

# The Beaver

## A STUDENT'S MONTH AT CALTECH

**T**HE Beaver put down his slipstick, lit a cigarette, and gazed out on the afternoon sun in the House court. A dozen of his friends were basking around the green steel card table, in comfortable shirtsleeves, just like the perennial Yearbook pictures of Leisure in the Student Houses. No use fighting this thing, he decided, and gathered up books, blankets, pillow, and portable radio. Out on the wide lawn between the Houses and the parking lot sprawled the other sunworshippers. He spread out the blanket, peeled off his shirt, and sprawled, too. "What an easy life!" from some ironic voice.

Spring had definitely infiltrated into Tech, he mused, and indolently closed the cover of his English book. Raises hell with good intentions. He wondered if the biologists had analyzed its insidious influence on Techmen's snake-blood. With spring came bock beer, and mutual approbation societies were springing up to quaff it on warm evenings at the Skip Inn—at least those sentimentalists who didn't like chrome-plated bars and had a soft place in their hearts for the sudsy 65-cent pitcher at the Skip. While it was here, bock even replaced our incessant mugs of stout, which the wise chemists, after diligent research, had reported was as high as 10 percent alcohol. Bock was simply the essence of spring.

Tops were down on the convertibles; last Sunday they had helped open the season at Corona. Lay there in the warm sand and worried about an unfinished lab report and the looming reckoning with blue slips. But now blue slips were out and the Beaver was still alive. He only got one, and he didn't like the professor anyway. He rolled over on the blanket and listened to the others talking about how easy it would be to make the roof between Fleming and Ricketts into a long sun-deck with a little privacy. It was a good idea, but these things that sound easy never seemed to get done. Buildings and Grounds moved in devious, hierarchial ways.

### Senior Ditch Day

With spring would come Senior Ditch Day. The Beaver wondered if the Senior wheels had set the secret day yet; the guys in his class wanted to know and even sent a spy to the last Senior Class meeting. He remembered with some satisfaction how last year the news had leaked and several Seniors had been barred and bolted in their rooms the night before with diabolic efficiency. The Beaver decided, come his Senior year, he would leave early, but in the meantime he would hope no Seniors did this year.

The Institute was raising tuition to \$600 for next year. The Beaver beaked long and loud with his friends and listened to the blossoming financial arguments pro and con from everyone who had taken Econ 2, or who claimed to know about the Budget up in Throop. They discussed where best to scratch up the \$100 needed to supplement the GI Bill, and idly wondered what com-

panies would hire green ME's and Physicists for summer work. For all their bitter complaining, the Beaver knew that the High Command in Throop was implacable. They were probably up to their ears with creditors anyway, he decided. Next year's student body would be smaller, almost down to pre-war size, and it would again be high school graduates who came as Freshmen—not Army graduates, as the Beaver's class had been. He had gone the noon of the Frosh entrance exams to scrutinize the hopefuls for the Class of '53 over a cup of caffeine in the Greasy Spoon, and had sorrowfully watched a strangely eager throng of high school seniors neglecting lunch for the rapt discussion of quadratic equations, faradays of electricity, and  $f=ma$ . They looked so young and eager, he thought, but they'll learn. He drowned his aged experience in bitter coffee and lit a philosophical cigarette.

### Joy in Techville

A warm glow suffused his innards as the Beaver browsed over the *California Tech's* sports page. Every event had been a victory. It was a great season: Swimmers Splash Easily Over Redlands; Engineer Baseballers Drop Whittier; Thinclads Take Honors Over LA State and Loyola. Even the hated Oxy had seen ignominious defeat at the murderous hands of the Caltech tennis team. There was indeed joy in Techville, as the mighty Goon had enthusiastically crowed in his column, and Hustlin' Hal Musselman's bald and worried head was now perpetually wreathed in an Eisenhower grin around his eternal cigar. This sort of thing, the Beaver realized, doesn't happen often, but he was happy to be here when it did. He penitently resolved again to get out and cheer for the team next Saturday.

The Beaver, stricken with curiosity, climbed the stairs in Ricketts and entered the kitchenette where he could join the others in viewing Haufe's Monster—an impressively clicking electrical machine which pitted its wits against yours in tit-tat-toe. Fascinated, he watched the skeleton of wire (a quarter-mile of it) and relays dictate plays to a tit-tat-toe board, lighting up the squares mysteriously as it beat or tied comer after comer. The machine never lost unless its master threw a special switch, causing it to lose interest apparently, and let mere humans beat it. He wondered if the infernal thing stayed up all night while people slept, and thought up new and clever stratagems. The creative imagination of these EE's follows strange paths, the Beaver thought, as he recalled Boblett's Van de Graaf generator which had terrorized the maids in Blacker, or the great sparking devil's head they had built for the big Interhouse Dance.

Like most Techmen, the Beaver took satisfaction and pleasure in scoring his professors and instructors in the Tau Bate poll. There was faintly vengeful satisfaction here in having a means to zero those instructors who lectured dully or didn't care about the student's problems and those who were unjust or self-righteous and superior with their great knowledge. But he was also pleased to lavish laurels on the men who were humanly interested in students, who were dynamic and clear in lectures and made him enjoy their courses by simple force of their own enthusiasm. The poll was a good thing. He had watched many men examine their teaching after the first poll last year and come up with better courses. The Beaver had always felt that students were the best judges of their courses; he slid his slide rule and notes under his chair in the lecture room and filled in the twenty answers on the sheet with loving care.

—Jim Hendrickson, '50