

TURNING POINT

THE SOPHOMORE set his bags down against the wall of the station and walked over to the tracks, looking to the south for some sign of the train.

Choo-choo, he thought happily to himself, choo-choo, and in forty and a half hours I'll be home, two thousand miles away from Pasadena and three months removed from Tech. Choo-choo.

There wasn't any sign of any train. His spirits dampened, he walked back the other way, and then stopped to look toward the east, not toward Mecca but in the direction instead of the Caltech campus, which lay only a mile or two away, over the buildings and down the quiet streets.

Why should I be so glad to get away? he asked himself. You'd think a college kid would hate the summers, would be already anxiously awaiting the beginning of the new year. College years were the brightest of all, and college life was the liveliest of all, and the best—that was the way you were supposed to look at it.

Actually, he wasn't as glad as all that to be going home. He was looking forward to the reunion with his high-school friends (who were scattered in colleges all over the Middle West) and he was looking forward to his job as a relief from the nine-month ordeal of classes. But he certainly was going to miss student house life, and Caltech life, with all its little peculiarities which he was coming to respect.

He tried to evaluate his sophomore year. Socially, he'd shown some improvement, he decided, but not nearly enough. He'd still feel backward at home in the company of his friends who had gone the route of co-education; but he had made strides.

Nothing he had done during this spring term had worked out quite right, the Sophomore realized, but nothing had been a complete failure. He hadn't dated enough, he hadn't horsed around enough, he hadn't studied enough—but somehow he felt that now he was more fun-conscious, more social-conscious, and even more study-conscious than he'd been a few months back.

It suddenly occurred to him that just now, standing on the station platform and evaluating his sophomore year, he hadn't given much more than a passing thought to his academic side.

That was characteristic at Tech, he thought. You just

don't worry about the academic side when you're at Tech. You can count on that to take care of itself; your real responsibility is to develop your other sides, to try to keep pace in every other way with the students at other colleges whom you are outdistancing in a scholastic way.

We take it for granted, he thought, following the idea along, that we're learning. Emphasis on studying disappears; emphasis on grades becomes more obvious, for the simple reason that *you know* you're learning but only grades can communicate that fact to other people, people who don't know Caltech.

The thing is, the Sophomore decided with a sudden rush of feeling, that what you *don't* know can really hurt you. You *can't* be sure when you're at Caltech that you're learning to live with other people, that you're learning the enjoyment and appreciation of life that is really the most important aspect of an education.

What a splendid rationalization! he smiled to himself. Or maybe it's the *truth*. But anyway, it was a good operating hypothesis. It was Caltech's responsibility to make him a good scientist or engineer, he decided, and it was his own responsibility to make himself a good citizen and a well-rounded human being.

Well, Caltech was coming through. There was no getting around it; he knew a hell of a lot more now than he'd known a year back. Science had lost its glamor for him, but he still felt at home with a technical education.

And if *he* wasn't coming through with his part of the bargain, well, by gosh, now was the time to start. Three summer months at home, among people I know, in places I know, learning what I want and how to get it. That ought to be the turning point.

Pretty logical turning point—half way through his college days. It *did* seem like the Big Fork in the Great Highway of Life, and he was determined to return to Pasadena in the fall far more alive, far more alert, far more *conscious* than he'd ever know how to be before.

Down the tracks to the south, a glint of steel heralded the approach of the streamliner, and the Sophomore—now a Junior—stopped philosophizing, and began to hum a tune.

"Sweet Chariot," he murmured to himself, "comin' for to carry me home."

—Marty Tangora '57