

THE SOPHOMORE: HALF A MAN

THE SOPHOMORE laughed a little bit to himself as he gazed through his window at the horrible mess in the courtyard below. In the center of the jumbled heap were two beds, piled high with clothing, linens, spreads, and what have you. Around the outside his eyes picked out a chest of drawers, a dozen or so pairs of shoes, several desks, countless books, an alarm clock, some chairs, some wastebaskets, and some lamps—and he was sure there was more, though he couldn't make it out from his window.

Ditch Day had come early this year, he thought. Probably the seniors had planned to take their traditional day off very early in third term this year, in the hope that the lowerclassmen would be caught off guard. They had been off guard—for about a half an hour; then the usual sadistic practices had begun.

Ditch Day was a funny tradition, he mused; at least part of it seemed a little strange to him. Sure, it was natural enough for the seniors to all take the same day off every year, to ditch their classes and head for the beach. But it wasn't quite clear to the Sophomore why the other guys had to go and make such a mess of everything as their part of the tradition.

He wondered how Ditch Day had developed historically. When had the first jealous freshman stacked a senior's room while the senior was taking his ditch? Why had it become the proper thing to do, to use Ditch Day as a day of revenge? What the Sophomore really would like to do was, instead of going around stacking the seniors' rooms, to take off for the beach with them. Sort of an All-School Ditch Day instead of just for the seniors.

Still, it wasn't that he hadn't enjoyed his part in the sadism. He had helped fill the oil drum with water in the former ASCIT president's room, and had helped empty a dozen vacuum cleaner bags full of dust onto the floor of another unlucky senior. It certainly was a good way to blow off steam.

He was a little bit jealous of the guys in Fleming who had dreamed up the neatest stunt in years. He hadn't actually seen it, but from what he had heard, they had rotated one senior's room through ninety degrees! The bed and desk and chair were propped up on the wall. Paintings and wall decorations were now on the floor and ceiling. The floor lamp had been set on its side, and even the light switch had been transplanted. The door even had been taken off its regular hinges and hinged at the top (or bottom, he forgot which). You could just walk into the room (so he had heard) and lie down on the floor, and it looked like you were standing up. It had really been an inspired job.

Third term certainly had arrived. The sun was shining

every day, almost, and the smog wasn't usually enough even to irritate your eyes. The air was getting hot, and the classrooms were getting warmer and the classes drowsier. It was always hard for the Sophomore to stay attentive through two or three hours of classes in the mornings, but it was impossible now—and that was a sure sign of spring. Another sign was the slowly increasing number of wet spots on the concrete, where premature waterfights, forerunners of the full-scale wars of the next few weeks, had spent themselves.

Probably the best sign of all was the faint shade of brown that was beginning to show on the faces of the undergrads. Almost everyone had been to the beach a few times now. There was a bright red face at the dinner table almost every night, sported often by one of those confident "I-never-burn-I-only-tan" people who characteristically end up burning brightest of all.

The Sophomore stepped back from the window and looked around his room, which was not quite the shambles that the courtyard was, but was hardly a model of good housekeeping. He noticed the house social program that was pinned up on the wall next to the door, and reminded himself to get on the stick and get some girls lined up for the fabulous round of third-term parties.

It's April already, he thought with a start. April of my sophomore year. Two more months and my college days are half over! What was going to be next? He sympathized with the seniors, who were thinking two more months and it's all over, all of it—except for the ones for whom grad school might provide a short-term extension of their college life. But he'd just left high school a few months ago, it seemed like, and now college was half gone. If a high-school graduate is a boy and a college graduate is a man, then I'm half a man now, he smiled to himself. Half a man. What will I be like in two more years? he wondered sleepily.

Hey, he thought, snapping out of it, if I'm going to Little Corona tomorrow I'd better knock off that calculus homework.

The last thing he wanted to do! He wanted to go down to the courtyard and sit and talk, or read a magazine in the lounge, or call up his girl, or just sack out, or something—anything except that homework.

Serves me right for wanting to get an education, he thought with a forced grimace. He sat down at his desk and pulled down his book, and then stopped to gaze out the window at the evening sky one last time.

Two years and I'll be a man, he thought again. Let's make 'em good years.

Resignedly he started in on the hated homework.

—Marty Tangora '57