

IT'S ABOUT THAT TIME

SENIOR YEAR—It didn't seem much different from any other year, the Senior thought to himself.

When he had been a freshman, the Seniors had been a class apart. They'd been older, wiser, worldlier, even a little bit *bigger* somehow. Just as it had been in high school, they were a world removed from the lower classmen. Every time a Senior—with an imaginary capital letter attached to him—had stopped to talk and joke with him, it had been a lift, a reassurance that he was really a *college* man now.

Now he was there, and somehow the perspective was all different. It was the Seniors who were the regular guys, his buddies, his classmates. He saw the freshmen moving around the campus, groping for a place, and he didn't think he had ever been a freshman—just as, three years ago, he didn't think that he was ever going to be a Senior.

It was the same old *him*, wasn't it? The same interests, the same buddies, the same classes.

The book in his lap was an unnatural weight and he set it aside and stared out the window at the autumn day, drumming his fingers on the chair arm. Outside, the air was cool and clean, and the sky was spotted with little cotton-candy clouds, and the mountains were flecked with the season's first snow.

No, it wasn't the same, nothing was the same, the Senior decided, and he felt that he'd known it all along.

Tomorrow he would be sixty years old. Tomorrow he would be a smiling, wrinkled old grandfather, and the laughing girl who shared his secrets now would be white-haired and quiet.

And he'd watch the kids playing across the street, and he'd think to himself, Pop, you were never like that. And the kids would play in the sun and the autumn, and never believe that they would ever be sixty years old.

It was starting already, he thought with a little amusement and a little fear. Now he was "Mister" to the kids, just as much a grown-up as his father had been a dozen years ago. Now nobody ever called him "young man" or "sonny" any more.

I still have until June, he thought mischievously. I can still be a kid for eight months longer.

His mood shifted as he daydreamed about the mad, foolish, childish things he would still do before that frighteningly imminent June came crashing through to the front of the calendar. He thought of the mountains and the beaches, of parties and pranks, of laughter and love.

Twenty-first year.

Year of Commencement, he thought, sobering again. Year of Decision, Year of Orientation. Year of the death of childhood, the year when the preliminaries were completed and the real test began.

It's about that time, the Senior thought with a new seriousness. If I'm not ready to pull up roots, it's about that time. If I'm not willing to say good-byes, to stand in my cap and gown and shake hands with guys that I've loved as brothers and know that I'll never see again, then I've got eight months to make ready.

Outside the sky was dusky now, and the approaching sunset spoke with throaty blues and whispering pinks. Warming at the lovely colors of the autumn sky, the Senior stood and gazed thoughtfully at the quiet lawn.

The Senior had a fatal weakness for pretty sunsets. Throwing on his jacket, he deserted the room and walked eagerly through the hallways. Here and there yellow lights were on now, shading gracefully into the somber twilight.

I have eight months to go, and then I shall be a man, the Senior said to himself matter-of-factly. Soon there would be responsibilities, commitments, and necessities. Soon I will have common sense, soon I will be mature and responsible.

In eight months and a little more I shall be a voter, a professional man, a family man, a prominent citizen, a grandfather.

Meanwhile, the Senior thought warmly, I am twenty years old, strong, self-reliant, and quite free to do what I please. With a heavy inclination to do so.

And nobody's going to stop me if I want to go chasing sunsets.

Bright-eyed, the Senior walked out into the autumn air.

—Marty Tangora '57