's in the secret drawer?"

She shook her head. "Stocks and bonds, I suppose. Something I'm too stupid to know about. Sometimes I think I might as well be—" She stopped.

Smiling, she held out her hand. "Here. Sit by me, and we'll cut out pictures."

Afterward I asked her, "Where *is* the secret drawer?"

She laughed. "There isn't any. That was a joke."

I didn't believe her.

My mother died not long after that, and Miss Annie Hodge came to keep house for my father and me. She was a wheezy, slack-jawed old woman with a face the color of suet pudding. We loathed each other on sight.

I remember her cackling laughter the day she came into my room unexpectedly and found me sorting my box of paper dolls. Later my father ordered me to bring them down to the living-room. "A boy your age playing with these!" he said in a tone of searing contempt, and he burned the box in the fireplace.

It was in the living-room with its grim, mahogany furniture and liver-colored wall-paper that we had most of our "talks." He must have thought of them as man-to-man talks.

He said a good deal about being manly and mixing with the crowd and playing the game. Beneath it all was the implication that I'd somehow failed to measure up to his expectation, although he was never clear as to what his expectations actually were.

"What do you intend to make of yourself?" he asked.

"A writer," I said, and he struck his forehead and groaned, "God! I might have expected that!"

Once he came home and found me reading by the fire.

"The fellows are down on the corner playing ball." He demanded sharply, "Why aren't you out playing?"

"I don't want to play," I said.

"They were teasing you, weren't they?"

"No."

"Don't lie to me. I always know when you're lying. They said you threw like a girl, didn't they?"

I didn't answer.

His mouth twitched. "For God's sake, keep your hands down at your sides! And don't stand like that!" He jerked me erect. I shrank away from him. Instinctively I lifted my hands again. It was a defensive gesture. In a fury, he struck me, and I fell . . .

An odd boy, people called me. Wherever I went, it seemed they were watching, whispering, laughing. I didn't know why.

"You have no friends," my father flung at me, in a kind of accusation.

"I don't want any friends!" I shouted back.

It wasn't true, of course. Sometimes I thought I couldn't endure the crushing loneliness of another day.

To help fill the hours, I kept a voluminous diary. Writing became a part of my life. Sometimes I lived in a world of fantasy. I was a famous author surrounded by admiring friends. Hintonville was forever behind me.

Father talked darkly of sending me to military school, but nothing ever came of that, and I continued in Hintonville High. A week after graduation I went to work in the bank. From the first, I hated it. I was trapped. I could see no way out.

And while I dreamed of freedom, Fred Zimmerman was "making his territory." Fred Zimmerman in his old green car was coming nearer to Hintonville.

I was sent to the hotel one day with some cancelled checks the manager

had asked for. I delivered the checks at the desk and as I started out, a man in the lobby spoke to me.

"I'm a stranger in town. Can you tell me anything about an old covered bridge in the neighborhood?"

"Yes," I said. "It's six miles south."

He kept me there, talking, asking questions about Hintonville. He was neat, rather fleshy-faced, probably thirty-five or forty. I liked his friendliness and his odd, one-sided way of smiling.

"I'm going out for a look at that bridge," he said. "Like to go along and show me the way?"

"I'm due back at the bank now," I said.

"No hurry. We could make it this evening."

"All right," I said.

He asked my name and introduced himself. He was Fred Zimmerman, a brush salesman, passing through town.

I met him at the hotel that evening. We drove down the highway in his old green car. The sky was turning pink, and I told him we'd have to hurry if he wanted to see the bridge before sundown.

But he seemed in no hurry. A few miles down the highway he turned off on a side road.

"This isn't the way," I said.

He parked and turned toward me, smiling a little. "I saw the bridge this morning . . . not mad at me, are you?"

I was bewildered. The idea flashed through my mind that this was all a joke, that somehow he was making fun of me.

"I'm lonesome, kid," he said. "That's the plain truth, and when I saw you today I got the idea you were lonesome, too."

Still bewildered, I could think of nothing to say.

"Don't be mad at me," he said, his voice husky and warm. "We're all human, after all."

He picked up my hand and held it. I began to shiver.

"Cold, kid?" He put an arm heavily around my shoulders and drew me toward him.

Hours later he let me out at the edge of town. I stumbled home in a daze. Now I knew. Now I knew.

"Fred—Fred—" I said over and over. It was the most precious name in the world to me.

Father was waiting in the hall. He took out his watch and looked at it. "Where have you been?"

I could feel my face burning. "Out. Walking."

"Where? Who with?"

"Out—along the reservoir—by myself," I stammered.

"You're lying. Who were you with? What were you doing?"

"I don't have to tell you everywhere I go," I said.

He took a step toward me.

"And don't you touch me, either!" I said.

I edged past him and ran upstairs.

I didn't see Fred again before he left the next morning, but he had promised to write and give me his next address.

For a month I watched the mails for his letter. I began a long letter to him, writing a page a day. I told him how I loved him, missed him, longed for him. I was seventeen.

I hid the letter under the paper lining in my dresser drawer. One evening my father called me. He was in the living-room with my letter in his hand. White-faced, he lashed out at me, "Who is Fred?"

I wouldn't tell.

For a long time he raged at me. I was a filthy degenerate, not fit to associate with decent people. It was God's mercy that my mother hadn't lived to see this day. I could leave this house the first thing in the morning. I was no son of his, and he never wanted to see my face again.

I was frightened and shaken. I had no plans, no idea of how I was to live. I had wanted my freedom, but not like this.

Instinctively I headed for the nearest city. I worked in a restaurant, a hotel, a furniture store.

Fred became only a vague memory, as other men drifted in and out of my life. Faceless men, mostly. Some of them kind, but men who didn't matter.

In my spare hours I wrote. One of my stories grew into a novel. I sent it to a literary agent whose name I found in a library. Larry Framingham was his name. Why did I choose him from the list? Was it the merest accident, or was fate bending over my shoulder?

Larry Framingham found a publisher for my book. I hoped my father and the rest of Hintonville would see it and perhaps recognize themselves.

The book was not a success. Neither was my second.

My agent wrote to ask how my next book was progressing. Depressed and discouraged, I answered that there would never be another book.

A letter came from him. "Why don't you come to New York? I'm almost sure I can find something for you to do here—something that will be a cushion until you can finish your next book."

I went to New York. I met Larry Framingham. He was older than I. His hair was gray at the temples. He had the kindest face I had ever seen.

He found me a room overlooking Washington Square. Every evening for a week he dropped by. Then he told me, "It's time you settled down to work. You won't be seeing me for a while."

The next evening stretched interminably ahead. Try as I would, I couldn't write. I gazed out across the Square. I paced the floor. At last I called Larry.

"Something's the matter," I said. "I got so used to you last week, I can't seem to do anything without you."

"A funny thing," he said. "I was just feeling the same way."

Larry found a larger apartment, and we moved in together. My next book was a success, and my first play ran six months on Broadway.

For all we meant to each other, Larry was my severest critic.

"You're bitter, and it creeps into your work," he told me. "All the time you're fighting back at life."

"I'm not fighting now," I protested. "I'm perfectly happy as long as I'm with you."

He shook his head. "Sometimes you're miles away from me, Jim. You're still trying to get even with Hintonville."

Forget the past and let it go. That was Larry's creed.

I tried to forget. Most of the time I succeeded, but sometimes I *was* back in Hintonville, hating it, hating my father.

One day a telegram came to me, in care of my publishers. It was from someone in the Hintonville Bank. My father had died suddenly of a heart attack.

"It's been fifteen years," I said, "There's no reason why I should go back."

"It couldn't do any harm, could it?" said Larry.

"It couldn't do any good."

"It might lay a few ghosts," said Larry.

I thought that over. Perhaps Larry was right. He usually was . . .

I arrived in Hintonville the evening before the funeral. There was a light in the old house, and Miss Annie Hodge was waiting to meet me.

"Oh, Mister Jimmie!" she panted, peering at me with rubbed, red eyes.

Mister Jimmie . . .

I said, "How do you do?"

"I've been getting everything ready for you," she said.

"I'll see that you're paid for your trouble," I said.

She was gone at last. I sat in the living-room, lonely for Larry, depressed by the chill mustiness of the old house.

Idly I looked at the keys Miss Annie had turned over to me—her "house-keeping" keys and those my father had always carried. Here was the little brass key. "To his precious secret drawer," my mother had said. ". . . the one in his desk."

I wondered about the drawer—if anyone had ever found it, if it had been opened since his death.

As far as I knew, his only desk was the one here in the mahogany secretary. I dragged it out a little way from the wall and looked at it. I could see no place where a drawer might be hidden.

I ran my hand over the wood. There was a rough spot in the ornamental moulding just below the desk-top. It was the head of a nishing-nail. A curious spot for a nail, I thought.

With a kitchen knife I pried at the moulding. I loosened the nail and pulled it out. A strip of the moulding swung back on a hinge. Behind it was a keyhole.

I tried the brass key, turned it, and pulled. A small drawer slid out.

On top was a yellowed photograph—the picture of a young man I had never seen. It was a wistful face, delicate, yet strong. On it was written, "To Jim from Arne."

Under it was a letter addressed to James Hendricks, Esq.—my father. The postmark on the envelope showed that it was thirty-odd years old.

I unfolded the thin, brittle paper and read:

Jim, my darling,

Let me call you my darling again. Let me tell you how much I love you and long for you. If I could make you understand . . . Jim, that night at the cabin when you . . . Afterward you said it was the liquor. You tried to pretend it had never happened, but you loved me then, as I loved you . . . Jim, I'll go away. I'll do anything you say, only don't marry her just to prove . . . don't destroy yourself . . . I love you. I love you.

Always your own

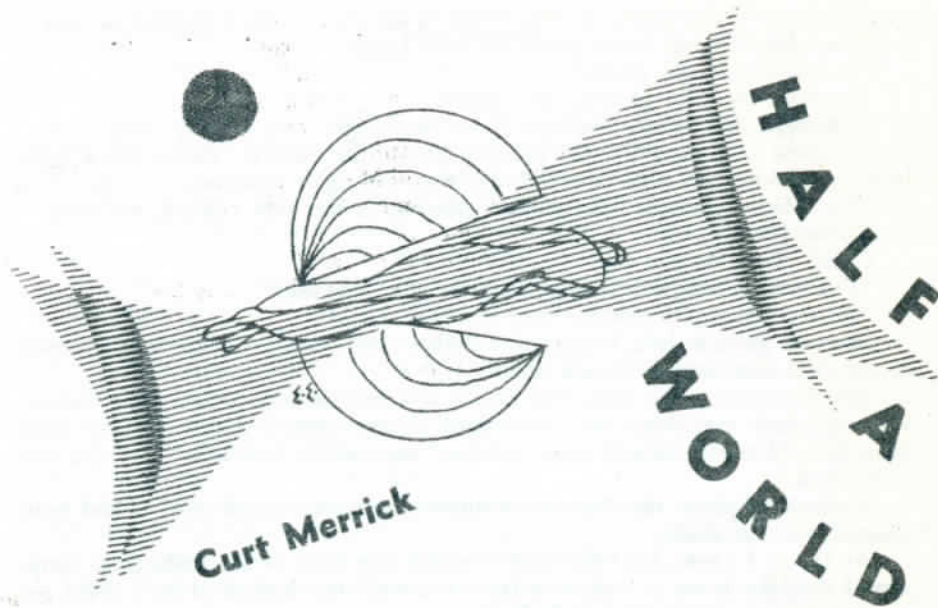
ARNE

I sat numbly with the letter in my hand. This was my father . . . *this*.

Some of the old bitterness stirred inside me, but there was something else. There was the beginning of compassion.

He had had his poor, warped shell of self-righteousness. Little more than that. And I had had so much.

I went to the telephone and placed a call to New York. I sat in the silent house, waiting impatiently for the sound of Larry's voice.



Dick Lovett held his eyes on the control tower visascope. What he would see in a few minutes could change everything in his world. The minutes ticked slowly, steadily on but his mind raced back—back into the past. All of the past since he had been aware of himself passed in shadowy review. He was young and he had inherited a new and better position in society than others of his kind before him had enjoyed. Now his runaway thoughts were travelling farther back into those difficult days about which he had only read or been told.

It had all started with the transposition of the letters in the word, homosexual, so that the "sex" connotation was eliminated, and a new designation provided for that group which had borne this onus for so long. From that point on things began to slowly change for the better. With a new name the ranks of *HEXOSOMUALS*, as they were now called, swelled to an unprecedented number. Many heretofore unsuspected individuals, to whom a "movement" involving organization of homosexuals was anathema, came forward and joined with their brothers and sisters in the march toward a new concept in society.

Of course, the heartbreaking labor of the pioneer workers in organization was not to be minimized. Now that so much had been accomplished it was hard to believe that it had taken all those years of persecution to make the homosexuals desperate enough to really begin to organize in earnest. Some of the early organizers were pilloried and all but "boiled in oil" getting things underway.

The heterosexual majority termed, with a high degree of inaccuracy, as "normals" had received a new name too in the shuffle and were now referred to as *MORNALS*. The more open the *HEXOSOMUALS*' organizing activity had become, the more frenzied and violent the *MORNALS* made their opposition. All the biggest batteries of the Law and the powerful influence of the Church were brought to bear in trying to strangle the nascent movement . . .

Dick halted the parade of thoughts as he reached for a capsuled stimulant. He must keep himself on the alert while he remained at his lonely vigil in front of the visascope. But his thoughts would not remain captive for long. They were off again on their journey into the past.

There was considerable difficulty from another segment of society—the *VERPERTS*. Many of those emotionally distorted people, whose compulsions directed their attentions only to youngsters or other perverted acts, had to be dealt with and controlled. The *MORNALS* had to be convinced that these unfortunate persons were no more a part of the *HEXOSOMUALS*, per se, than they were of the *MORNALS* and that their activity was justly abhorrent to society, both the Old and the New.

Thus, in retrospect, the integration of *HEXOSOMUALS* into a friendly and productive coexistence with *MORNALS* seemed easy, but in reality it had been anything but that. The resulting sense of security for the *HEXOSOMUALS* in society became enormously increased and was worth all the superhuman efforts made to achieve it . . .

These were some of the thoughts that crowded into Dick Lovett's mind as he scanned the screen in front of him. So much—everything in fact—depended on the outcome of the strategy he and his staff had evolved. This was the big test . . .

He had read and reread the history of the last half of the 1900's leading into a new century. It seemed like some tragic nightmare that the homosexuals, as they were then archaically termed, were jailed and persecuted, kept from participation in government and civil affairs on the flimsy pretext of being considered "security risks."

As the light caught the bars on Dick's shoulder, bespeaking his powers of command, he smiled. Yes, the *HEXOSOMUALS* had come a long way since those dark days of the 1950's. Now he must stop this wool-gathering and give his undivided attention to matters in hand.

For years the conflict with the *SURSIANS* had seemed ready to break wide open and each side had held back mindful of the awful consequences involved. This teetering on the edge of doom couldn't go on forever. Every new mental hospital kept being filled the same day it opened its doors. *MORNALS* and *HEXOSOMUALS* alike were at the breaking point.

Then it was that Lovett, as commander of the Air Squadrons, had evolved the strategy now about to unfold before his eyes. His own Squadron, the most popular group in the Air Command, which was composed entirely of *HEXOSOMUALS*, had volunteered to spark this mission. They were to act as decoy and lure the reluctant *SURSIANS* through an atomic curtain, the existence of which, it was hoped, would be completely unknown to the enemy. If the plan succeeded, the victim's airships would be disintegrated.

It seemed feasible and was certainly decisive. If any sanity was to be preserved quick decision was definitely imperative. A status quo, with both sides armed to the teeth sitting in quiet desperation waiting for the other to make a move, couldn't be maintained indefinitely.

The first indication of action was beginning to show up on the screen. Dick's mouth became tense, his lips a thin line, as he watched. The lead plane, piloted by Gaylan Carr, ace flyer of this special *HEXOSOMUAL* Corps, was of more than tactical concern to Dick. Gay was not only his Aide—he was his reason for living. Every dream, every hope of their lives together, flew in that plane.

It was dawn—and this was it! The first grey streaks of light filled the sky. Now all his gallant men should be coming into view—and if the plan worked, the *SURSIANS* in pursuit.

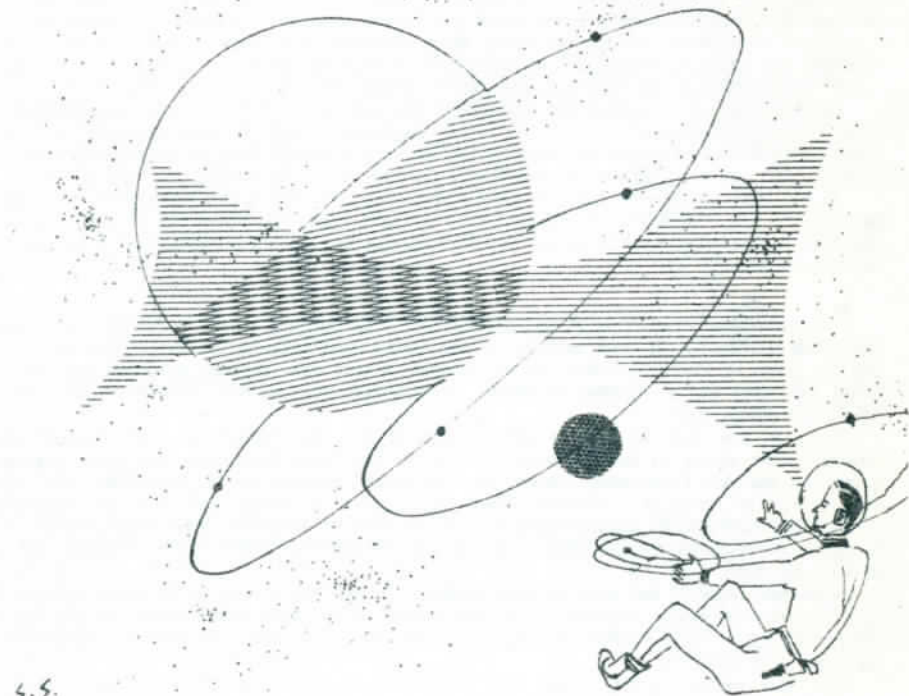
Dick felt hot and cold by turns as he adjusted the controls of the screen. Why didn't they come? Time was running out.

Suddenly they were there! Gay's ship and the others and—Dick caught his breath—



the *SURSIANS*! His men were almost through the area of the curtain when he saw the whole sickening picture! Something had gone wrong—impossibly, horribly wrong. His own men were being crumpled and twisted by atomic fire, but the *SURSIANS*, seemingly untouched, came on with a piercing supersonic scream. Gay was lost—everything was lost. The whole world was crashing about his head and all because his plans had miscarried. He, Dick Lovett, had brought about the end of the world.

A ring of fire closed around Dick's throat. He could no longer breathe, and his eyes were swallowed up in the deadly blue atomic fog. He tried to speak—one name—Gay—but no sound would come.



ΣΣ

The fog was lifting but the shrieking drone of aircraft still sang in Dick's brain. His mind strained to return to reality and his hands reached out for reassurance.

"Dick! Dick! What is it?" It was Gay's voice. "What's the matter?"

Dick shook his head. Things were getting clearer now.

"Are you all right?" Dick's voice was very unsteady.

"I'm all right, but how about you?" Some of the concern was beginning to leave Gay's face. "You were making such awful noises!"

"What day is it . . . I mean, what year . . . ?" Dick was still tense.

Gay's reply came quickly. "Sunday, August 29th, 1954—time, about 5:00 P.M. You went to sleep at three."

"Then there are no . . . *HEXOSOMUALS*!" Dick's returning awareness couldn't conceal the disappointment he felt, and it colored his voice.

Gay looked puzzled. "*HEXOSOMUALS*?" he queried, "what's that?"

"A dream," Dick finally answered. "A dream for the future—a wonderful dream up to a certain point. It all seemed so plausible, somehow, being accepted by society and no longer under a cloud." By now Dick was sitting up. "Oh, if . . ."

He didn't finish the sentence.

"You can tell me your dream later . . ." But Dick could not go back to sleep. Somehow he knew that he could never again be content with half a world. Today, "a dream," but tomorrow—maybe tomorrow . . . !



DINNER FOR THREE

by flint holland

Her hands were in the biscuit mix when the phone rang. She heard Ray put down his newspaper in the living room and stomp into the hall.

"Hello . . . Hello . . . Who? . . . Sherry! For the love of Pete! What brings you to Hollywood? . . . Which studio? . . . Imagine that! Where you staying? . . . Well—not sure we'll be home. I'll ask Necia."

His wife came to the kitchen doorway. "Invite her to dinner, Ray. I've always liked the girl-friends you had before we were married."

He put a hand over the mouth-piece. "Sherry is a man. Young fellow I roomed with when Detroit was overcrowded during the war. Sheridan Woolley. Maybe I better say we won't be home."

"That would be unfriendly. Tell him to take a taxi and he'll be in time for dinner. Fried chicken and hot biscuits. That'll fetch him." She returned to the kitchen and heard her husband pass along the invitation with somewhat less enthusiasm.

She smiled as she assured herself that it was still necessary to push Ray out of his bachelor shyness.

From her fifth floor window she saw the taxi when it stopped in front of the apartment. She was setting the nook table with a lace cloth and her best napkins. The bell rang and she heard Ray faltering to the door. Heard the forced joviality in his greeting. It almost made her laugh to hear him struggle at it. She took off her flowered apron and went into the living room.

Ray began clumsily, "Necia, this is Sherry. Been four years since I knew him in Detroit. Says he's here for a screen test with Empire Studios."

She gave her hand cordially. "How very thrilling! I'm happy to know you, Sherry. Ray hadn't told me about you." She was pleasantly interested in this blond young man with large blue eyes and a complexion as smooth as her own. His sand-color suit brightened his blond-

ness to a startling degree. No wonder he was trying for the films!

Ray was fumbling for cigarettes on the table. "Smoke, Sherry? . . . Oh, no, of course you never did . . . How about cocktails, Necia?"

Sherry was still holding her hand. "Old Ray did mighty well for himself," he voted. The voice was soft and possessive.

Smilingly she removed her hand and returned to the kitchen. With the three cocktails on a small silver tray she returned to the living room. Ray was awkward at what to talk about. She couldn't remember his being this way with other men. She helped:

"How did Empire hear about you, Sherry? I mean, did you have theatrical experience in Detroit? The studios send scouts everywhere."

The smooth white hand which grasped the stem of the cocktail glass was emblazoned by a large

pigeon-blood ruby on the ring finger. It was synthetic but it gave fire and value to the young flesh. More than one girl must have laid awake in the night and thought about that hand.

He was answering her question. "Not a scout, no. Empire never heard of me till I bruised my knuckles on their famous door."

"I hope they were impressed. Have you seen the test?"

He took a swallow from the glass. "They liked my response to color photography. Had to admit it was tops. But they said I lacked heroic qualities. And my voice, it seems, is nice but juvenile." His eyes glinted resentfully as he took another swallow. "And oh yes! They said I had too much fat on the buttocks."

She heard Ray choke slightly on his drink. Her laughter carried the right note of sympathy. "What nonsense! You're not fat at all. What was the final verdict?"



He finished the cocktail. "Oh, the usual letdown. Extra parts for awhile if I cared to register with Central Casting. Always a possibility that a small character part might arise."

"I hope you registered."

"I did not. I haven't come all the way from Detroit to play in a mob scene now and then."

"What a pity!" she consoled. "Ray, don't you think he was treated rather shabbily? I mean, an attractive personality deserves some recognition."

Sherry snickered. "Don't ask Ray to praise me. It's the hardest thing he ever did. I'm not complaining of their treatment. They were kind and thorough. The young cameraman took no end of trouble when he posed me for the closeups. The most gorgeous eyes! I think some of the technicians are better looking than the actors."

Why was Ray so glum? She set the plates of chicken and mashed potatoes and peas on the table and was passing the hot biscuits. Sherry was willing to talk if Ray wasn't.

"Honestly, I don't mean to imply that the studio was stupid, but I do think I rate a small part. Besides, I want to live in Southern California. I liked Detroit well enough at one time—especially when Ray was there." He wagged his head in amused memory at something. "We were both doing war work which was too heavy for us. The steel plates nearly ruined my hands. Ray didn't mind so much because he's strong, but he was plenty weary when we staggered into our room in the evening. It was the housing emergency which brought us together."

She poured tea and sat down. The bored expression on Ray's face puzzled her. Sherry chattered on.

"The room was small and had a

weird smell, I remember. One small clothes closet, if you please, for all my clothes and Ray's few. We never knew where anything was. One night we were reduced to a single pair of pajamas between us. I slept in the pants and Ray wore the shirt." He burst into laughter. "It was too unbearably funny when he forgot and jumped out of bed at six o'clock to take the morning paper from the startled chambermaid."

Ray's expression remained sober. She couldn't figure it. Of course Sherry was overacting a little, but it was all in fun. She was glad when the dinner was over and she had declined Sherry's demand to wash the dishes. They went back to the living room with a noticeable vacuum in the air. She tried to break it with another question:

"You won't take the verdict of only one studio, will you?"

"I'm afraid I will," Sherry admitted. "The test was expert and I've swallowed the big bad medicine. Lost confidence in my acting. Never had much anyway. No, I'll just trot home to Detroit. I suppose I can still have fun in the old town."

Ray said solemnly, "You can always jump in the lake."

Sherry giggled without offense. "Why, you rat! I can't swim and you know it." He turned back to Necia. "Ray was carrying a torch for a sort of war-time sweetheart and I guess he was having dreams about her, because sometimes when I woke up he had both arms—"

"Sherry!" Ray's tone was a stop-signal. "Let's leave out silly dreams."

Sherry grinned at his hostess. "Oh, well, it was a good story while it lasted."

She urged, "Why not find some other kind of work here?"

He reached out and patted her hand. "Thanks, my dear. If I stay, will you give Ray a free night occasionally?"