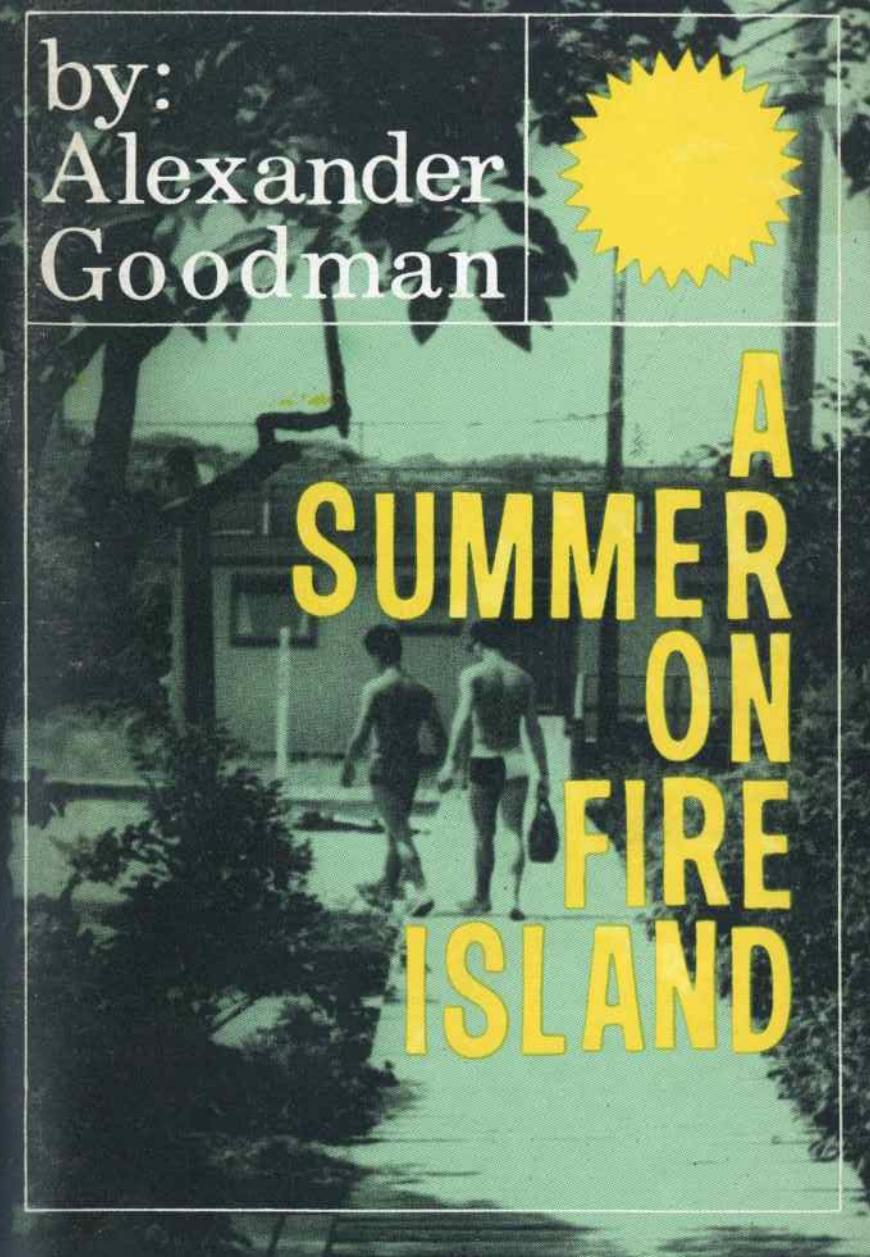


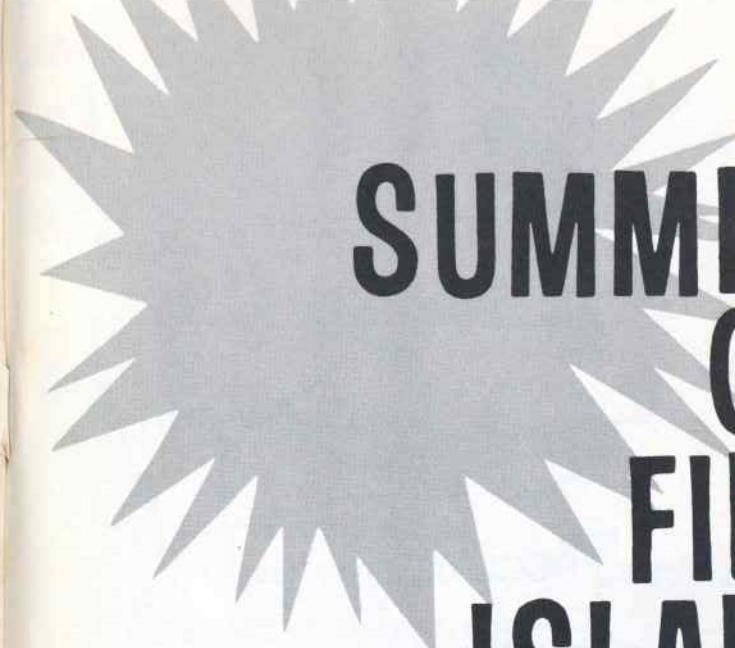


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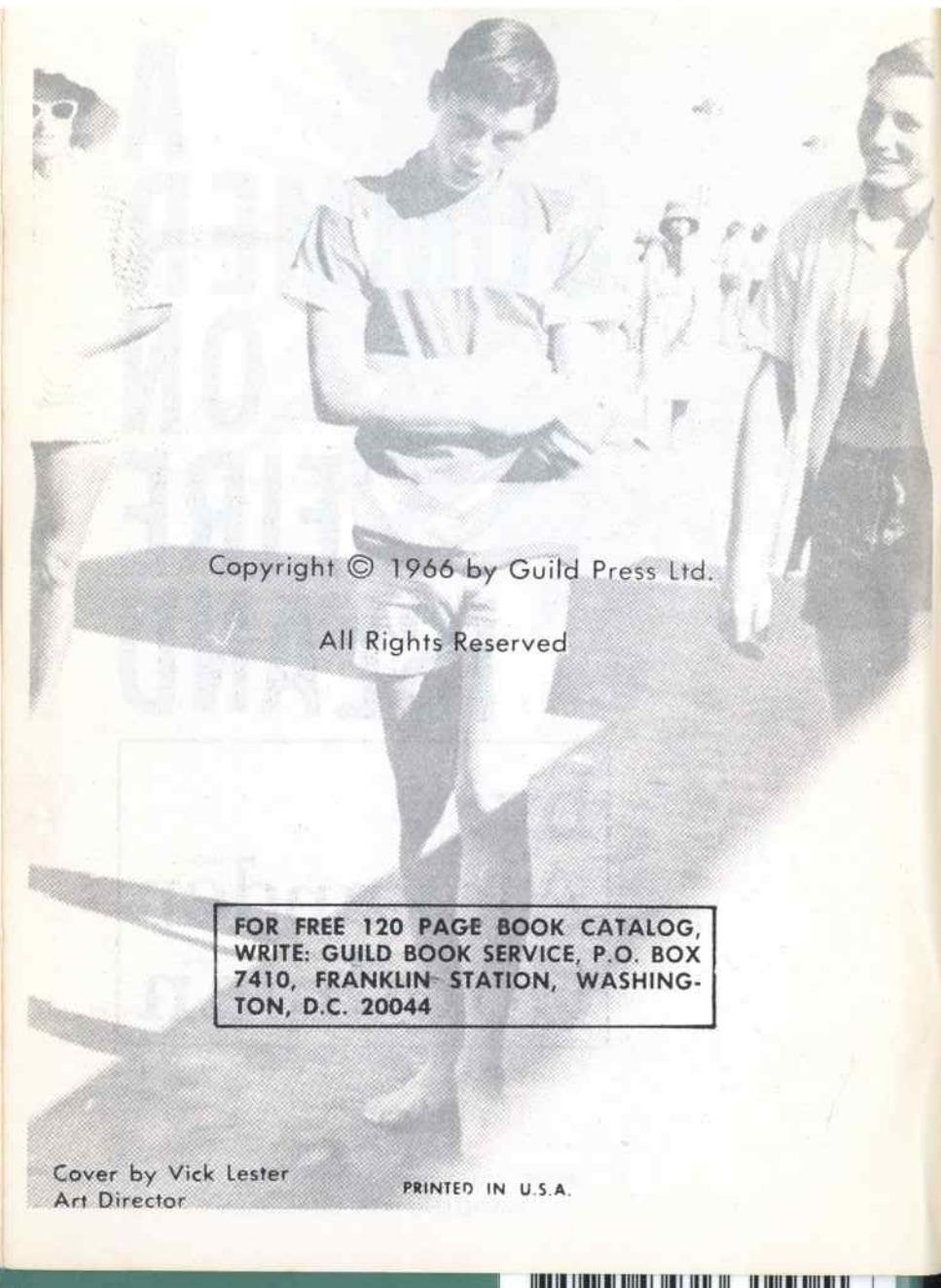


# A SUMMER ON FIRE ISLAND

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## CHAPTER ONE

### A SUMMER ON FIRE ISLAND

Summer in America stands apart from the rest of the year. Fall, winter and spring are all seasons for work, but summer is for rest and play. It's a time for the pale, undernourished libido to push, if it can, right through the high walls of the ego and frolic in the air and grow strong in the sun.

I had always envied those lucky ones who could just like that drop work and take off for a whole summer, who could blithely move bag and baggage to the mountains or the beach, and for a whole season seriously concentrate on relaxing, on finding out about themselves, on studying what happens when suddenly all the city pressures are lifted from their labor-bent souls. How many bleak, work-filled years did I, myself, yearn for a whole season of unshackled self-indulgence!

Last spring, I decided to be among the free, to joyously bathe in the soft winds of leisure, to languorously lie in the warm rays of indolence. I decided to rent a cottage at Fire Island for the whole summer. I would live, to be specific, in Cherry Grove—a very special part of Fire Island.

Why there? you may ask. There were many reasons: one, the place itself is very beautiful; two, I believed it

was a good place for writing; three, as I am a homosexual, the Grove for me has always had a strong fascination. I had always thought it was one of the most unusual places in the world. I had always wanted to live there for a whole season so I could study and enjoy it more closely and intimately.

What makes this place unique? The answer is simple —it has a population made up almost exclusively of homosexuals. Most of the property is owned by homosexuals. It is an almost completely gay town.

The very distinctive thing we have here, then, is a community with the greatest concentration of gay persons anywhere in the world.

I was very curious as to what this uncommon community would be like. What would a whole village of queens be like? Could they live together in harmony and peace? What kind of homes would they have? What would it be like, living among a group of people who are boldly willing to proclaim their difference from the rest of the world? And, of course, I wondered what sex would be like in this unusual place.

Before I go any further, however, I must explain that Fire Island, as a whole, is not homosexual. The island itself is a very narrow, long strip of land just off Long Island and running parallel to it. There are several communities on this strip. Of them, only one, Cherry Grove, is almost entirely gay. The Pines is half and half, while there is actually no known gay activity in the other small towns of the island.

Despite this fact, Fire Island has become synonymous with Cherry Grove and homosexuality. When he wants a laugh, all Jack Paar needs to do is say "Fire Island." This is perhaps unfair to the many straight Fire Island

people who have owned homes at this resort for years. I sometimes feel sorry for the straight young fellow at Ocean Beach, who often has to face frankly suspicious eyes when he talks to acquaintances of his lively Fire Island weekends.

Each little village on the island has its own special personality. Of course they all have in common the same beach, the same bay, the same complete and blissful lack of roads (and automobiles too, of course), and they all share the free and easy atmosphere of most of the Eastern Seaboard resorts.

But then the strong differences begin appearing. Physically Ocean Beach, for instance, filled with husband-hunting secretaries and sex-hungry college boys, looks very much like the lower-middle-class residential area in a city like Cincinnati. Quiet, sedate Point of Woods, on the other hand, is more like a midget Newport.

Both of these places are very different from the lively, extraordinary Cherry Grove.

Physically, the Grove is only about a mile long and three small city blocks wide. As you first arrive on the ferry, you can take the front face of it in at a glance. From the open top deck you can see the Grove's largest and most beautiful house, "Belvedere," and the several other smaller sized cottages facing the bay. You notice how the dock itself, with the few stores around it, lies in the direct center of the Grove.

It is not a very impressive place, this first time, as you carry your suitcase up the narrow wooden walk toward the ocean. You see several empty lots covered with debris. The boxlike wooden houses along the walk look makeshift and dirty. The place as a whole doesn't look too well cared for.

But the beauty of the Grove swiftly grows on you.

In your room you quickly take off your summer suit and change into a pair of shorts. Then in your bare feet you step through the glass doors of your living room onto the sundeck. From there you walk to the top of the wooden stairs which lead down to the beach. At the top of these stairs you see spread before you a rippling carpet of ocean gently teasing a floor of golden sand. Sweeping up from the beach is a clear, cool breeze which reminds you of the hot, sticky city you left behind this afternoon. You think of your sweltering city friends and you laugh.

You then take a leisurely stroll down one of the many wooden walks—the rickety thoroughfares of the Grove, all of which are raised a foot or so above the soft, marshy earth. Now you can take a closer look at the houses.

You are glad to find that as you walk farther away from the dock the cottages increase in cleanliness, elegance, and style.

With childish joy you look at the many brightly colored flags, gracefully waving over each of the houses. They are all kinds, all shapes. Many Old Glories, many from other countries. But many aren't national designs at all. Flags colored bright chartreuse or lavender, made of satin, silk, or chiffon, flags joyfully swishing in the glittering blue sky, are more like bold gay emblems proclaiming their owners' right to have fun, to live their lives as they please.

You find delight in the abundant many-colored flowers of the well-tended gardens which often encircle trickling water fountains and pale classical statuary.

Each house, you discover, has a distinction of its own:

a delightful garden, a large romantic picture window, or a spacious sundeck on which you see a boy setting a dinner table with candles and flowers.

It is a lovely place, you almost say aloud. It has definitely more charm and style than any straight beach resort you've ever seen.

The cottages have no street numbers, only names, each one of which often contains some sly gay pun: Twin Picques, Trade Entrance, Peter's Inn, Mary-Land, Boys in the Attic, Funny Girls, The Cherry Netherlands, Les Boys, Oh-Lay!, Belle Grove.

There are usually three or four tenants to a house. One person alone is seldom able to swing the rent, for the Grove is not an inexpensive place. The rents are considered to be the highest on the island, usually running from \$1,000 to \$3,000 for the season (May 15th to September 15th). For a furnished 4-room cottage the average rent is \$1,500. Few young men can plunk down \$500 for just a third of a summer house, for only 3 or 4 months.

This is the reason why the average age of the Cherry Grover is higher than one would think. From observing the boys on the beach and at the bars, one assumes that the average age is from 25 to 35. You learn later, however, that the older residents often keep to their houses, seldom going to the beach or the bars. The average age in Cherry Grove is actually around 40.

What are these summer residents actually like? Most of them have responsible, well-paying jobs—as hairdressers (the largest minority), dress designers, antique dealers, interior decorators, teachers, plus all kinds of other positions. Some have college backgrounds, some not. As a whole, they're a lively, pleasure-loving,

but definitely nonintellectual group, preferring musical comedies to art films, mystery novels to serious ones.

Let us now zoom in on what I will select as an average Cherry Grover (of course he really isn't, as it is difficult to choose an average anything, but anyway—). I will christen this fellow Charles W. Grover. He works as a Seventh Avenue dress salesman and lives with his sister and brother-in-law in the Bronx.

He has been coming to the Grove for the last 5 years now. Each of these years he has shared a cottage with his very old friend, Louis Bamburg. This season they are staying in a 5-room house facing the ocean. They call it "Gayville," and they share it with a third fellow, William Steel, whom they do not know very well. Steel, 38, works as an editor in a publishing house; Bamburg, 45, is in wallpaper. Charles is the baby of the house, aged 35.

In the office of New Styles, Limited, on a Friday at exactly 5:15, Charles grabs his weekend suitcase and then a cab which drops him off at Penn Station where, just in time, he catches the 5:29 on the Long Island Railroad.

Once on board he quickly makes his way to the bar car. It's standing room only but he doesn't mind. Charles has learned that a trip fortified by three or four vodka-and-tonics takes half the time of one without. And at the bar he usually finds one or more other Cherry Grovers with whom he can catch up on the latest gossip. This helps still more to shorten the 3-hour journey. Ahhh, there's Winnie Jurrow!

"Charles, darling!" Winnie, a baby-faced man of 40, calls to Charles as he pushes through the crowd.

In the city Charles, a tall, well-built, masculine-

appearing man, is of necessity circumspect and discreet. In the city he would, at all cost, avoid running into someone as loud and obvious as Winnie. But once on this train, chugging toward the island, with one or two drinks under his belt, Charles feels he can relax, drop his stiff, straight pose, and welcome the shrill but amusing chatter of a queen like Jurrow.

"Did you hear the news, Charles? Marty Epinger was caught in a raid at the St. Mark's baths on Tuesday. But surely you know Miss Epinger, don't you, Charles? She's Miss Frankenburg's first cousin. Yes, that's her, the one with a toupee. Isn't it awful? Miss Frankenburg had to go down to the Tombs to bail her out. Afterwards, Miss Frankenburg was so upset she came over to my place to cry on my shoulder at 3 in the morning! And did she look a wreck! It was very inconvenient, I must say, as I was smack in the middle of entertaining a most attractive young sailor. But you know me, Charles, anything for a friend."

A large percentage of the older Cherry Grovers habitually refer to their acquaintances in the third person feminine.

"Then on Thursday I saw poor Miss Penelope. She was so unhappy! She had just spent \$20 on the most beautiful silk kimono for Miss Wellington's Night in Tokyo soiree on Saturday. Then she discovers Miss Wellington absolutely refuses to let her step one foot into her house, claiming Miss P. has been lasciviously playing around with Miss W.'s new houseboy (you know, that scrumptious Italian number with the big schwantz, Mario, he's called). Well, it's true, of course. Miss P. has slept with the boy. She would be the first to admit it. But then, hasn't everyone? Haven't you, Charles? I

have—twice, and he's divine!!"

Finally the train churns to a slow stop in Sayville. A throng of taxi drivers stand before the open trunks of their cabs, yelling, "Taxi to the ferry! Taxi, taxi!"

But Charles has a full bladder. (The five drinks on the train must have had something to do with it.) He rushes into the Sayville station, where he suddenly remembers that this is the only stop on the whole Long Island Railroad without a men's room. There was one there once upon a time, but its overwhelming popularity closed it down.

So Charles is forced to rush over to the bar on the other side of the tracks. It's a sprawling, dirty, straight, drinking place, smelling heavily of stale beer. Somber gray and brown types are talking to each other in low, solemn tones as Charles rushes by them, headed for "the room."

He has always thought it rather funny, how on every Sunday evening this very ordinary, straight bar will suddenly be overwhelmed by waves of screaming faggots, forced to wait here for the New York train. The bar has survived it all these years, somehow, thinks Charles, proving perhaps that integration can work.

Charles doesn't know the three silent boys sitting with him in the cab headed for the ferry. They seem to be purposely avoiding looking at him as they pet the well-behaved miniature poodles politely sitting in the laps of each. Probably snob-queens from the Pines, he thinks.

He dislikes this ride. It angers him that the cab company charges 75¢ apiece for a very uncomfortable 5-minute trip.

But he loves the ride on the ferry. He always sits up-

stairs in the cool, open air.

He likes slowly gliding through the channel, past the many private boats and yachts, until they reach the expansive bay, where the ferry, picking up speed, creates foaming, arrowlike waves as it chugs toward the cloud-festooned island in the distance.

On board there are a few more friends for Charles to wave to, a poodle or two to pet. Except for two somber-looking lesbians in slacks, the ferry is exclusively packed with gay, suit-and-tie Madison Avenue types, looking a bit exhausted from the railroad trip and their hot week of humidity in the city.

But all their eyes light up and they smile involuntarily as the boat slows down at the dock and they see a colorful, noisy, half-naked crowd waiting for them, a crowd of slim boys in swimming suits, girls (real ones) in bright capri pants, barking dogs, waving friends, roommates with little wagons at their side for carrying groceries and luggage.

"Jimmy, how good to see you!" calls a large, heavy man in flowered shorts. "You must be exhausted. I have a cold pitcher of martinis waiting for you, poor dear."

"Here, Harry, take this suitcase and these flowers," a tiny, well-dressed queen tells his tall, well-built friend. "Yes, Mary, I brought your geisha costume, and don't worry, dear. It looks fine."

A good-looking, slender boy in a swimsuit tells his roommate as they walk down the dock, "Listen, Jerry, Arthur isn't coming out this week. No, not at all. I know he gave his solemn promise, but his mother died last Tuesday. Does that sound phoney to you? He swore on the telephone it was true."

"Louis," Charles calls to his roommate on the dock,

"grab this bag. I brought you some lovely lamb chops for tomorrow night. Bea sends her regrets but she can't make it this weekend. So you can invite Eddie to dinner tomorrow, if you want to."

"OK," says Louis as he takes the bag from Charles. Then they walk up to their cottage.

"Steel has brought out a guest this weekend," Louis carefully announces. From the tone of his voice, Charles can tell that his friend is not pleased with this. Charles knows already that Louis does not approve of Bill Steel, a quiet, masculine type, very unlike most of their more obvious friends. And Louis usually does not like any guests at all, except his own.

"What's the guest like?" Charles asks curiously.

"Looks like a hustler to me. Young, a lot of muscles, but nothing else as far as I'm concerned."

Hmm! Sounds interesting, Charles thinks. He and Louis have distinctly different tastes in boys. If Louis doesn't like someone, it is a good sign that Charles might.

Once in the house, Charles immediately exchanges his street clothes for a pair of swim trunks. Then he makes it over to the living room bar, where he mixes his sixth vodka-and-tonic of the afternoon.

"Why isn't the music playing?" he asks Louis. "This place is like a morgue!" Then he goes over to the phonograph, on the spindle of which he places five show tune albums. "Funny Girl" is the first. It's the big hit of the island this summer.

"Did you hear about Miss Penelope, Louis? She's threatening to put poison in Miss Wellington's soya sauce if she's not invited to her sukiyaki party Saturday night."

"How stupid! She should jump for joy she's not going. Everyone knows Miss Wellington gives the worst parties on the island. The food is always cold, the drinks weak, the company dull."

"You're not saying this just because she never sends you an invitation, are you?"

"Perhaps, but it's still true, nevertheless."

William Steel comes down the stairs from his bedroom with his guest, a young fellow with a very good physique. Steel himself is a large, shapeless man, now wearing a conservative outfit of matching shorts and jacket. His friend is dressed only in a latex bathing suit which he amply fills, and from his large arms and pectorals Charles can tell that he regularly works out at a gym.

"How are you, Charles?" says Steel. "This is Tony Morgan."

"Glad to meet you," the boy says and smiles as he firmly grips Charles's hand. About 22, 23, he thinks, and certainly not a hustler. His face is much too sensitive and intelligent for that.

During his next drink, he learns that Tony is actually a psychology major at Hunter and is a pleasant, well-spoken fellow, in fact.

While Charles casually converses with Steel and Tony, Louis begins preparing the dinner. They aren't going to eat, however, until 10 o'clock, after which the four of them will probably make the rounds of the bars.

In the meanwhile, it's cocktail and visiting time. Charles's old friends, Harry Mulligan and Steve Seers, drop in.

"Harry! Steve! How are you?" says Charles. "Let me fix you something to drink. Scotch? Gin? Vodka?" These

are the official Cherry Grove triumvirate. Harry has Scotch, Steve, vodka. It's a cardinal rule here that one *always* has enough liquor on hand to offer any guest as many drinks as he likes. And, of course, when you go visiting, you can expect unlimited drinks at each of your stops.

"You haven't met our new roommate, William Steel, have you, boys? And this is his friend, Tony." The eyes of Harry and Steve blaze with interest as they look over the new boy. He's really rather a rare type at the Grove. Charles is amused to notice that while they are talking to him, they are staring at Tony. But after two drinks they have to leave.

Dinner is finally ready. Louis gingerly lifts the barbecued chicken from the oven and sets it on the table. There are loud "ohs" and "ahs" as the Gayville household looks over the tantalizing red and gold bird, smelling of spicy barbecue sauce.

Just as Charles is about to stick his fork in the chicken's succulent thigh, however, a knock is heard at the door. Charles frowns, but Louis says, "Come in."

And in noisily prance 10 boys, all of them dressed in very elaborate older-women, Helen-Hokinson-type outfits. The room is suddenly swimming with feather boas, picture hats, printed dresses. At first glance they look to Charles just like his mother's Wednesday knitting club.

The boys at the dinner table scream with laughter.

One fellow with a blond wig and a pair of pince-nez perched over his nose speaks in a cracked, Eleanor Roosevelt voice, "We just thought we would give you lucky people the pleasure of seeing us before we went to the PTA meeting."

"Miss St. John, you are just too much!" says Louis. "I would swear you were my Aunt Sophie from Akron. Now, you dear girls just hold it while your mother gets out her old reliable Polaroid. This is worth keeping for posterity!"

They're a riot, thinks Charles, as he watches the group cavort around the room. Then he looks over at Tony. I'll bet he's never seen anything like this! His eyes are as big as saucers. He and Steel have completely forgotten their food. Charles, however, lifts one sliver of chicken to his mouth, but discovers he can't possibly eat it. The noisy commotion has taken away his appetite.

Another cardinal rule at the Grove is that of hospitality. All guests are welcome at any time, early in the morning, late at night, during dinner. You *cannot* say please come back later. You must invite them in, ask them if they would like a drink, invite them to dinner. Fortunately this PTA chapter has eaten already. And after a few pictures are taken they leave.

But the dinner is now irrevocably spoiled. Even Louis can't eat the food he has taken so much care and time to prepare.

"Well, it'll make good sandwiches for tomorrow," he says, as he carefully packs the chicken in tinfoil. Charles gets up from the table and begins clearing away the food and the dishes. He then begins washing the latter while Steel dries. Louis goes to his bedroom while Tony goes to the john.

"He seems like a very nice kid, Bill," Charles says.

"Yeah, he is. Though I don't know if it was wise bringing him out to Cherry Grove."

"Why not?"

"Well, he's pretty green about the gay life. All of this

camping and stuff might not set well with him."

"I wouldn't worry. He's a big boy now. It's time he learned the facts of gay life. He can take it."

After everything is in order Charles goes back to his bedroom, where he completely changes his clothing. He puts on a newly pressed pair of tan slacks. Then he carefully takes out a cashmere sweater from its plastic bag and pulls it over his sport shirt.

By the time he is finished, the whole household is ready to dive into the swim of the Cherry Grove night life.

They have a choice of four drinking places: 1) the rather quiet new restaurant on the dock, 2) the informal Sea Shack with its romantic, windblown deck facing the ocean, 3) the nightclub where an excellent female vocalist is singing this week, or 4) the busiest place of all, the hotel bar.

This last is by far the most popular drinking place on the island. Wherever Charles might go during the evening, he always eventually winds up here.

It's quite a large room with many tables and a long bar. And during the weekend it is often so packed the management has to turn people away.

The hotel has what some people might think of as a very odd policy in regard to this bar. It does its best to keep out straight people. Anyone who does not look queer, or is not *with* a queer, is not allowed inside. In past seasons, young toughs from Long Island would habitually come over on a Saturday night, expressly to start fights with the gay boys. They are carefully screened out now.

One of the main attractions of the bar is the dancing. It is quite unusual. In the first place, the dance floor is

bounded by wooden railings, which makes the area look like a sort of cattle pen. In the second place, the dancing itself is bizarre. According to the law, boys are not allowed to dance with each other, not even allowed to face each other, even though they don't actually touch. So the boys don't dance as partners, but as individuals. In long lines they do the Hully Gully or the Madison, while all of them face in the same direction.

They look very much like chorus boys practicing for the big show in a thirties musical movie. At the beginning of the summer the effect is sloppy, but as the season progresses it becomes a pleasure to see how professionally and gracefully these boys are able to execute the intricate steps. On a Saturday night there will sometimes be 40 men dancing, all ages, all physical types, all having a great time rhythmically moving their bodies to the insistent rock 'n' roll beat.

Charles is amused by one fellow on the floor who refuses to join in with the pack. For dance after dance, he dances his own, individual steps, completely apart from the rest and usually not in time with the music from the jukebox. Undoubtedly he is hearing the clear, distinctive beat of his own "different drummer."

Bathing suits are not allowed here after 6 p.m. (although the humid heat in this crowded room would often warrant them). On Saturday and Sunday afternoons, however, a small group of boys will do these same dances, wearing only swim trunks. Charles gets an erotic delight watching these boys with slender, deeply tanned bodies gyrate their shoulders and hips, having a kind of vicarious sex right before his eyes.

"Charles, how are you?" a dark, mature fellow says to him, as he squeezes through the crowd at the bar.

"Fine," he says brusquely, turning his face quickly away. He then pushes farther through the mob of men jammed together until he reaches a less crowded area on the other side. Peter Harkness had been his lover last summer. After a brief but furious fight, Peter had dropped Charles flatter than a pancake. Charles had been quite hurt by this affair. He hopes his "fine" this evening has been sharp and icy enough.

God, I know so many people on this island! he thinks. And how I hate running into all these past lovers, past tricks, new enemies, year after year. Each summer I say to myself I'm going somewhere else this season, but I always wind up here.

He meets many other friends, some worth a wave, some worth a hello, a few worth a minute or so of conversation. They've all been drinking just like myself, and now, like myself, they are all looking forward to some kind of sex tonight.

"Now, don't forget, after the bar closes there's going to be a gang-bang at 'The Kitty House.' Bring anyone you like, so long as he's attractive."

This sounds like fun, he thinks, but then he sees it's Milton Day who's doing the inviting. He has been to one of Milton's orgies once before. Screwing Milton was like waving it in a damp room. No, he doesn't want to get involved in anything like that tonight.

He carefully surveys the crowd. He just looks. There are quite a few attractive boys drinking and dancing, but he knows he could never make out with any of them in this place. No one makes out here. It's only a social place for dancing, drinking, dishing, and looking.

Now, who's that! he says to himself. Coming through the entranceway is a young man, 25 or so, a head taller

than anyone else in the room! A giant! But, Lordy! his build is in perfect proportion to his height. In this bar he looks like Gulliver among the Lilliputians. His contour shirt and tight pants leave little to the imagination. And the face is good too, thinks Charles. He looks just like one of those hard, handsome cowboys in the cigarette ads.

But now he's talking to someone. Who is it? I can't see his face. Now I do. Surprise, surprise! It's our weekend guest, Tony!! That boy's certainly doing well for his first night on the island. But what's happened to Steel? Surely he's an idiot to leave that lovely friend of his alone among these hungry wolves.

Charles goes to the bar and orders another drink. He feels bitterly frustrated, seeing these two tremendously attractive boys together. God, he thinks, I would be willing to pay money to go to bed with either of them. That Tony is damn attractive, he decides.

I'll go over and talk to him. I've nothing to lose. But when he looks over again at the railing where the two had been standing, he sees they are both gone. Hmm! That giant's a quick worker.

Charles finishes his drink. He tries not to think of those two beautiful boys, walking off together, soon to be alone in a room, kissing, making love. He puts his unfinished drink down. No more for tonight. He's not interested in drinking or talking or watching the dancers any more. He's interested in sex. In wild, dirty sex.

He walks out of the hotel and calmly strolls down one of the walks leading toward the Meat Rack.

It is very quiet and dark out, frightening, in a way. There are absolutely no street lamps on the walk. But Charles knows there are no muggings, no robberies in

Cherry Grove. There is really nothing to be afraid of (no sign of police on the island this weekend) as he nonchalantly walks through the pitch-black night.

He sees in the distance the red tips of cigarettes, the sudden flare of a match lighting up a face in the darkness. Then he sees, leaning in a doorway, the owner of the match, now only a dark shadow. I might like him, Charles thinks, but he doesn't feel like approaching anyone yet. He walks on. As the black, open areas increase, dark figures standing on the edge of the walk increase also.

Near the end of the walk, Charles just makes out a tall, blond young man standing against a gate. A ray of moonlight is hitting his face, which is contorted with pleasure.

The boy's trousers are down around his legs. Between these legs a shadow is energetically sucking the boy. The boy's organ glistens with spit.

He's a pretty-boy, Charles thinks, a queen, not my type. He watches for a minute and is about to go on, when the boy suddenly grabs him and firmly kisses him on the lips. Then with one hand he finds the zipper of Charles's fly and gently pulls the tab downwards. The boy then tenderly fondles Charles's now iron-hard member as if it were something infinitely precious. With two curious fingers, Charles explores the mysterious crevice between the boy's velvety-smooth buttocks.

Just from the softness around the opening, he can sense whether it is possible to penetrate this boy or not. The boy doesn't resist Charles's prying finger or tighten the opening with his anal muscles. His whole body seems to be curved toward Charles like an invitation of longing and desire.

He skillfully moves behind the boy. Then with saliva he thoroughly wets his member, which he then gently sticks between the boy's eager buttocks. But before pushing forward he slides his hands down the boy's pelvis and around the root of the organ being sucked so energetically. The lips of the man on his knees brush against Charles's fingers. Then Charles slowly pushes forward, slowly pushes that sensitive bone of himself into the slim, willing body before him.

"Oh, God!!" the boy screams, as if in great pain. But at the same time he spreads his legs farther apart and stoops over so as to more easily accept the bone demanding entrance into him.

In the meanwhile other shadows have joined them. One of these shadows is now passionately kissing the blond boy, who with one hand has found another zipper to pull down.

Charles now firmly puts his hand on the boy's waist. Then he pushes himself all the way in. It goes all the way in like a submarine penetrating the depths of an unknown sea. It feels so marvelous that he just holds it there for a minute or so. Then he pulls it back, all the way out, then suddenly, brutally, pushes it all the way in again.

"Please! You're hurting me!" the boy yells in pain. But Charles knows the boy loves this pain. He doesn't want him to stop. Charles pushes it in again and again now, not caring whether it hurts him or not.

But something goes wrong. Charles is striving now for that high, joyful peak, but it eludes him. Just when he thinks he is almost at the top he slides down. Did I have too much to drink? No, liquor has never impeded his sex before. Is it just that this boy, this thin, delicate

body, is not the body he really desires?

Again and again, almost angrily, he pushes himself into this body until he has reached the point where it is no longer pleasurable, but almost painful, and orgasm seems impossible. The traveler has lost sight of the enchanted castle. He is lost in the forest and must now either give up his quest and go home, or perform a miracle.

But after this boy has so unselfishly given me his body, I can't just take the thing out and walk away.

Of course, I could put on an act. With a few violent jerks and loud gasps and sighs, I could pretend I was coming. I've done it before.

The feeling of this body alone is not enough. I must use my mind. I must think of something, someone, who will help me reach that peak, who will guide me to the enchanted castle. Tony, Tony! Tony and that fabulous giant-cowboy in a bedroom, both of them naked, both of them passionately pressing against each other.

With a revived force and speed, Charles now thrusts himself into the boy while he is thinking of that giant-cowboy and Tony. Tony's handsome face, his glowing, shapely body! The peak is finally in sight, and the forest suddenly thins into a meadow leading to the diamond-dazzling castle lighting up the sky. A sensation like an electrical current charges through Charles's frame. Like lightning it spears the testical dam, which releases gushes of sperm through his own body and into the boy's.

The boy could feel when Charles neared his peak, and in the same rhythm he heavily hammers his organ into the mouth of the man at his feet. "I'm coming, I'm coming," he says at the same precise time the last drop

from Charles shoots into him.

While they are both standing there, breathing heavily, by means of gentle caresses on the shoulders and neck of the boy Charles tries to convey his thanks.

Then he swiftly takes it out of the boy. I must go home, he says to himself. He feels dirty, He zips up his pants and hurries back up the walk leading toward his cottage.

In the empty house, he stands against the washbowl in the bathroom while he cleans his genitals with soap and water. Louis and Bill are probably at some late party, he thinks. He then walks over to the toilet and urinates. "It's always good to urinate after screwing anyone," a gay doctor has told him once. "Clean it with soap and water and then take a piss and you can prevent getting VD," he said.

Charles walks into his bedroom. If I really want to, he thinks, I can go out again. It's still early. I can go down and see what's happening at the Meat Rack.

One orgasm in a Cherry Grove night is very little for him—and for many of the Grove boys. When he really feels like it, he is able to come five times during an evening, and that's not including all the numbers he can do for trade during the same night.

But I'm awfully tired, he tells himself. I might as well rest. It's too much of an effort walking down to the Rack, anyway. Charles also realizes that right now there is really only one boy he would really want to make love to. And there's small chance of that ever happening.

So he completely undresses, then lies back on his bed and relaxes.

He thinks over the sex he has just had on the walk. He thinks of how horrified he would have been when

he was in his twenties at this crude, fast, anonymous, animalistic lovemaking. How disgusted the discriminating, idealistic Charles of 15 years ago would have been at the mere notion of having sex in the open with strange bodies he didn't know, could hardly even see!

But he is different now. You must take whatever is offered to you on life's skimpy platter. If you wait for pheasant, you'll starve. I did enjoy it out there in the open, in the darkness—danger, dirt, nelly-boy and all. And he enjoyed it. We weren't hurting ourselves or any other human being on this earth.

It would be so easy to feel guilty, to loathe myself, to swear never to do anything like that again. But I won't. I'm determined to enjoy this nasty, scrubby life handed to me, take it or leave it. What's the use of living, if you really don't live? If you don't squeeze what you can out of every minute?

But then again, there are limits. Two years ago I went beyond those limits. It was as if I were insane, Charles thinks. Night after night he would be down at the Rack. (The whole island was calling him "The Queen of the Bushes" that season.) He would go raving wild down there. He would take off every stitch of clothes, then go mad, pursuing every hard, soft, succulent piece of skin he could find.

Then there was that one night when he let 15 guys screw him, one right after another. Why had he done it? It was physically dangerous. It could have sent him to the hospital. Why was he compelled to count up the score after each number, like a game?

It was almost as if he were purposely torturing himself, killing himself, making a St. Sebastian of himself.

After that night, Charles stayed in the city the rest

of the month. He was actually afraid to go back to the Grove. He feared the Grove, the Meat Rack, and especially himself. Since then he has radically toned down. Thank God, I'm over that madness, he thinks.

But even now, almost against his will, Charles does a lot of things he doesn't understand. He thinks of the damp, dirty, smelly subway johns in the city and the many times he has been on his knees before some man he really didn't like or desire. Yet for this man he was taking such risks! After it was over he didn't feel guilty or hate himself. He just felt ridiculous, a fool. A compulsion was leading him into slimy pools of danger where for his risks he received no joy or satisfaction.

At one time in his life he looked for one person, one lover who could cure him of these compulsions. But when he lived with Peter Harkness, it didn't work either. He was unfaithful to Peter (and Peter to him). Each moment away from the apartment, Charles would be looking for a new partner, for new sex.

And again his mind conjures up a picture of Tony. What a pleasant, good-natured kid! I'd love to go to bed with him. What if I wanted more? What would it be like if he were my lover, if we lived together? God, if I couldn't be satisfied with that beauty, I might as well give up.

But then, why would a fresh, attractive young kid like Tony be interested in an old, jaded queen like myself? Think of the hundreds of bodies you've made love to, the acres of flesh, the gallons of sweat, the semen shot down your throat, up your ass, all over your body. And you can think of that boy desiring you?

Yes, I can. I still have a hard, sexy body; a better than average face, a good-sized dong. I'm good in bed.

Can hold my own at any party. The kid wouldn't be cheated.

Where is he right now? I wonder what's he doing. Admit it, Charles, you're burning with envy and jealousy over those two boys. And while you're feeling this jealousy twisting in your mind, you're not going to sleep.

In the eye within, Charles creates the two naked bodies of Tony and the cowboy. With the utmost finesse he slips into this imaginary bedroom and places his body between theirs. With much less difficulty he has a second orgasm and then, effortlessly, he falls asleep.

• • •

At about 10 the next morning Charles is wakened by the sound of Louis washing himself in the bathroom. After lying in bed 15 minutes more, Charles himself gets up and stumbles into the same bathroom, where he showers and shaves.

He's feeling lousy. Yesterday's heavy drinking has finally caught up with him. A tribe of ugly demons is having a war dance in his brain. He shuffles into the kitchen, where he sees Louis sipping coffee at the breakfast table. Louis offers to pour him a cup.

"You're an angel! My head feels like the riveter's union is having a convention up there."

"Here you are, dear boy, but in exchange I'd like you to tell me what's going on around here. When I came in at 3 last night you were already in bed, sound asleep. Asleep so early on Friday night? You falling apart or something? Old age creeping up on you?"

Louis, who leads a very limited sex life, gets vicarious thrills from Charles's more frequent and adventur-

ous escapades. And usually Charles is all too willing to fill him in on all the erotic details. But this morning, with his aching head, Charles doesn't feel like saying a thing.

"Hello, Louis, Charles," says William Steel, walking down the stairs.

"Hi," Louis says, noticing that Steel is distinctly alone. "Do you want me to fix some eggs for you and Tony?"

"No, thanks. I'd just like some coffee. And Tony stayed out last night." Louis can't prevent a smile from spreading across his face. "Frankly, I don't know where he is. I met these friends of mine from college who invited me to a party. When I looked around for Tony, he was gone."

"How did the party turn out, Bill?" asks Charles.

"Fine. These friends of mine are staying at 'Fun and Games.' They really had a wild mob over there."

"How'd you make out?" Charles asks.

Steel turns a bit red. He's not used to being asked such personal questions. But he answers, "OK."

It's Saturday morning in Cherry Grove, and time for the beach. With his large towel, tanning lotion, transistor radio, and dark glasses, Charles makes his way down to the golden sand.

He's determined to get a dark, deep, beautiful tan today. If he isn't able to return to the city on Sunday night with a shiny nut-brown glow, he knows he will feel as if the whole weekend was wasted. It's very important for him to show all his colleagues in the office what glorious weekends he is always having. Besides, he looks very good with a tan.

He carefully spreads his towel on the sand. Then he rubs lotion on his face, chest, and legs. Then he lies

on his back, waiting for the warm rays to broil his body a crimson gold, just like last night's chicken. Ahhh, the sun! he thinks to himself; it feels so good! He turns on the radio.

But his beloved sun begins to get just a little hotter than he really likes. He starts to sweat and he gets impatient. He decides to sit up for a while and see just who is on the beach today.

Near the ocean he sees the four boys from the house called "Wrong Numbers." One is giggling with another, while the other two are watching the parade of men walking along the foamy edge of the sea.

Many of the best-looking boys in the world are on this beach during the summer—all different types: rich boys, poor ones, clothes models, physique models—

On a sunny day like today, Charles often sees a photographer taking shots of a handsome young man proudly displaying his oil-glistening musculature against a background of sea and sand.

On this beach there are also many good-looking boys who would never consider being models, although they may have all the qualifications. These are the kept young men, living with wealthy, older sponsors. These quiet, masculine beauties do a little chauffeuring or secretarizing now and then, but their main job is just to be decoratively available.

Then there are the rather noisy, vivacious, lower-class gay boys who have scrounged up just enough money for one-way ferry and train fare to the island. They know that once here, there will always be at least half a bed available and a ride home of some sort.

Then there are the handful of quite wealthy boys who could easily be spending the summer at Cannes or

Capri, but prefer Cherry Grove. Here they can relax while living among their own kind.

Charles enjoys the parade of boys strolling along the ocean. He sees many attractive numbers, but he realizes most of them aren't interested in him. He is happy that he makes out so well with fellows his own age or older, but every so often he wonders what it would be like to love and be loved by a boy.

There are so many that could easily fill his bill, sex-wise, anyway. But today, on this warm, sunny beach, he is content just to look at all the slim brown bodies walking near the sea. He is content to do no more than look.

Soon, however, the sun gets altogether too hot for him. He stands up so his body can catch the breeze. He thinks of taking a swim, but after one toedip in the surf, he is convinced that death by fire is better than by ice. Instead of a swim, he takes a walk.

He casually ambles past the last seven or eight houses of the Grove to where there is only empty dunes and deserted beach. Behind these dunes, he knows, is the Rack. Who is in there right now? he wonders. He thinks of all the lovely boys leaning against trees, tripping along the paths, patiently waiting for him this very moment. But they'll have to wait. His head is still aching. Sex and headaches never mix. Perhaps I'll take a little look-see on the return trip when I'll be feeling better, he hopes.

After walking on a little farther, he sees new cottages suspended on wooden stilts over the dunes. He knows he is in another community, the Pines. He begins to see children, many children, and whole families, and clusters of teenagers, and many girls. At the Grove there are very few teenagers, children, families, or girls.

Every so often, however, he passes a group of men sitting together on the sand. From their slim bodies, their laughter, from the sharp way they look up at him as he walks by, Charles recognizes "sisters under the skin."

A chubby boy and his girl friend, both in their twenties, who hold hands as they pass by him near the ocean's edge, look at him, too. They are undoubtedly trying to categorize him. Is he one of the fairies from the Grove? they are asking themselves. But if he is or isn't, it really doesn't matter much to them.

The Pines has a much different character from the Grove. Besides being almost thoroughly mixed between the straight and the gay, it is quieter, more elegant and sophisticated. Its inhabitants are more intelligent and cultured. At the same time the place is often thought of as cold, aloof, and snobbish. By many it's called a grand kingdom for closet queens.

This even mixture of homos and heteros in the Pines makes it quite unique. In one fancy pink-and-white cottage will be living four high-spirited gay television boys who often give lively parties, go regularly to the bars, visit the Rack whenever they can—while in the bright and shiny white-shingled house just a few bushes away lives a very respectable young shoe executive with his pretty wife and children, who are in most respects having a normal, pleasant summer vacation. Normal in every way, except for their having many gay friends and neighbors (including the four young camps next door—the boys even babysit for the couple, occasionally).

These four young men prefer the Pines, mainly because of their jobs. Hairdressers and dress designers

are free to cavort whenever and wherever they please. They are expected to be gay and it's quite rare, I'm sure, that either would ever lose his job over his unorthodox bed habits. In the television studios and the advertising agencies, however, you can be gay only as long as your colleagues and bosses don't know it. I've heard that simply saying the words "Cherry Grove" in one of these large companies is enough to send an employee packing.

Charles decides that while he is here in the Pines, he may as well visit his good friends, Henry and Jerry, who have just moved into a newly built cottage near the dock. He leaves the beach, climbs up over the dunes on the wooden stairs which lead onto one of the steep "roller coaster" walks. This walk passes right in front of a very modernistic two-story house surrounded by tall, overshadowing pine trees.

"Henry, Jerry!!" he calls, but no one answers. As the door is open, he walks in.

"Charles!" says a redhead, thin fellow wearing glasses. He is just coming into the living room from the kitchen. "I was trying to fix the latch on the back door. You know how these new houses are. Make yourself at home. Like a drink? Scotch? Vodka-and-tonic?"

"No, thank you. I never want to touch the stuff again. From last night's drinking, I have a head that's going to explode any minute now."

"What about an aspirin?"

"No, nothing does any good. I'll just have to wait till it passes away. Where's your better half?"

"You mean my worse. Just guess."

"The Meat Rack?"

"Of course. I don't know what it is, but that boy needs sex the way other people need oxygen. I've decided

Henry is a sex fiend, a real one!"

"Tell me, Jerry, I've always wondered what Henry was like when you were really married. I mean, when you were passionately in love with each other." Henry and Jerry have been living together for almost 7 years. They stopped having sex with each other, however, after the first 2.

"He would be absolutely faithful to me for 3 out of every 7 days of the week, which, for Henry, was being fantastically virtuous."

"But don't you get awfully jealous of him now?"

"I certainly do. There are times I've hated Henry so much I've wanted to squeeze everything out of his tiny little soul. But doesn't this happen with anyone you really love, who is really close to you? When you really hate someone, isn't it always your lover or your closest friend? There are more murders between husbands and wives and parents and children than between strangers. I adore Henry as a person, as good company, once in a while as a sex partner. We just never have had enough squabbles and fights to cancel the genuine love, the wonderful times we've had and still have together."

"But what about your own sex life, Jerry?"

"Well, I'm glad that, compared to the monster, I'm a sexual midget. Every now and then someone or other will find his way to my bed. And Henry is very generous on occasion. He'll bring home a tasty little tidbit we both will share."

"In some ways, Jerry, I envy you and Henry. I've never lived with one boy for any length of time. But in other ways I'm glad I have my freedom. I can do just what I like, when I like, with whom I like—"

"And I envy you, Charles—once in a while. But do

you think you're any freer than I am? Before I met Henry, I knew what it was like to live alone and have to continually scrounge around for sex, to cruise the bars, the streets, the parks, the johns. Sex was poisoning my life. What good was making money, buying a car, fixing up an apartment, if all my evenings were spent hungrily begging some stupid boy to help warm my ice-cold bed?"

"You're right, cruising is a drag sometimes, but—" Charles suddenly notices a rather large painting hung on the wall. "Say, this is new, isn't it?" It's of a nude boy sitting on a pale white horse, and it looks like an original. As art it probably isn't very good, but as sex Charles finds it exciting. "Who did it?"

"The monster. Not bad, is it?"

"God, that guy is talented—writer, jazz musician, painter—"

"And sex maniac. He is quite a smart boy and he's finally started cashing in on his abilities."

Charles enjoys talking with Jerry. He's more intelligent than any of his friends at the Grove, friends like Louis, for instance. Charles always comes away from a visit with him feeling that he's learned something.

But after a few more minutes of talk he says goodbye to Jerry, says he'll probably see him in the Grove tonight, and then ambles back to the walk and heads for the Pines harbor.

Involuntarily, Charles sighs at the sight of the large, luxurious yachts lined up at the dock. They look so supremely fat and proud, shining gloriously in their raiments of mahogany and chrome. How nice it would be to own one of these sea palaces, he muses, suddenly imagining himself in a crisp white captain's uniform,

authoritatively ordering a superbly built young helmsman (in a bikini) to be more careful steering this magnificent vessel into the crowded harbor at Cannes.

He can't resist peeking through the porthole of the largest and poshest of the yachts. But inside he sees two ill-dressed, middle-aged couples playing cards, looking as if they are bored to death. One woman suddenly looks up from her hand and gives him an expression Medusa would envy.

Well, Charles thinks as he continues walking down the side of the dock, if I have to be one of those in order to own a yacht like that, then thank you, no. He now feels very happy he doesn't own a yacht.

On the sun deck of the Boatel restaurant, he sees bevies of bathing-suited Pines boys having sandwiches and drinks. At one table he notices the three queens with the three poodles who sat with him in the cab yesterday. They look him over with sharp disdain, then swiftly turn their delicate profiles away.

The bitches, he thinks; they delight in being nasty to people they don't even know.

No, he thinks, the Pines is a nice place to visit but— Damn it, I like people too much and I like gay people. Maybe we're not as pretty or as elegant over at the Grove, but I'm sure we have one helluva better time. I can certainly believe Steve Seers when he says he wasted a whole season taking a place here last summer.

It's just too snooty for me, Charles murmurs to himself as he heads back to the Grove.

Should I, or shouldn't I? he ponders as he comes near the tall dune directly in front of the Meat Rack. I'll just have one quick look, he thinks (preparing himself for

an unsuccessful exploration in the bushes). I just want to see what's happening.

But as he climbs down from the dune toward the main entrance of the Rack, who does he see coming out but Tony! Tony in his bathing suit, looking rather disturbed.

"Hi!" he calls.

Tony turns around, looking very irritated, but then when he sees it's Charles he smiles and stops, waiting for Charles to join him. Charles has immediately decided to give up his exploring today and walk back to the cottage with Tony.

"Been having any fun?" he asks the boy. This must be the first time the kid's been in the Rack.

"Fun!! I was scared to death. I've never seen anything like that place in my whole life."

"See any interesting talent?"

The boy looks up at him quizzically and Charles realizes Tony is not used to the gay vocabulary or such pointed questions.

But Tony figures out what Charles means. "There were plenty of good-looking guys, I guess, but I was scared. One teenager, kind of a nice-looking kid, grabbed me by the arm, tried to do something with me right there in the open before everybody. I had to push him out of the way. Then one old guy followed me wherever I went. Never touched me or said anything, just followed me."

He turns around and looks back toward the trees. Then he laughs. "Look over there, Charles, see the man standing near the bushes? That's him, poor guy. You know when you said 'Hi' I thought it was him, finally getting up enough nerve to say something."

When they reach the end of the sand path they climb

up onto Ocean Walk, which leads them to their cottage on the far side of the Grove.

"What do you think of this place, Tony?" Charles asks as he waves his arm toward the walks lined with bright and shiny summer houses.

"Hmmm. I'm not sure. One minute I think it's the most interesting place I've ever seen. The following minute I'm ready to take the next boat back to civilization. In fact, I almost left here this morning."

"Why?"

"Well, what happened to me last night was so weird and frightening that—"

"What was it?"

"I don't know—I—do you mind if I don't talk about it right now? Maybe I'll tell you about it later on."

"OK," says Charles, greatly disappointed, but then he asks, "Do you mind if I ask you something personal, Tony?"

"Well, you can ask it, but I won't guarantee an answer."

"How long have you been gay?"

"If you want the truth, I don't think I *am* altogether gay. But if you want to know when was the first time I ever went to bed with a man, it was about 3 months ago."

"I thought that was the case."

"But before and after that I've gone out with girls. I like them. I like screwing them."

"Then why bother with boys at all? What made you go to bed with a boy in the first place?"

"It's very simple, Charles—money. The lack of that soft, beautiful green stuff."

What's this? Charles thinks. Was Louis right all the

time and the boy *is* a hustler?

"You see, I've been very serious about this girl I met in college and I think she really likes me, too. But she comes from this very wealthy old New York family, you know, an apartment on Fifth Avenue, a house in Oyster Bay. While I'm just a poor slob. My family in Akron depleted their life's savings to send me to college. I have to hold on tight to every penny I get. But Lois is very nice about my being poor. She asks me to dinner parties, weekends with her family on Long Island, all sorts of fancy places. One time she insisted I escort her to this big charity ball at the Plaza. Her family paid for the tickets, of course, \$50 each, but it took 2 whole weeks of my savings just to rent the monkey suit and pay for the cab, et cetera. All for the stiffest, dullest party I've ever gone to. I began to think seriously about the whole setup. After all the money I spent on Lois (she would beg that we go dutch, but what kind of a joker would that make me?)—anyway, I started thinking how after all the time, money, and effort that I spent on the girl, we had sex exactly one time, only once, and she put on such a big martyr act that I didn't enjoy it at all. She made me feel as if I were screwing a nun. Well—I hope I'm not boring you with all this, Charles?"

"No, not all," he says.

"Well, one evening I was in Vance's apartment, just relaxing, watching TV, drinking beer. I met Vance in my biology class. A nice, quiet kid. You'd never in the world suspect he was queer or anything. We would have dinner together once in a while, sometimes go to a football game. Well, let's see, it was one of those steaming summer nights and we were lying on the rug of his living room. (He lives with his folks but they

were on a vacation in Europe.) We were both drinking beer while watching some stupid play or other on TV. It was so hot we both were stripped down to our shorts. Well, I was sitting with my legs spread apart while looking at the screen, when suddenly I felt as if I was being watched—you know how you feel that sometimes? I looked over at Vance just in time to see his face turn away. Then I looked down in the direction where I had seen he had just been looking—at my shorts. Funny I hadn't noticed, but the slit in my boxers was wide open and junior was hanging all the way out. I didn't think anything of this and stuck junior back in his manger, and I resumed staring at the idiot-box. But after a while I couldn't help looking back at Vance. His eyes were riveted on the screen. Then I looked down at his shorts. He was wearing white, tight-fitting jockeys. Under the cotton, I could see as plain as day, he had a large erection. He suddenly looked up at me and saw where I was looking. For only a moment I saw the most embarrassed, pathetic expression I've ever seen on a man's face. He looked like a little puppydog caught in the act. He quickly raised his legs to cover himself. But then he changed his mind. He looked up at me and sent me a cynical smile which clearly said, 'I don't give a damn.' Instead of covering himself, he spread his legs farther apart so I could see all of his jockeys and all that was under them. The next thing I knew, yours truly had a hard on. The beers were soon pushed out of the way and the TV was turned off."

"How did you like it, the first time?"

"Well, Vance did all the work, I just lay there, but I enjoyed it. It's not like with a girl, though. When you're with a girl who really knows her stuff, everything goes

together, it fits, you both work together toward a goal. With a boy—well, frankly, I was surprised at the pleasure I felt in the touch of a man's body, and that Vance certainly has a talented mouth, but still, with a guy, I always feel something is missing, something's left out."

"Did you see much of Vance after that?"

"Yeah. I'm a pretty horny fellow. I saw him twice every week before he joined his parents in Europe. After that night with Vance I stopped dating any girl who wouldn't deliver, except Lois, that is. That's how I've been able to save some money."

"You still see Lois?"

"Once in a while. In fact, before he left, when I had a date I'd first visit Vance and get my rocks off, then I'd take Lois out somewhere. That way I wouldn't get so damn frustrated each time she got near me."

"That's some system you had. Vance didn't mind?"

"No, not at all. He would get as much of me as he could."

Charles tries to sound relaxed and diffident as he says:

"Maybe now you won't mind telling me what happened last night. You know you got my curiosity all worked up."

Tony grimaces, but then he says, "OK. It was all so odd, I've been trying to keep it out of my mind, but maybe I should tell somebody. Well, I was standing at the railing watching the dancing in the bar. Bill had run into some of his old Yale buddies and was busy yakking away with them in a booth. So I was just standing there watching the crazy dancing when this big, muscle guy starts talking to me. Maybe you saw him,

a real tall bruiser. Suddenly out of nowhere, he invites me to a party. I was kind of bored, I guess, and in the mood for some excitement, so I said, why not? Then off we went. It was hot as blazes in the bar, but windy and cold outside. I was glad Bill insisted I wear my jacket. Well, as soon as we were outside walking, this guy kind of clammed up. And when he did talk, he sounded as if he were frightened, which is kind of funny for a big guy like that. And then he started saying weird things, like 'You been in many fights?', 'Do you ever feel real crazy, and want to do something way out, real wild?' and 'You know, there are a lot of strange people at Cherry Grove.' You said it, I felt like saying back.

"And then he takes me down this real dark path. I couldn't see my hand in front of my face. And he knocks on the door of this house. He knocks three times, very carefully. But I still don't see one light. I'm about ready to turn around and get the hell out of there, when my friend knocks three times again and the door opens. A big flashlight almost knocks my eyes out. 'It's me, Carl,' the big guy says. "Who's that?" the man in back of the flashlight says. 'He's all right,' Carl answers. 'OK,' says Flashlight, and we follow him into the house, first through one room, then another, then down some stairs. All the time Carl is tightly gripping my hand.

"At the bottom of the stairs is a door. Flashlight opens it. I stand still as a rock for I don't know how long. I was petrified, scaredder than I've ever been in my life. I had this one long look at what was going on in that place, then I summoned up all the strength that was in me and I pushed both Carl and Flashlight out of my way and as fast as I could, somehow or other, got out of that damn house."

"What was it, Tony?"

"There were about 10 guys there, some holding flashlights, some holding small torches, all of them wearing leather jackets and jeans and motorcycle caps, all kneeling in kind of a circle. All except one guy standing near the wall. He was stripped to the waist. He stood above them all and in his hand he was holding a belt, you know, one of those thick black leather belts with studs on them."

"You must have stumbled into an S-and-M party."

"A what?"

"A sadomasochist torture club. But go on."

"Well, all these other guys sitting on their knees were either shining flashlights toward the center of the circle, or they were sitting on this kid that was lying face down in the middle of the floor. Two were on his legs, two on his arms, one was pushing his face into the floor. This kid—just from his body, he looked 17 or 18—was stark naked, lying on his stomach without one stitch of clothes. I could hear him moaning. The guy standing over him with the belt was yelling every filthy, dirty swear word he could think of. Then down came the belt with a loud whack, right on the boy's ass. He screamed. He screamed real loud. Then I got the hell out of there."

"Tell me, Tony, what were you wearing last night?"

"Levis, a blue T-shirt, my leather jacket. Back in Akron I owned a cycle once upon a time. The leather jacket's all I've got left from it."

"So that explains it."

"What?"

"You may not realize it, but you attended one of the most exclusive parties of the season. Usually those guys are very, very careful about any outsiders barging into

their performances."

"What do you mean, performances? They looked like they were going to murder that boy."

"No. That would never happen. They're even careful that the lashes don't bleed. The man with the whip, the naked boy on the floor, the boys in leather jackets, are all acting, half-acting, anyway. The man with the whip is only half-brutal; the boy on the floor is only half-hurt."

"You mean that kid on the floor wanted to be whipped?"

"Of course. Do you think they'd monkey around with some kid who didn't? Who might tell? The kid on the floor was probably having the time of his life. Your big friend Carl was the stupid one. When he saw your leather jacket, he thought you belonged to the club. And because you're a good-looking guy, he thought it would be worth the chance. You know, Tony, I'll bet you frightened those guys out of their wits when you ran away like that. I'll bet *they're* the ones that took the next ferry back to the mainland. But tell me, how come you didn't come home after that?"

"Well, at first I thought I should tell somebody about what those jokers were up to. I really thought they were murdering that kid. And I actually went up to one of the hotel cops. But just before I opened my mouth, I realized that never in a million years would I ever be able to find my way back to that house. I would look like a real fool when the cop started asking me where and when and how. And maybe I did kind of have a feeling there was something phoney about that setup. So I just asked the cop what time it was. It was only 12. And it was such a nice night. I didn't feel like going back into that steamroom of a bar, or to sleep, so I walked down to the

ocean. I walked and walked until I was alone with the waves and the stars. Then I took off all my clothes and had a long, wonderful swim. Then I climbed over the highest dune in sight until I found a hollow perfect for keeping out the wind and I went to sleep."

"You're really kind of a romantic guy, aren't you, Tony?"

"My friends have a shorter word for it: nuts."

"Well, maybe I'm not one of your friends, then, because I like it. It's not nutty to me at all."

"Then, you know, that makes you nuts, just the way I am, and in that case I have to put you in an altogether new category. That makes you more than just a friend."

"Thanks. I think I rather like that category."

They were now on the porch of the cottage. Charles couldn't help but gently squeeze Tony's arm.

If only this door is locked, Charles thinks. Then it would mean that Louis and Bill are out and Tony and I will be alone for a while, the greatest "a while" in my life, maybe—but no such luck. The door opens with a twist of the knob and there, sitting on the couch, reading a magazine, is Bill Steel.

"Hello, stranger," he says to Tony. "I was getting ready to give you up as a lost cause. Where you been?" He can't quite hide the anger in his voice.

Charles smells a fight coming up and just for fun decides to be Tony's defender.

"Bill," he says angrily, "what do you mean abandoning this poor boy in that wicked bar last night? While you were dishing the dirt with your old Whippennpoof buddies, Tony was practically kidnaped by a mob of S-and-M-ers and almost got lost in the Sunken Forest." (He thinks he might as well add a little color to the story.)

"The Sunken Forest!!" says Bill.

"Just imagine, will you, on his first night on Fire Island he's abandoned by his friend, kidnaped by thugs, and gets lost in the woods, without having any sex or even getting intoxicated!"

"What is all this, Tony?"

"It's a complicated story which I'll tell you right after I take a long, hot shower. But don't worry, Bill," Tony says just before skipping up the stairs, "I'm not really mad at you. I forgive you," after which he has time for a split-second wink at Charles.

"Forgive me? He vanishes into thin air and stays out all night and *I'm* the one to be forgiven! I'm the villain!"

"No, you aren't, Bill. And don't you be mad at him. He really didn't do anything, just dropped in on the wrong party, then went to sleep on a dune."

"Maybe you're right. To tell the truth, I did feel a little guilty about him last night. I should have made more of an effort to find the boy before I took off with my friends. I did kind of abandon him. Oh, what does it matter, anyway?"

Bill suddenly bounds from his chair. "Say, how about my fixing you a big fat drink, Charles? I think I need one for myself right now."

"No, thank you. I'm just getting over the hangover I had this morning."

"How about a skinny little drink, then? Just to relax yourself."

"OK, Bill; you've sold me. Fix me something cold and not too strong, while I put a record on the phonograph. This place is dead. Do you like living in a morgue, Bill?"

"Sooner than in a Barbra Streisand madhouse, any time."

"Then I order you to leave Cherry Grove this minute. Hand over your tube of K-Y and your beaded bag. You'll just never be a bona fide Cherry Grover if you don't love Barbra Streisand, worship Carol Channing, and adore every hit musical album of the last 10 years. What would you rather hear—Bartok, for God's sake?"

"I'd rather hear nothing at all, thank you. I'd rather just think."

"Think!!! Then you *really* don't belong here. Get thee back to IBM! Thinking is much, much worse than Bartok. There are strict Fire Island rules against it. Frankly, Bill, just between us girls, what is an intelligent, cultured, 'thinking' person like yourself doing at Cherry Grove in the first place? Why would any self-respecting 'thinker' spend a whole summer among these very sweet, very amusing, but generally bird-brained queens and faggots?"

"Can I ask you the same question, Charles?"

"No, you can't. I'm not quite a birdbrain, but I am a faggot and I'm *not* a thinker. I love Cherry Grove, in fact, because it's plumb-chock-full of the most amusing, pretty nonthinkers you could find anywhere. I love to camp and dish and even get up in drag on occasion. I fit in this place. But you don't. Why are you here, Bill Steel?"

"The answer is very simple, Charles—Sex. For years I've heard that this island is the sexiest place in the whole country. It's been widely rumored you can pick beautiful boys off the trees. And that's the kind of place I need."

"So tell me, William Steel, have you found the streets

of Cherry Grove paved with available boys?"

"Ha!! In the 2 months I've been here, do you know how many times I've made out in this pseudo-Sodom? Twice, only twice. I do better on Third Avenue. This place abounds with sexy youngsters, but tell me, Charles, is it at all fair that handsome young boys should only like other handsome young boys? Isn't there one fairly nice, fairly good-looking fellow who is bored with his shallow, pretty playmates, and is seriously looking for mature, intellectual companionship?"

"Frankly, I've never heard of such an animal, not at the Grove, anyway. But tell me, Bill, why should you be looking for a fairly anything boy when you yourself have imported to the Grove one of the nicest, best looking chaps that's ever set foot on this island?"

"That's an easy one. Tony's very nice and very handsome and also very independent. We went to bed once. I liked it and him very much. But he didn't. He didn't like me *or* my lovemaking. He refused to go to bed with me again. So I said to him, OK, no sex, but let me be your friend (thinking, of course, I could make him come around sooner or later), and then I invited him out here, very reluctantly agreeing there would be no strings, we would both be free agents. You know, we got here a little early on Friday. When we were changing in my room, I immediately broke the agreement and made a pass at the boy. He turned me down cold. Maybe that was the real reason he stayed out all last night, maybe he was afraid of what a liquored-up Bill Steel might do to him in a bedroom alone. Well, I'm giving the boy up completely. Maybe I'll give up sex, too."

"Bill, I know it's not quite your kind of thing, but

there's always the Meat Rack."

"Yes, there's always the Meat Rack."

Charles could tell Steel that there's often a lot of good sex in the Rack, that many a night when he was turned down by this or that pretty boy he would find release down there, that there are many men on this island right now who are here only because of the sweet and strange delights of the Rack. But this is something Bill must decide and find out for himself.

"Charles, angel!" says Winnie Jurrow as he flounces in through the front door with his best friend, Walter Anthony, about the wildest and most infamous queen on the island.

(When he was much younger and better looking (but just as wild), Walter Anthony had an extended, torridly passionate love affair with a handsome, ebony-black Pullman porter who was picturesquely christened Ulysses S. Jones. Ever since, by all of his friends, Anthony has been fondly referred to as "Miss Penelope." Just like her Ithacan namesake she knits, but unlike Homer's patient, long-suffering heroine, her doings with her many, many suitors have never been platonic. But between the brief bouts with these boys, she still sighs for her Ulysses and pines for his return. This is very unlikely, as after Ulysses had one day, in an angry fit, knifed his unpleasant, unattractive legitimate female spouse he was quite quickly removed (for life) to Sing Sing. But Miss Penelope didn't give up hope. One bright Sunday afternoon she donned a full-bodiced calico dress, a fetching blue bonnet, and two cans of charcoal makeup, after which she politely presented herself at the visitor's entrance of the famous Penitentiary-on-the-Hudson. She told the authority in charge that she was

Ulysses' mother, Mrs. Hecuba W. Jones from Natchez, and with tears in her eyes insisted on seeing her son. Unfortunately she was ignorant of the fact that this good lady had been dead for several years. This ignorance resulted in Miss Penelope's being thrown into the local Ossining jail for 7 days. She claims that this week in jail was the most glorious, most exciting week of her life.)

"Charles, my own!" she cries as she fondly embraces him, then kisses him on the cheek. "I swear, you're the most handsome faggot I know. Those muscles! Have you lost weight?"

"No, in fact I just put some on."

"Well, off or on, it's very becoming." She then reaches over and dramatically grabs a large paper bag from the hand of Winnie, who then mysteriously giggles. Now she turns to Charles and in measured tones asks, "Tell me, my dear, what are you doing tonight?"

"I have tickets for the show," Charles answers.

Winnie says, "It's absolutely marvelous, I hear. Miss Frankenburg saw a runthrough and she says it's very good."

Miss Penelope gives a withering, Tallulah Bankhead look at Winnie, who takes a frightened step out of her way.

"You're not going to any of the parties tonight?" she asks in tones of hushed drama.

"No."

"You mean you're not going to Miss Wellington's long-awaited, ultrafabulous sukiyaki affair?"

"No. I haven't been invited."

"But you have! You have!" she screams. "Look!" and from the paper bag in her hand she slips out a large,

square piece of mauve stationery.

Charles reads:

His  
Royal Elegance  
The  
Grand Mikado  
Cordially Commands  
Your Irresistible Presence  
at a  
Royal Food and Drinking Feast  
in the  
Wellington Palatial Gardens  
Saturday Evening, August 2nd.  
Elaborate Costume Imperative

"And here's one for you, Bill," says Penelope, handing him another one from the bag.

"What's going on here, Miss P.?" says Charles. "What in the hell are you doing with Miss Wellington's invitations?"

"Tell him, Penelope, tell him," says Winnie.

"Well, my dears, after Miss Wellington informed me, in the nastiest language these sensitive ears of mine have ever heard, that I was *persona non grata* in her Royal Palatial Gardens (get her!), that I was definitely *not* invited to her Jap Jamboree, just because I happened to have made it once or twice with her sweet little whore of a houseboy (cross my heart, he begged me to make love to him! he begged me!), well, after suffering under the vile reptilian lash of her ultraevil tongue,

I decided that I just could not let her get away with it. I saw that drastic measures had to be taken. A Queen must have her revenge! So I very simply lifted up the phone and put in a call to Miss W.'s New York printer—and he's a doll! Did you know he once was a piece of rough trade that Miss W. literally picked up out of the gutter and set up in business? Of course now he's as gay as can be but terribly attractive—well, anyway, my scheme worked beautifully. In my most cultured voice, I said: 'This is Mr. Wellington's social secretary, my good man. Mr. Wellington has discovered he's running short of the invitations for his party. He needs at least 200 more. Please have them ready early this afternoon. My name is Walter Anthony and I shall pick them up at 2. Thank you very much.' And here we are," she says, raising the bag high.

"You know how persnickety Miss W. is about her guest list. Why, she'd rather die than have any of the 'wrong sort' in her exquisite home," says Winnie. "Miss P. and I have been making certain that every tourist at the hotel, every hairdresser, hustler, bull dike, and drag queen gets an invitation. We've only 10 or so left now. I even passed some out to some *straight* people!"

Charles laughs as he imagines the wealthy, haughty, unpleasant Miss W. receiving a long, raggedy line of unwanted, uninvited party guests. He puts his arm affectionately around Miss Penelope and says, "Miss P., when I'm elected President, I'm going to make you Secretary of Camp."

"What obscene business is going on in my house?" says Louis Bamburg, entering the front door with Jerry Bordelay, an old friend. Then he opens wide his arms.

"Penelope!!" he yells.

"Louisa!!" and they passionately kiss each other on the lips. Then Winnie opens his arms wide and says, "Louisa!!"

"Winifred!" and Louis kisses Winnie just as passionately.

Then Louis says, "Miss P., have you met my friend Jerry Bordelay?"

Miss P. shrieks "Geraldine!" and violently kisses Jerry.

"Where in heaven's name did you two meet?" Louis inquires.

"I never saw her before in my life!" says Miss P., now throwing a kiss to Charles.

"Drinks for everybody!" Louis proclaims as he gathers glasses from the kitchen shelf and lines them up before the liquor bottles. Meanwhile, Charles takes the bar orders from the chattering guests, who are now lazily stretching out on the divan and in the bamboo chairs.

"You know, I have irrevocably decided," Miss Penelope announces as if she were saying something of vital importance, "if I don't find a steady husband in the next 10 days, I'm going to a nunnery!"

"But Miss P.," whines Winnie, "you look so awful in black."

"No! I'm giving up all this cruising, camping, carrying on. I'm telling all my hustlers goodbye. And goodbye also to the ungay gay world."

"You're breaking our hearts, Miss P!" says Charles.

"No, each year the rough trade gets rougher, the dirt dirtier, the vice squad more vicious— Tell me, dear sir," she suddenly says to Bill Steel on her left, "would you marry me?"

Bill, who is both horrified and amused by Miss P., laughs at this very rhetorical question.

What's Tony up to? Charles wonders. Then he gets a very bright, thrilling idea. He excuses himself politely and goes upstairs. In Steel's room he sees Tony, dressed in slacks and a blue T-shirt, combing his hair.

"Hello, handsome," says Charles. God, he's beautiful. I'd like to try something with the boy right now, but I don't dare.

"Hi, Charles," Tony answers.

"Say, what are you doing tonight?"

"I haven't any plans, but I—"

"Look. I've got two tickets to the show tonight. It's supposed to be very good."

"That would be great, Charles, but Bill might not like it. Do you have a ticket for him?"

"No; no, I don't. Listen, I'll talk to Bill myself. If I can fix it with him, can you come?"

"Sure, it would be a pleasure," Tony says, as with his deep brown eyes he looks warmly at Charles, who takes the boy's hands and presses them.

Just one kiss from this boy would be so nice, he thinks. He moves a step forward—but then he hears footsteps in the hall. He turns away just in time, as Louis walks into the room. Louis looks at Tony, then at him.

"We've run out of vodka. Have you any in your room?" Louis says, obviously disturbed.

"Yes, I think so," he answers and walks with Louis across the hall.

Later on everyone looks up as Tony comes down the stairs. Charles introduces him to those he hasn't met yet.

"It's him, everybody, it's him!" says Penny, suddenly standing up. "Winifred, it's him, my next husband!" and she puts both arms around the surprised boy.

Charles doesn't know how Tony is taking to this. He decides he'd better stop it right now.

"Please, Miss P.!" he says grandly, as he forcibly removes first one arm, then the other, from around the boy's shoulders. "Stop playing around with my fiance!" With high ostentation he then escorts Tony over to a chair near the bar.

"That's the story of my life!" says Miss P., plopping down on the divan.

The record arm of the phonograph lifts from the last number of "What Makes Sammy Run?" and a new record falls into place—"The Stripper."

Miss Penny points a finger at Louis. "What exactly are you up to, Miss Louisa, playing that dirty album? You know what that lowdown music does to my nervous system!"

Then, with a gesture borrowed from Bali, she puts a hand to her forehead. Then her face looks smolderingly over one shoulder, while her legs turn at an angle and begin sensuously pressing against each other. All talking stops; all drinks are put aside; everyone watches in rapt fascination this reincarnation of the Wicked Woman of Babylon.

Like a cobra coming out of the snake charmer's basket, she rises from the divan, and on tiny feet makes her way to center stage.

With a paunch the size of a football, rapidly thinning hair, and a round, pink babyface, Miss Penelope does not create the picture of the ideal stripper. But she more than adequately makes up for these physical deficiencies with gestures and movements of such intense delicacy that she is able to completely capture any audience lucky enough to be present at one of her famous per-

formances.

"Take it off! Take it off, you slut!" Louis yells.

With the utmost finesse, Penny loosens her coat jacket, slips out of it, then abruptly flings it at the bewildered Tony. Then with Shirley Temple coyness, one by one, she unbuttons her white shirt. With the sensuous abandon of a Circe, she lets the shirt fall from her shoulders to the floor, then with a swift kick sends it flying under the divan. Her amazingly deft fingers now unbuckle her belt, which then joins the hidden shirt. The fingers then daintily grasp the tab of her zipper, which she then pulls one, two, three inches down the length of her fly—

All eyes are glued on that shiny zipper—except Louis's. He has looked up at the front door, to see someone standing there—a girl, a real girl!

"Maggie! Maggie, my own!" and he gets up to greet her. She's a tall brunette, 26 or so, a great friend of Louis's.

"This is Maggie, everybody, one of my favorite people. Don't get up, girls, she doesn't mind. Go on, Penny. Maggie doesn't care. Take it off."

But a flustered Miss Penelope has zipped up her trousers and is putting on the shirt Winnie has retrieved from under the sofa.

"You can do your act before Maggie, Miss P. She doesn't mind, do you, Maggie?"

"No, go ahead," Maggie says while she sits down near the window.

But the mood is broken. The sight of a real, honest-to-goodness female has turned Gilda the Love Goddess back into Walter Anthony the Ridiculous Invert. He is about to sit down again when Louis takes his arm.

"Wait a bit, Miss P.," says Louis. "I have a much better idea. Come with me. Charles, be sure everybody's drinks are taken care of while I'm gone." And he leads a subdued Penelope up the stairs. "Don't leave, anybody," he yells back to the party. "Show time in 10 minutes."

After their exit there is an icy silence in the living room. The men are all looking, or they are all carefully *not* looking, at the one girl. They are not at all used to being in the company of girls, especially at gay parties. As Charles knows Maggie slightly, he feels he must attempt to break the ice.

"Is Brucie out this weekend, Maggie?" he asks. (Brucie is the gay boy with whom she shares her cottage.)

"Yes. And you should see the doll he brought with him, Charles. What a beauty! He'd make you cream your jeans."

These last, casually spoken words, coming from this sweet-faced young girl, spread a blanket of amazement and shock over the room, until they all laugh. The ice is broken and the party resumes.

"Are you here only for the weekend, Maggie?" asks Jerry Bordelay. He is very much interested in why this girl is in Cherry Grove.

"I'm here every weekend. I have a house for the season."

This intrigues Bordelay. (Though he has never published one word, Jerry has always thought of himself as a professional writer. He is constantly cramming his head with mental notes for novels and stories, none of which will probably ever reach the light of day. Maggie is good material, he thinks.) Why does this intelligent,

attractive girl (she couldn't be a lesbian!) want to spend a whole summer season among a lot of queers?

"How do you like it here?" he asks.

"Fine. I always have a good time at the Grove."

"But, frankly, I don't understand—"

"—what a nice girl like me is doing in a crazy, mixed-up place like this?"

"You put it well."

"The truth is, Jerry, I'm not as normal as I look. Don't get me wrong, I'm not a dike. I can't stand them, in fact. I really like men very much—but I don't like sex. In my whole life, I've had two sexual experiences. Both of them made me violently ill, physically and mentally. I've been to all kinds of doctors and psychiatrists, but I still have this pathological block about sex. Naturally, then, I have an aversion to men who are sexually attracted to me. So—" and she sweeps her hand around the room, "voila!"

"But sometimes don't you feel kind of uncomfortable, always surrounded by gay boys?"

"Sometimes, because a lot of them don't like me. They resent me, or any straight girl, being on the island. But it doesn't bother me much. I have enough good friends here who accept me as I am, as Maggie, a person, an individual. They don't hold the fact that I'm a woman against me."

Louis calls from upstairs, "Charles! Charles! Put on some entrance music. Put on 'Hello, Dolly.'"

Miss Penelope, almost completely recovered from the upsetting interruption of the first act of her show, is about to begin the second.

From head to toe, she is dressed in shimmering, sparkling, brashly vulgar drag. Her hair is a resplendent, ny-

lon gold; her dress, a lustrous crimson. In her inch-long eyelashes, blood-red lipstick, golden curls crowned by a glittering tiara, she is no longer a silly, rapidly aging pervert, the despair of Mrs. Grundy and the vice squad. No, she is the fabulous Penelope Pazazz, the Queen of Broadway, who is loved and worshiped by the multitudes.

Like Marlene, like Mae West, like the most desirable whore in Christendom, with her hips swinging from left to right like a seesaw, she slowly, step by step, descends the stairs.

Charles, Jerry, Winnie, Bill, Tony, and especially Maggie wildly applaud this gaudy, unbelievable vision as it struts grandly before them.

"It's a dream! I don't believe my eyes!" says Winnie.

But Miss P. pays no attention to Winnie. With the sinuous roll of a burleycue Delilah, she continues her walk until she directly faces Tony. Then she indicates with her outstretched arms that HE has the privilege of the first dance with her.

But Tony doesn't move. He sits in his chair, embarrassed and a bit horrified.

"C'mon, handsome," she says in the voice of the immortal Mae, "it's time we tripped the light fantastic."

"I don't know how—" he mumbles.

"Don't worry," shouts Louis, "Penny will teach you."

"C'mon, kid, it's easy," Mae continues. "Just let me show you how."

"What are you afraid of, muscles? She's not going to eat you."

"Not now, anyway," says Penelope-Mae. "I'll save that for later. C'mon, big boy. These ever-loving arms are just dying to feel those big biceps you're carrying."

Charles thinks it's time to step in again. Tony's face is almost as red as Penny's dress. Charles is about to grab the scarlet woman and dance with her himself, when like a jack-in-the-box Tony leaps out of his chair and stands up before Miss P. as straight as an arrow.

"Sure, gorgeous, why not?" he says decisively, then sweeps her into his arms and like a whirlwind waltzes her around the room, knocking two glasses and a vase off a coffee table in the process.

"Ray!" everyone yells and applauds.

But after several more of these Fledermaus turns, the Queen of Broadway shows signs of weakening. As the waltz ends, Tony allows his partner to collapse clumsily on the divan—her feet on Louis, her head on Winnie, her bottom on Bill. With the mass of swirling red drag on their laps, the three look ever so much like three children bathing in a tub of blood.

At the height of the ensuing laughter and confusion, Charles brusquely turns off the phonograph. "I don't know about you dizzy queens," he announces, "but it's time this one had her beauty sleep. Tonight is going to be my big night, and I have to rest up for it."

His speech works. The company arises and prepares to depart, all except Penelope, panting on the divan like a tired canine.

Winnie whips off her friend's blond wig and says, "Penelope-Mae, you get out of those glad rags this instant or I'm going to give your bottom the whipping of its life. You know we have 20 more of Miss W.'s invites to pass out before the party starts tonight?"

Miss P. leans on Winnie's shoulder as they climb the stairs to the bedroom.

Soon all the company has gone. After Tony and Bill

take a walk to the store for tonight's dinner, Charles and Louis begin gathering up the dirty glasses and ashtrays and cleaning them in the sink.

"Guess what, Charles?" says Louis as he hands his roommate the first glass to dry. "Your clever mother has managed to get two invitations to the sukiyaki party tonight."

"Real or phoney?"

"Absolutely bona fide ones. They're from Miss Wellington herself, in fact."

"How did this happen? I distinctly remember that you loathe the lady."

"That was this morning. A girl has a right to change her mind, doesn't she? Even Miss W. deserves a second chance. Well, Miss Frankenburg, Miss St. John, and myself were having a pleasant little hen party over at 'Bloody Marys' this afternoon, when who suddenly pops in but the notorious Miss W., herself. 'I insist that you ladies come over to my house this very minute and see something truly miraculous,' she says. Then Miss W. personally takes us on a tour of her newly transformed Palatial Gardens. Charles, I'd be willing to bet my last beaded bag that the sukiyaki party is going to be the most spectacular affair this season. You just should see what that clever lady has done! From tree to tree she's strung these enchanting colored lamps. She's hung the branches with fresh flowers. I saw enough cases of liquor for the Inaugural Ball. It must be costing her a fortune! Miss W. may be a bitch at times, but I must say she has really fabulous taste. And this afternoon she couldn't have been nicer to all of us, especially to me, Charles. She humbly begged my pardon for not sending us an invitation. She said it was an oversight and she

made a great point of our coming tonight. We just have to go!"

"But, Louis, what about costumes?"

"Miss W. has set aside two kimonos, just for us. Isn't that incredible? She was so damn sweet. I couldn't figure it out. Do you think she's hot for my body?"

"I pity you, if she is," says Charles, thinking, I might as well break it to him now.

"I'm sorry, Louis, but I can't go to the party tonight."

"Why not?"

"You know I have tickets to the show."

"Certainly, so just skip over to the community house right now and turn them in. They'll take them back. And we'll see the show next week."

"I'm sorry, Louis, but tonight I'm going to the show and I'm not changing my mind."

Louis is very disturbed, but he doesn't give up yet.

"Are you going by yourself? Who's using my ticket?"

"This time I didn't buy you a ticket, Louis. I'm going with someone else."

"And who is this someone else, Charles?"

"Tony."

"Tony? Bill's friend?"

"Yes. Do you mind?"

Louis's voice rises in anger: "No, not at all!"

In a hot, sticky silence, Charles finishes drying the dishes while Louis straightens the furniture.

"I think I'm going to lie down for a while," Charles says, and starts to leave.

Louis stops him. "Charles, I'm going out now. When Steel and his friend come back from the store, tell them that I'm not cooking tonight. Tonight I'm going to have dinner with Maggie and Bruce at the Sea Shack."

Then just before Louis reaches the door he says, "You can do the cooking for once," and he walks out.

Louis well knows that Charles can't boil an egg.

Goddamn it, he thinks. I wish he would let go of me. It's time he let go.

• • •

Saturday night is THE big night at the Grove. It's when hordes of tourists come over from Ocean Beach and the mainland and clog up the walks and overflow the bars. It's the night when the drag shows are given and when many cottages are shaking with excitement, getting ready for one of the many big costume affairs.

These big costume parties are a very significant part of the season. Every Grove house of any standing must give at least one lavish affair each year, or else lose its social status. The popularity and esteem of a cottage is in direct proportion to the size and success of its party. One large, extravagant, greatly talked about costume ball will insure a house invitations to every other standout affair of the season.

The Grove costume parties easily surpass any similar ones in the city in originality, color, excitement, and style. With bolts of shiny material and needle and thread, energetic boys spend hour after hour fashioning wild, fanciful, fantastic getups which are the equal of any you might see in a Broadway show.

A host cottage will completely redo its grounds and rooms for this one special evening. For "King Arthur's Royal Tournament," Frank Walsh turned his two-story house into a medieval (cardboard) castle with drawbridge, turrets, and all. The four boys at "Erotica" spent

two solid days building the facade of an ocean liner for their "Bon Voyage" gala.

Each costume party has a theme: the Baby Shower, the Arabian Nights, Luau, Hadassah, Voyage to the Moon, Hollywood, Shakespeare. And each invited household appears in costumes which complement each individual and also fit in with the main theme.

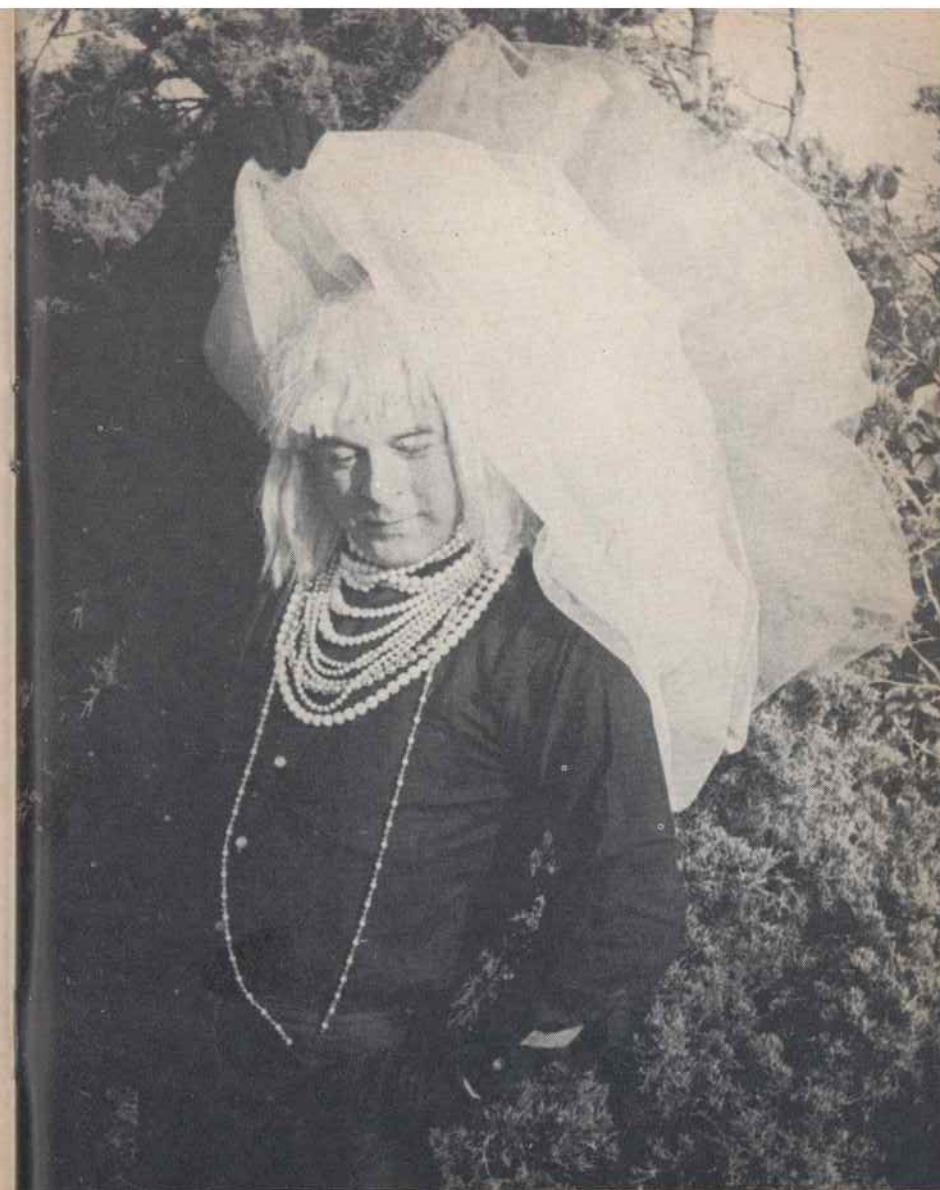
For "The Reign of Terror" ball, for instance, Marie Antoinette in a towering wig and hoopskirt came with four executioners with axes and black masks. For "Egyptian Nights" a Negro Cleopatra lay on a bepillowed golden chaise held aloft by four white stripped-to-the-waist muscle boys.

Just for a lark, let us drop in on one of the really successful affairs of a few years ago.

For the "Annual Academy Awards" party, champagne is flowing from a fountain. In the front yard of the host cottage, a platform stage has been put up in the center, facing the fountain. A table on the stage holds rows of golden statuettes (of slender, androgynous figures), called "Marys." At the very end of the affair they will ceremoniously be awarded to: The Handsomest Male on Fire Island, The Busiest Belle in the Meat Rack, The Boy with the Greatest Physique, The Biggest Mouth in Cherry Grove, The Most Elegant (or Swishiest, or Prettiest, or Bitchiest) Queen on the Island, etc. Each lucky fellow receives his award to enthusiastic applause and fanfare.

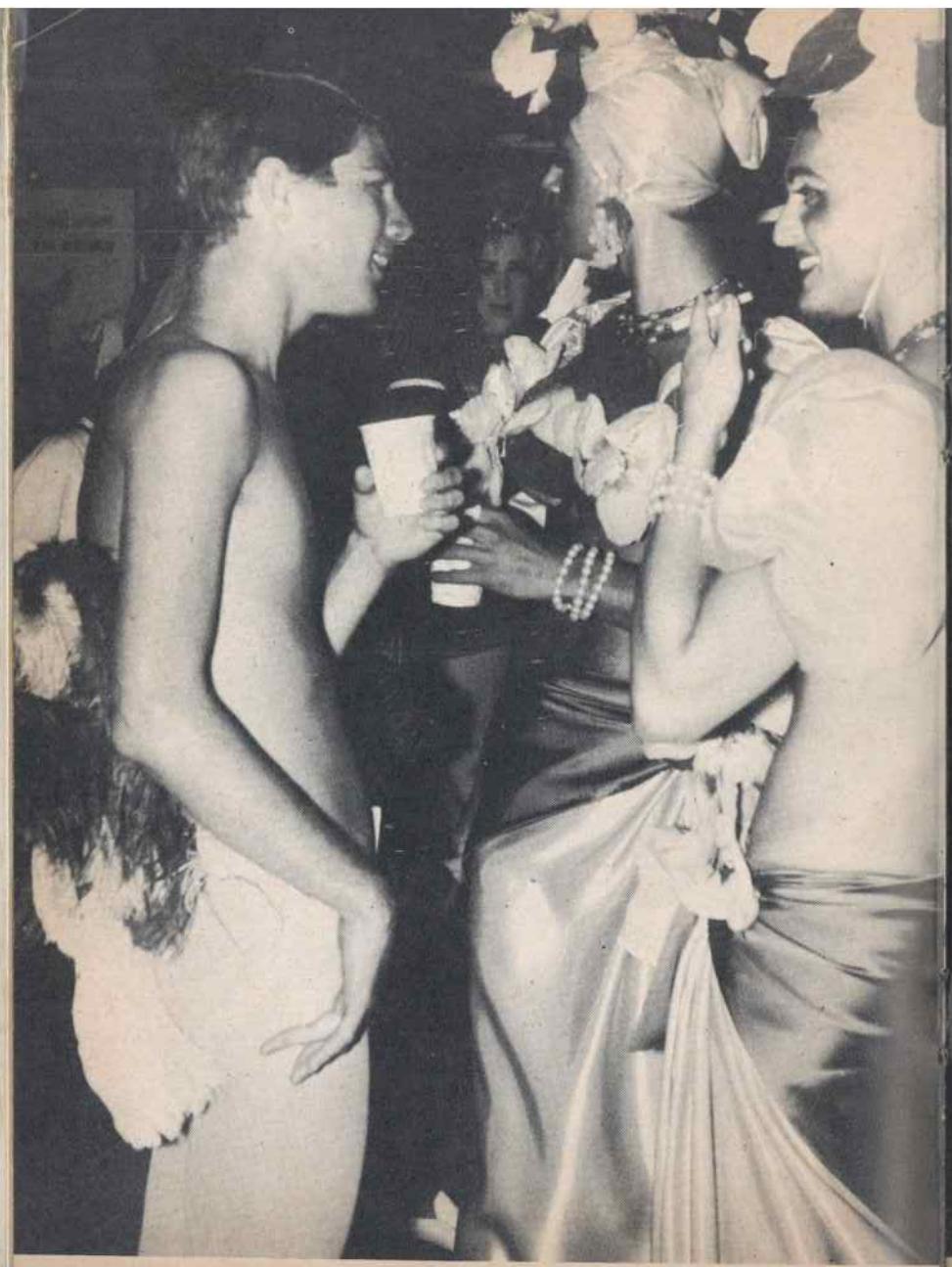
The party officially starts at 9. But everyone knows that any really chic Cherry Grover always arrives at least an hour late.

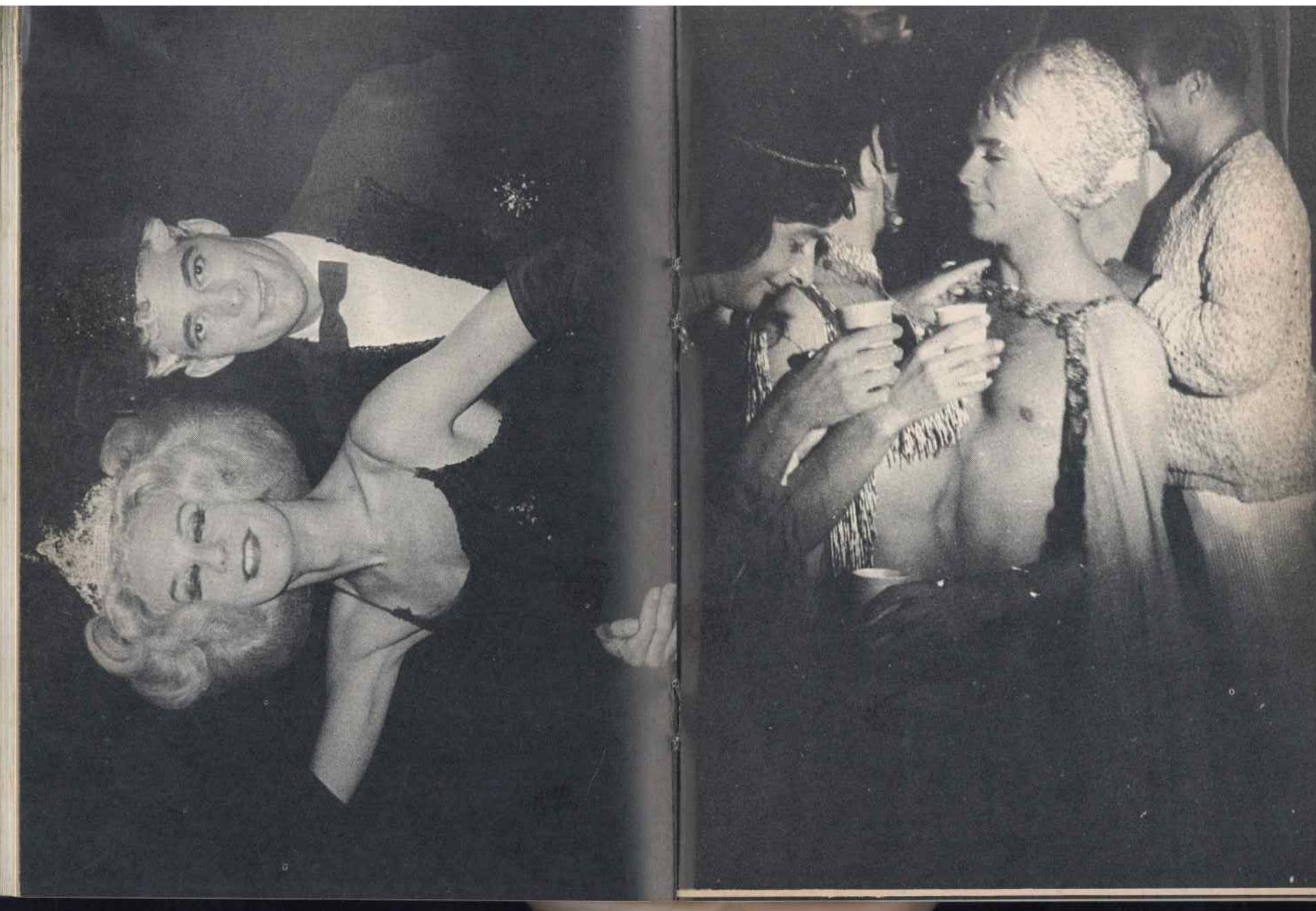
As it becomes darker, sightseers gather around the front yard fence; floodlights bathe the entranceway



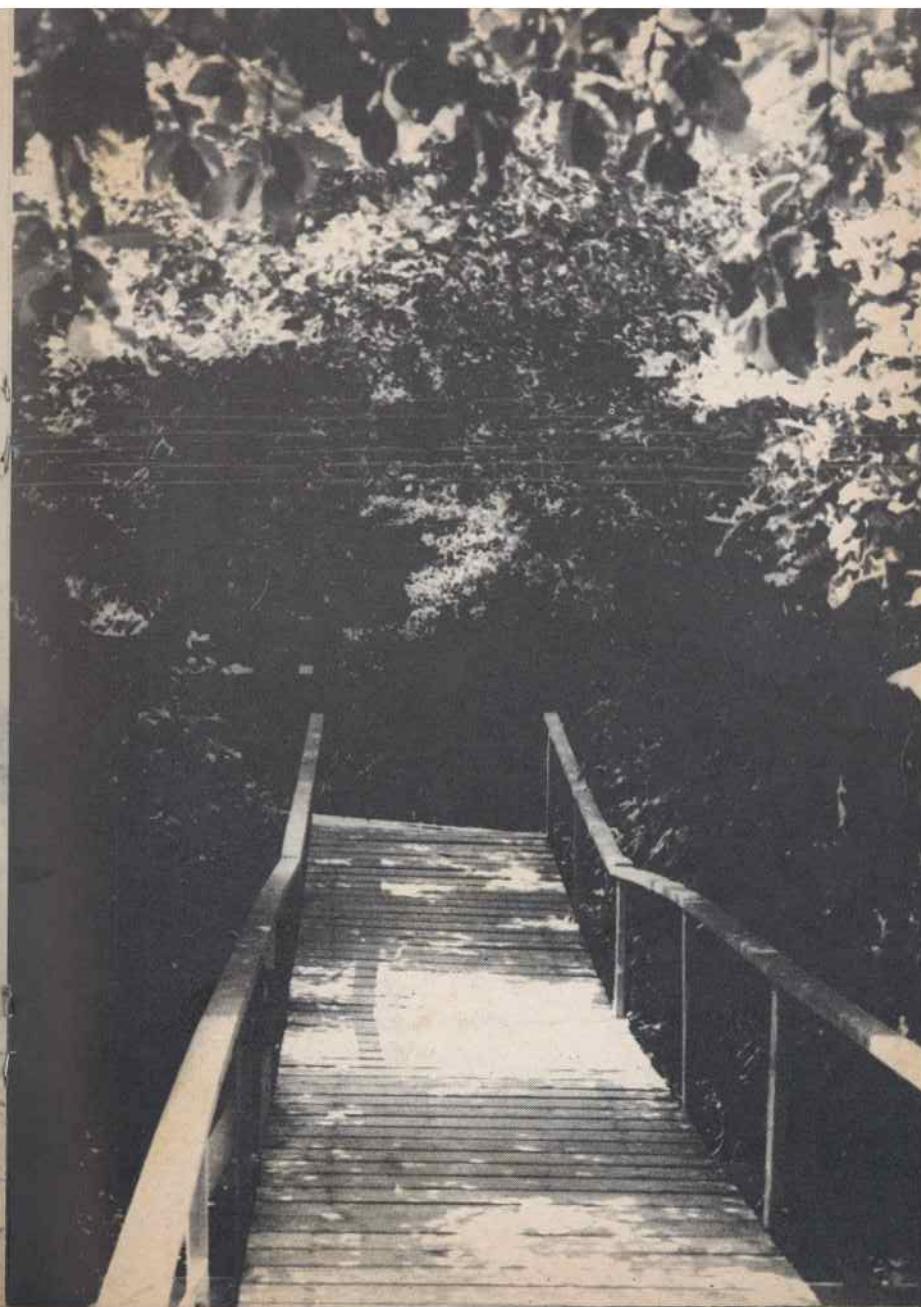
The cast of characters is always changing and the costumes are a tribute to ingenuity and imagination.

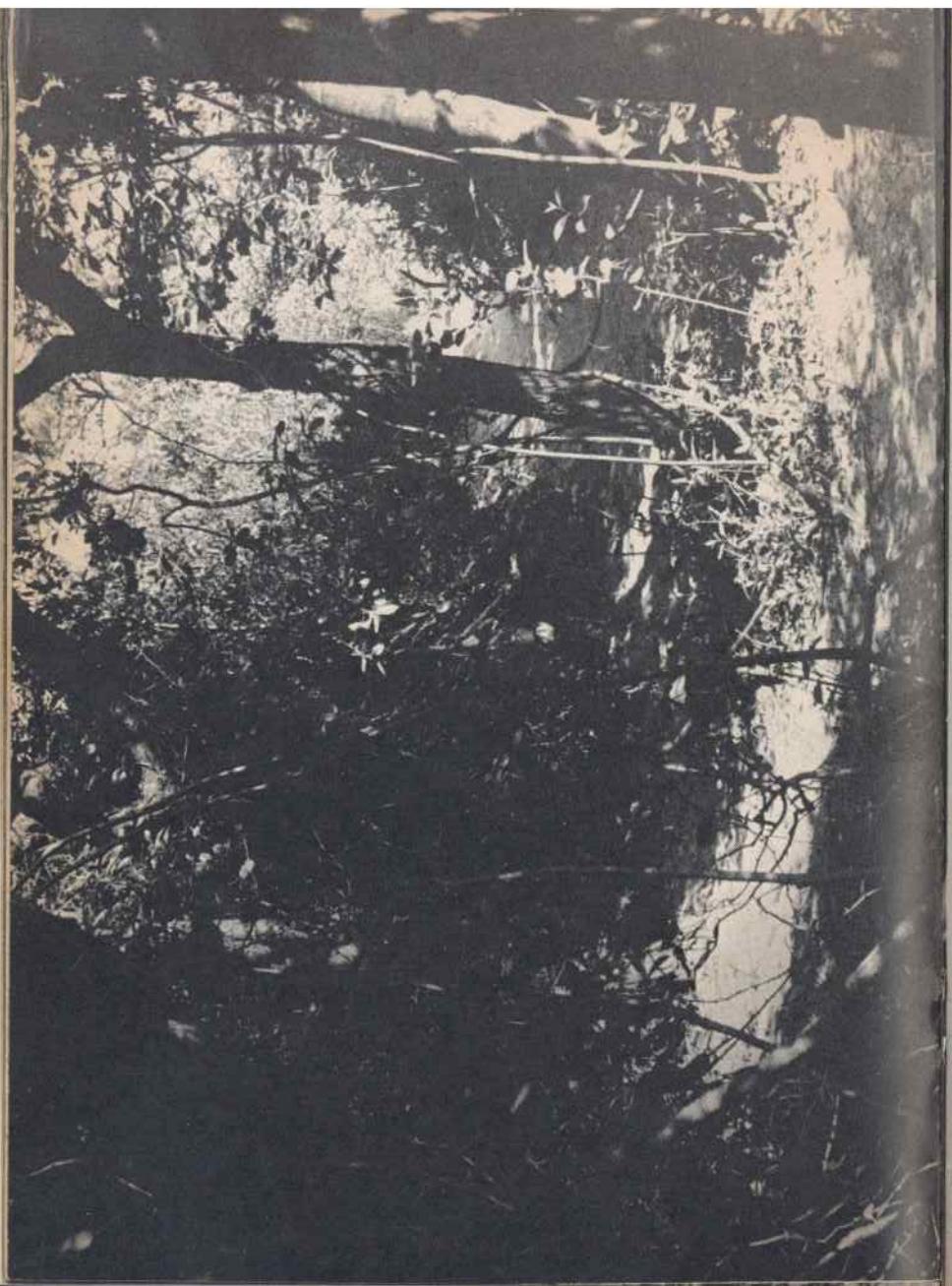






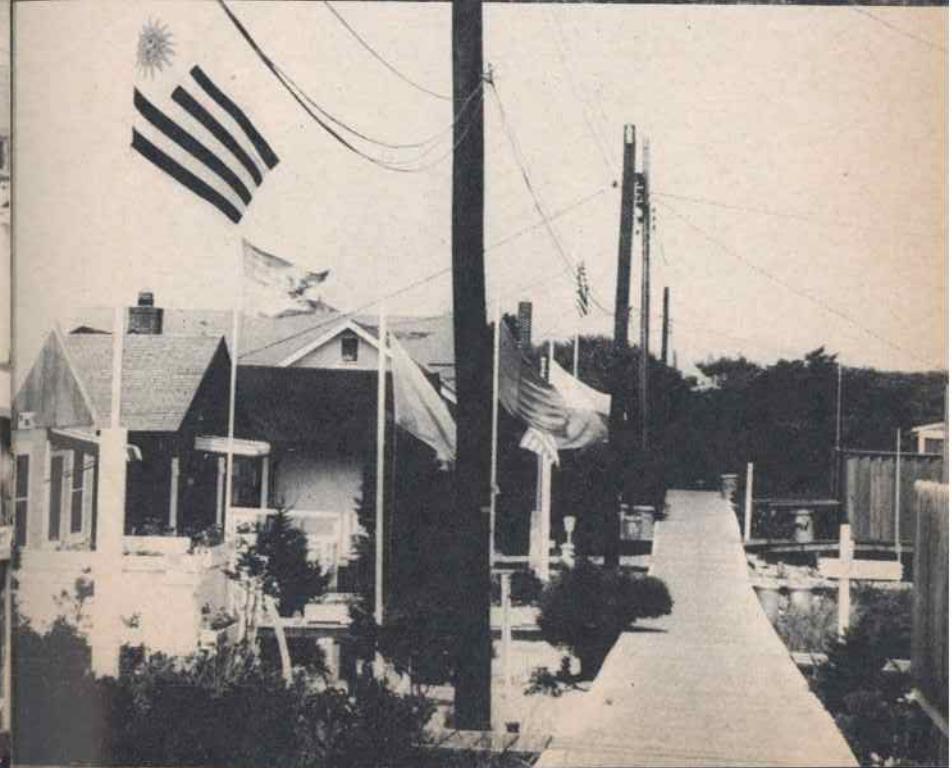
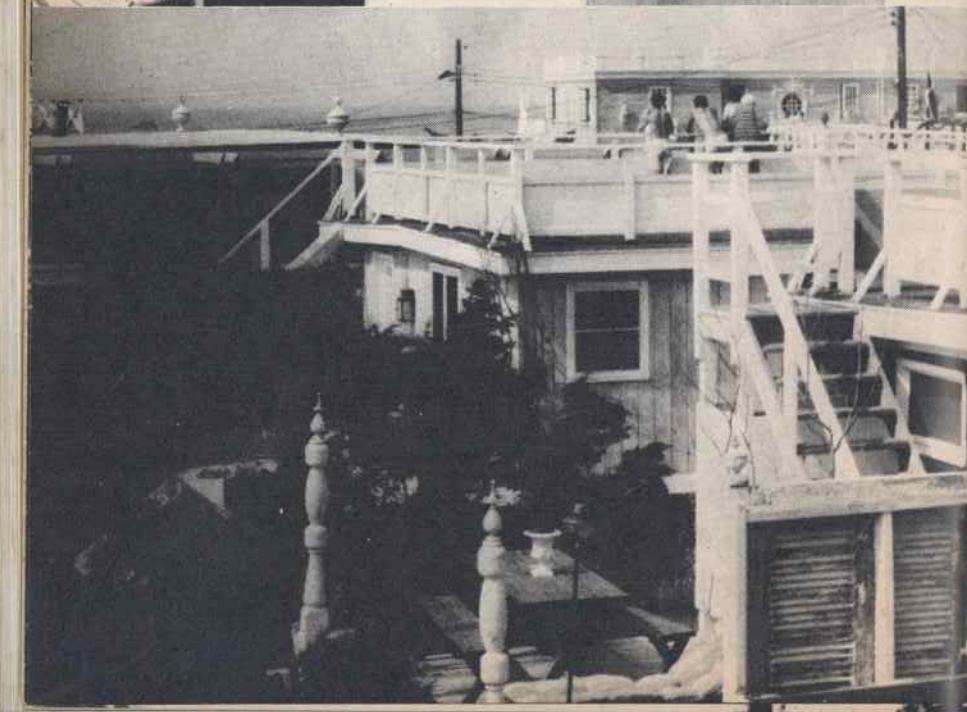
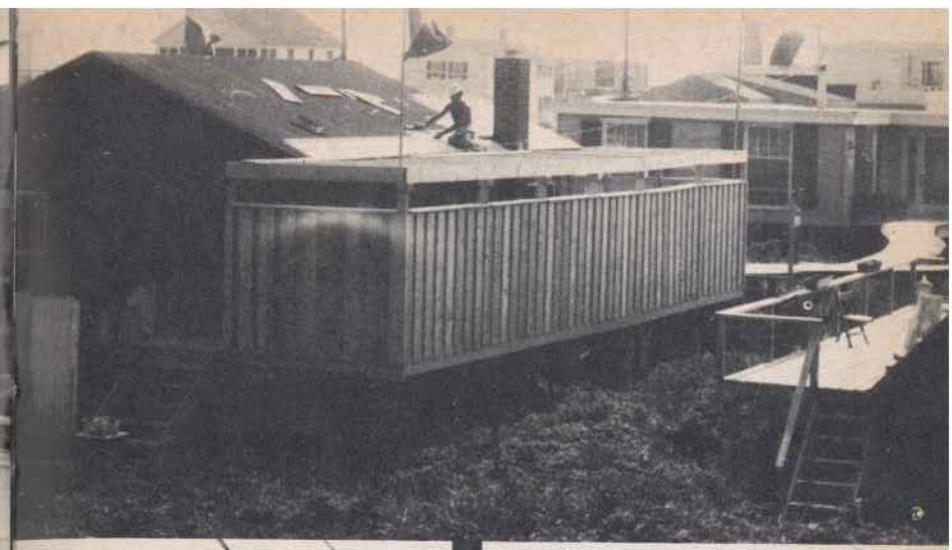
The Beach is one of the really beautiful things at Fire Island. Across the way you see a wooden sidewalk end and one of the many pathways which lead wherever you want to go—but all of them lead to the famed "meat rack" itself, pictured on the following page.



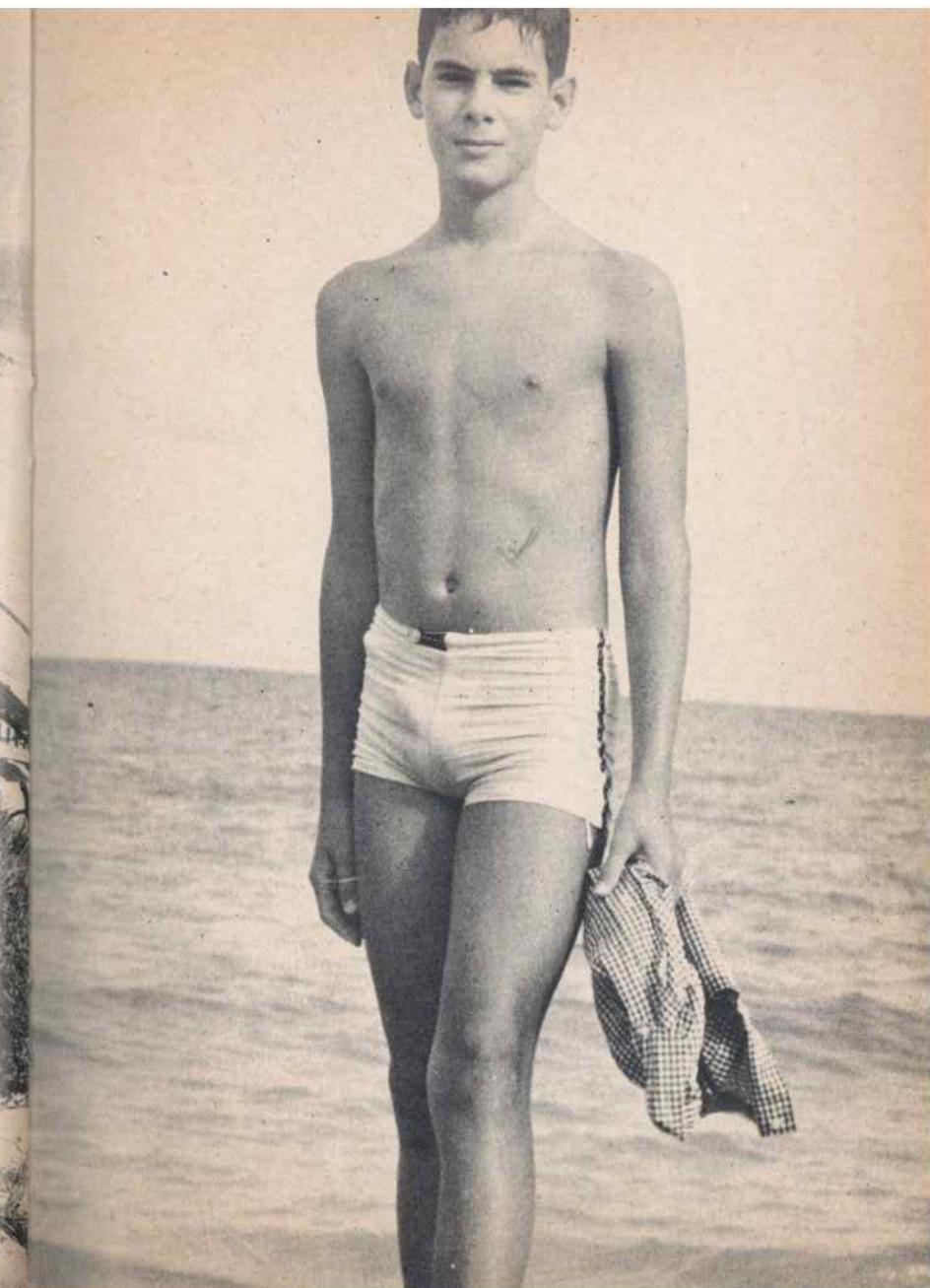
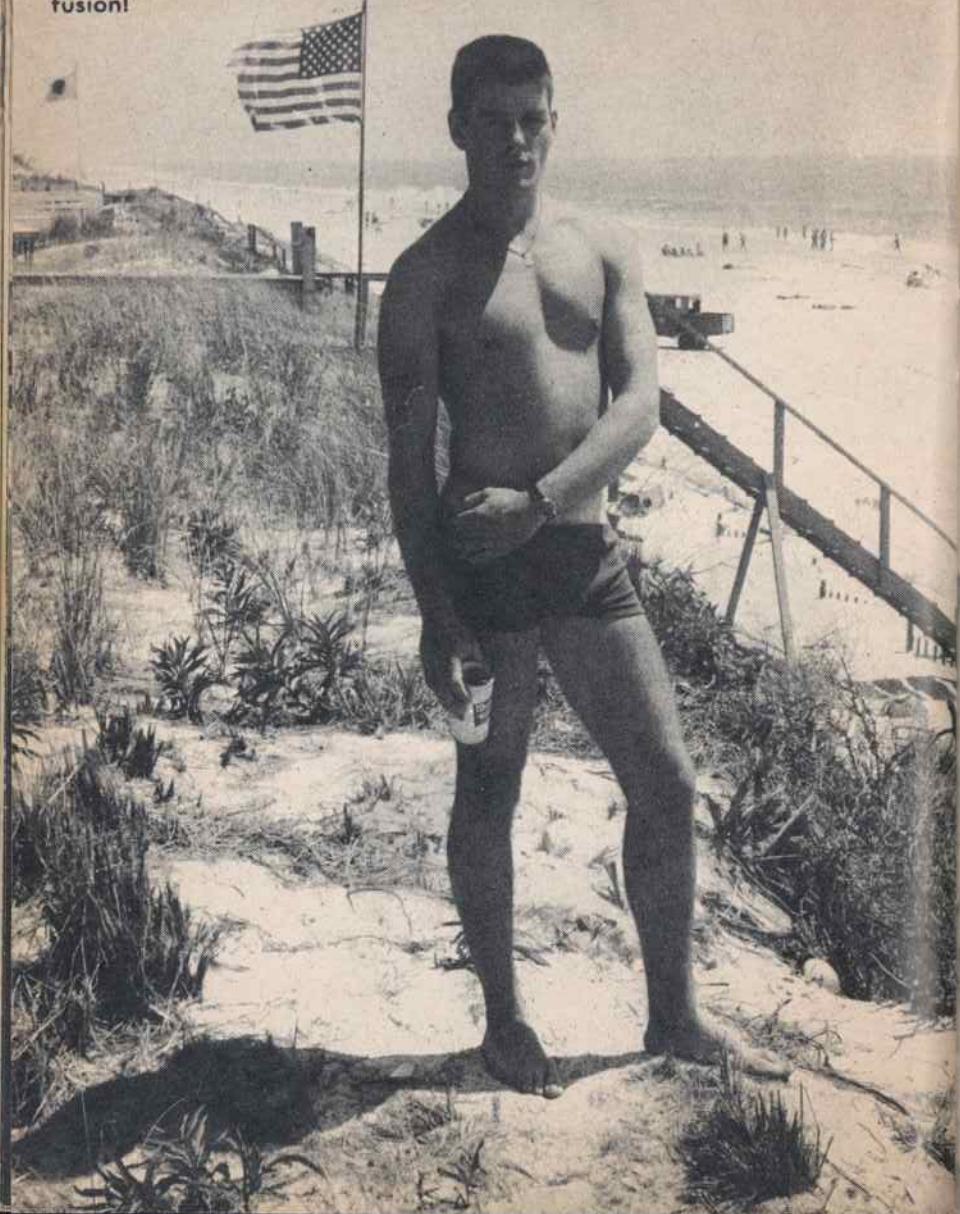


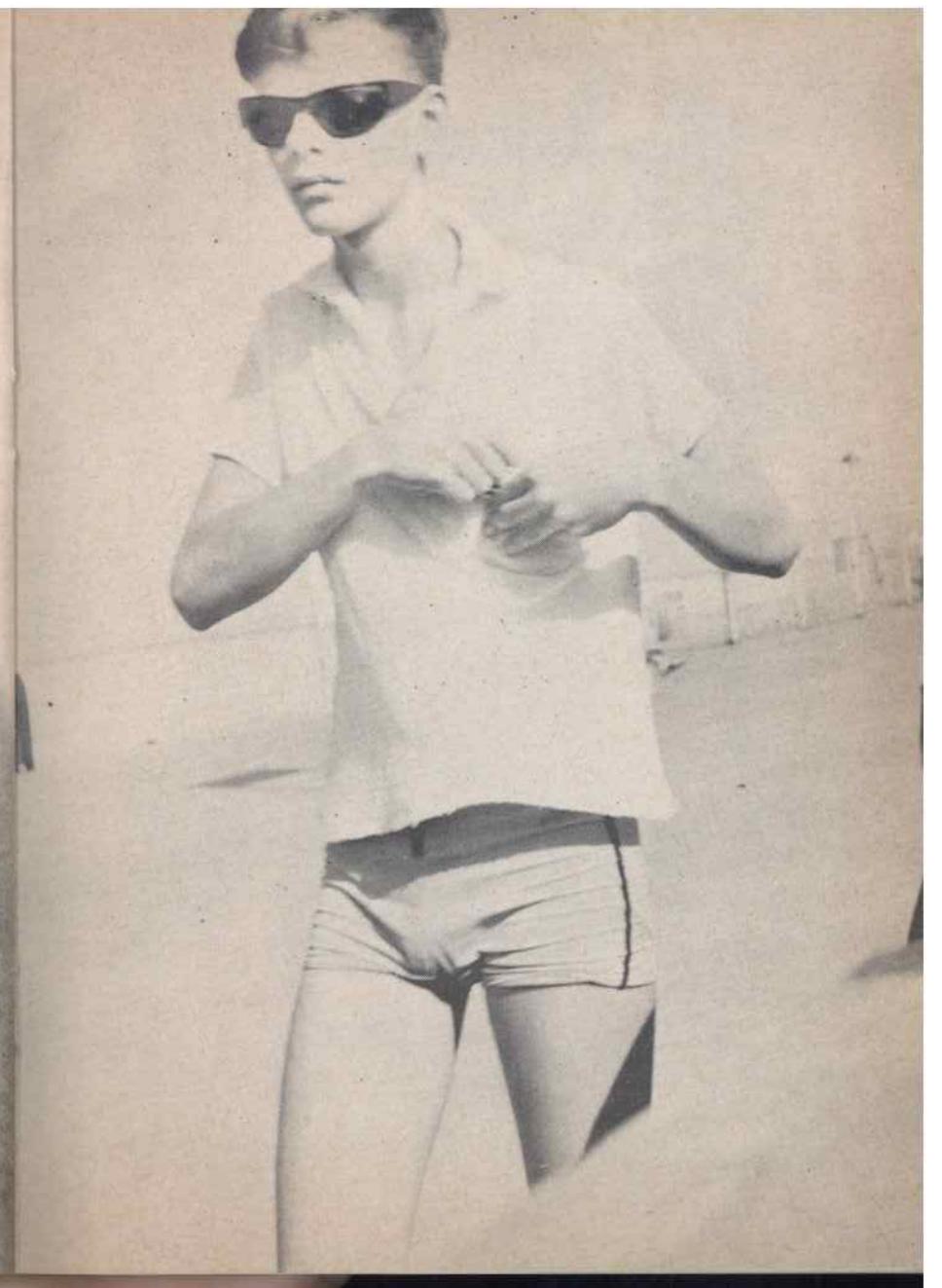
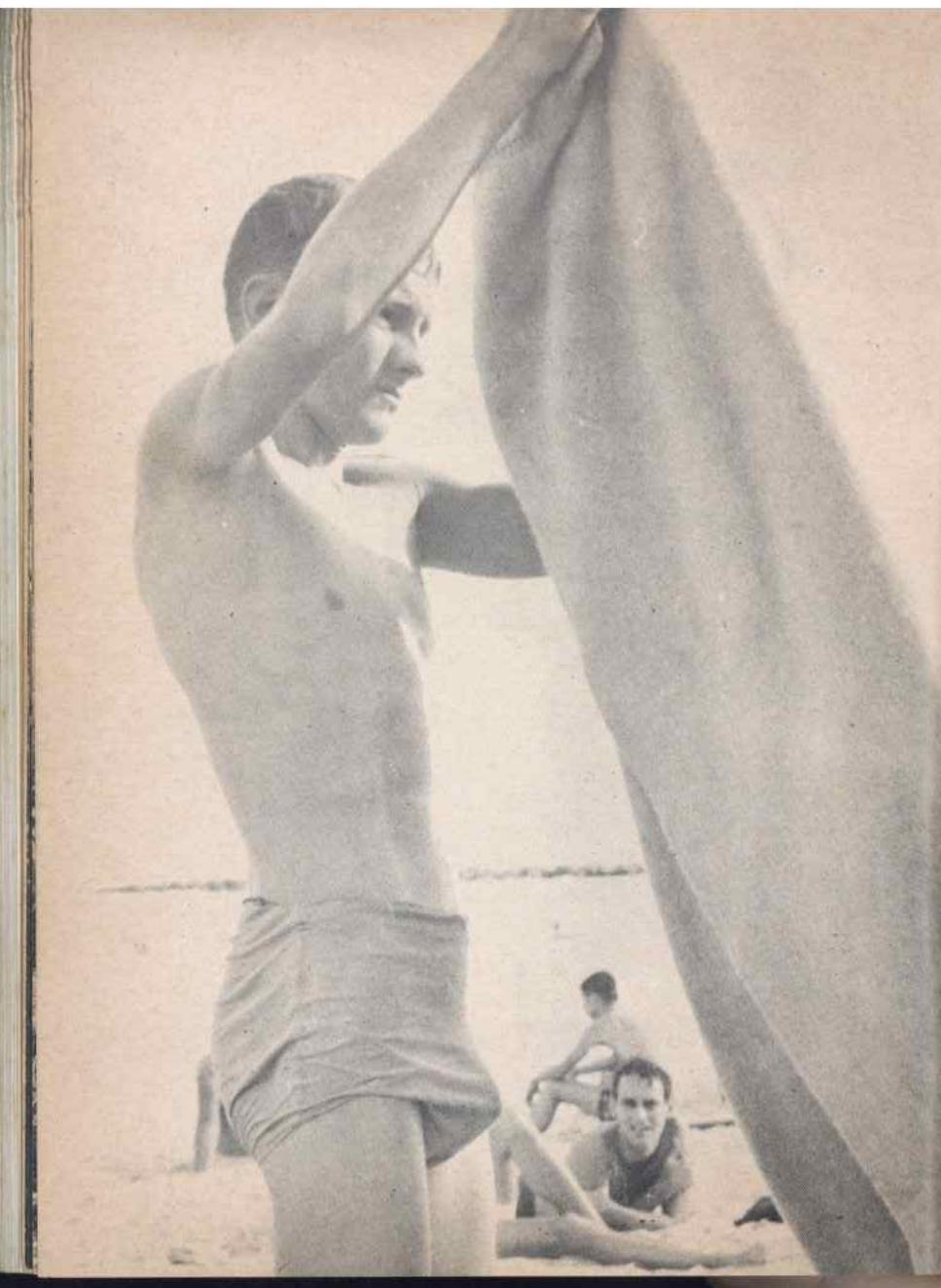
Across the way is a clearing in the "meat rack" and below we have a closer view of the dunes and underbrush that surround famed glade.

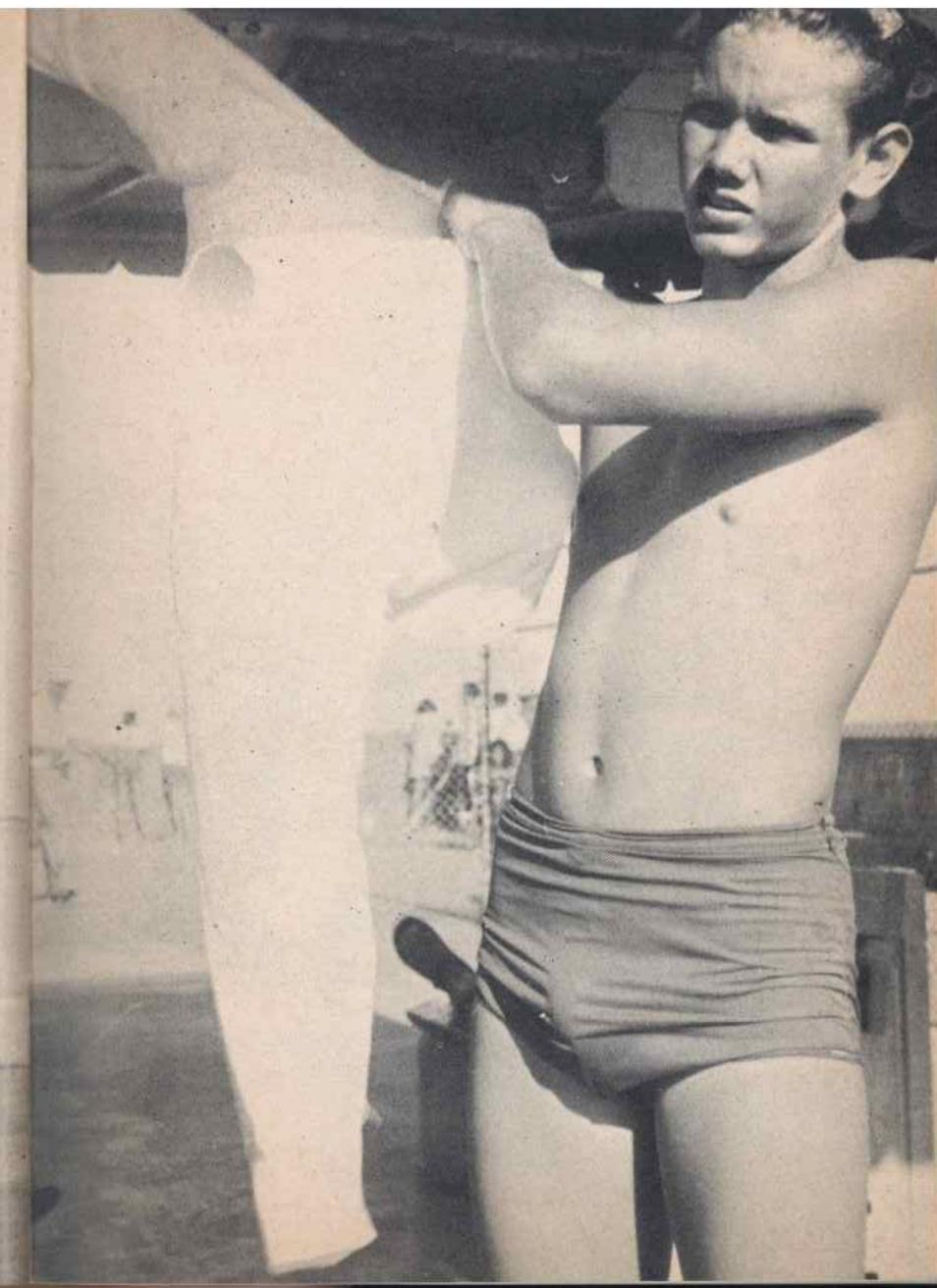
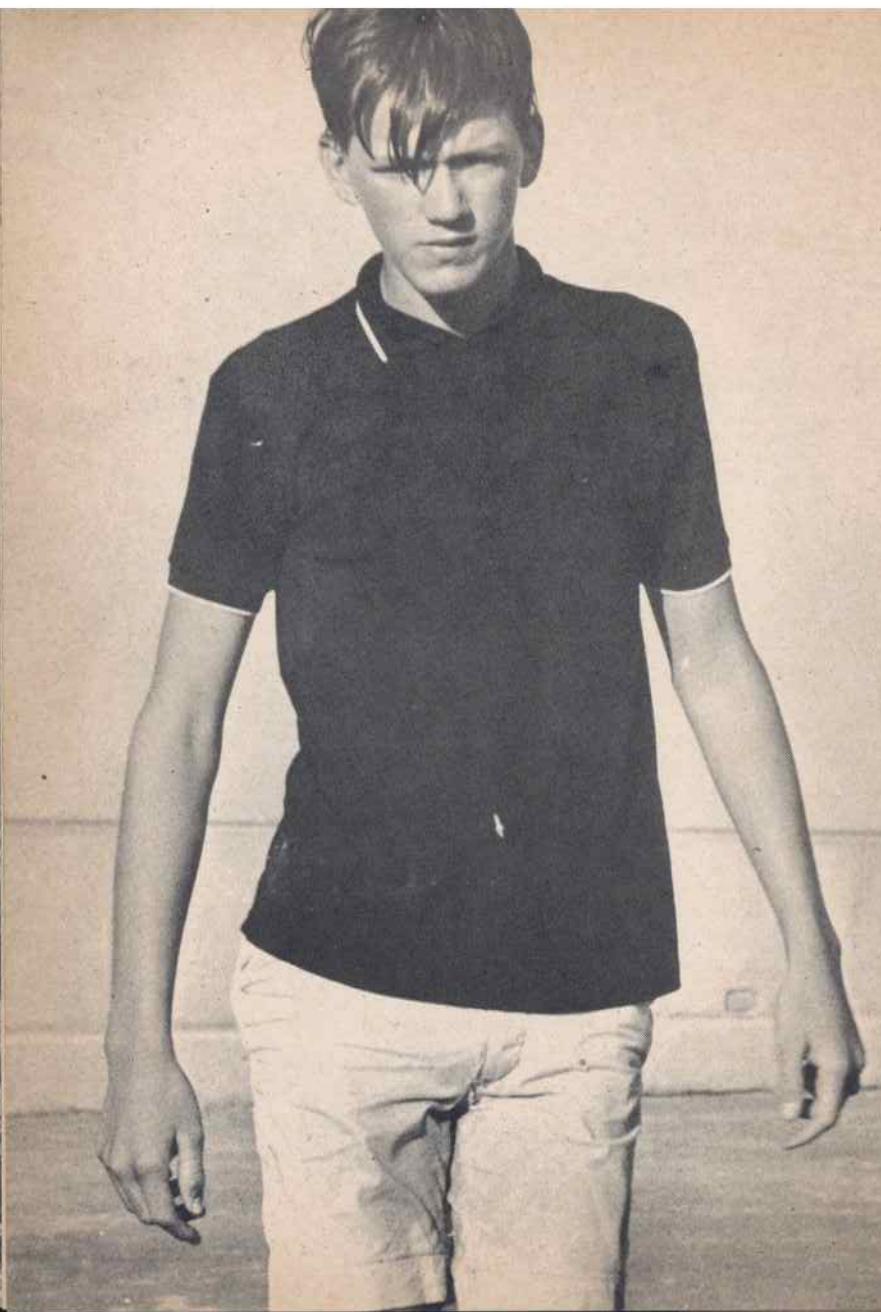


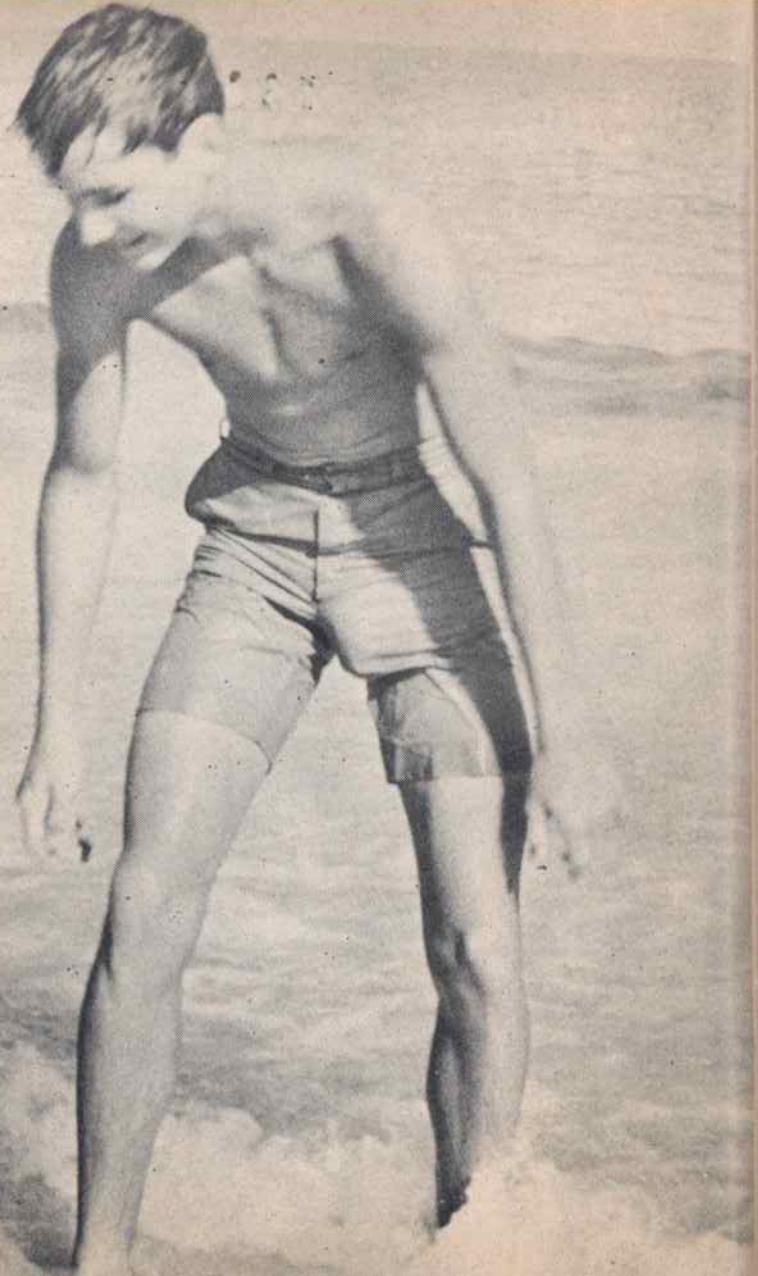


Yes, there are boys; some available, some not; some free, some expensive; some beautiful, some unattractive; but they are there in profusion!









in glaring white light. One by one bedazzling visions of Ziegfeld Girls, Leading Ladies, Stars, Starlets (all boys, all accoutered in the most extravagant of plumages) push through the clamorous sightseers to the main promenade on which they elegantly saunter up to the stage where they are pithily interviewed by the Mistress of Ceremonies. After daintily stepping down from the platform they make a mad dash for the champagne. Now holding their wine-filled paper cups, they stand with friends and vehemently dish the stars now arriving.

The Mistress of Ceremonies tonight is Lana Turner, out of drag a stocky muscleman, but dressed tonight in a billowing muumuu of pink feathers and a sleek, shiny blond wig, she is all gregarious femininity. With the microphone in her hand, she effusively greets her star-studded guests as they grandly walk toward her through the bright lights and the cheering throng.

A stunning brunette in a tight-fitting blue evening gown majestically swishes up the walk with her escort of three handsome chorus boys dressed in top hat and tails.

"And now, Ladies and Gentlemen," says Lana, seething with excitement, "who do I see coming toward the stage? Who can it be? Is it really— Is it possibly— Yes, it is, Ladies and Gentlemen—one of the greats! It's none other than that fine actress and a great personal friend of mine, Ava Gardner! Give Ava a hand, everybody!"

And in his exquisite gown and wig and makeup, the boy does look like Ava Gardner, only a younger and prettier version.

"Now, Ava, you know how much we all adore your movies. It's really a great thrill to see you here tonight. Would you mind saying just a word or two to all your

adoring fans out there?"

"Talk to us, Ava!" someone yells from the crowd.

But Ava doesn't talk.

"Go ahead," says Lana, "you see how anxious they all are to hear your voice."

But still Ava doesn't talk. No one had told her about talking. She screws up her forehead in thought. Finally a few precious words do issue through those scarlet, sensuous lips:

"All I godda say is:" (the voice is, surprisingly, that of a Brooklyn longshoreman) "Aw suck!"

After a moment of stunned silence, the audience laughs and applauds. As they go off the stage one of the chorus boys pats Ava on the behind. She then triumphantly joins a group of screaming sister stars.

"But who is it coming toward us now?" says Lana. "Who can it be? No, it isn't. It isn't. It can't be! But it is! It must be! It's the one and only Jean Harlow!"

And sure enough, there is the shimmering white satin gown, the arched razor-thin eyebrows, the platinum-blond hair. On closer inspection, however, beneath the flour-white powder one can see the tiny wrinkles and blue veins of a man in his seventies. You can also see that this old fellow is quite drunk, and twice he has to be helped after falling off the walk.

But this shaky, decayed version of the Blond Bombshell receives the loudest ovation of all. For the last 20 years this veteran Cherry Grover has been making an annual appearance as the flamboyant Platinum Blond.

"Well, Jean!" Lana says. "Gee, you're looking swell. Tell me, dear, how is everything up there in that Great Sound Stage in the Sky?"

"We have our fun," Jean answers pertly.

"Tell me, Jean—" Lana's voice is now heavy with sentiment—"have you met our dear friend Marilyn up there? Has she at last found happiness? All of us down here miss her so much."

"Oh, yes, I've seen Marilyn several times. She's such a sweet girl," Jean answers in a creaky voice. "I've been showing her around, introducing her to all my friends. We like her very much up there."

And after Jean, there's Judy, then Bette, Joan, Marlene, Greta, Lena, Elizabeth, and on and on. Small, skinny boys, seldom noticed on the beach or in the bars, with the help of a few spangles and daubs of paint are transformed for this one evening into gorgeous, elegant women, celebrities, stars, personalities of beauty and importance.

• • •

"So what did Bill say?" says Tony, as he walks with Charles down toward the community house, where the show is being given.

"Nothing. He was glad to get you off his hands. Did you know he already had a date? With a kid he met last night at 'Fun and Games.' After dinner, when you were out of the room, he came to me and asked if I would keep an eye on you. He's ditching you tonight, Tony; do you mind?"

"Not at all. I'm glad he's keeping himself busy."

"Don't you like Bill, Tony?"

"Once in a while, as a friend, but that's all. He's really a nice guy, but I feel he wants too much from me. He said he loved me. I don't like hearing that from

a guy, especially him. He started saying crazy things about buying me a car, taking me to Europe, paying all my college expenses. I had to tell him to stop.

"Don't you want any of these things?"

"Sure. But in the first place, I don't think he means half of what he's saying. In the second place, being around Bill for any length of time makes me nervous. A fine time I'd have in Europe with him as my ball and chain! In the third place, I can't stand going to bed with him. I don't know what it is. I think it's just how his skin feels to me, kind of soft and clammy. I never in my life had such a hard time coming as that night I spent with him. And Steel isn't an idiot. He's not giving me a car, or a trip to Europe, just for a goodnight kiss."

Charles thinks about his own body. Perhaps Tony would be repelled by it, too. Charles remembers when he was young, how he was repelled by the older men who desired him. Just the fact of their age disgusted him. Tony, Tony, please don't feel that way about me, he thinks.

"I have a question for you now, Charles."

"Fire away. If I don't like it, I'll lie."

"Are you and this guy Louis lovers?"

"No! What ever made you think that?"

"I don't know. I just kind of felt there was something between you two, something more than just friendship."

"Oh, no. I've known Louis for 15 years, but we haven't gone to bed together once. But I can understand how you might think there was more. The whole Grove has thought we were lovers at one time or another. Louis and I have been very close. Whenever I've had serious trouble of any kind I've always been able to count on Louis's helping me as much as he can."

"It's a good thing to have a friend like that."

"It is. But a good friend can become a burden, too."

"How do you mean?"

"Louis thinks he has proprietary rights to me. He hates any friends of mine whom he thinks I might like more than him."

"He doesn't like me, does he, Charles?"

"Don't let it bother you, Tony. Being on Louis's hate list is really kind of a distinction. All the best people are on it. I might soon join them." They now mingle with the crowd of people waiting to get into the community house.

The large audience looks as though it has been wedged into the theater with a shoehorn. On one side of the hall is an overflow of standees. The small seats force Charles and Tony to sit almost on top of each other. Charles doesn't mind this at all.

Considering the limited money and rehearsal time available, these gay reviews are surprisingly good, usually much better than any of the professional shows of this kind performed in the city.

Most of the cast is in drag, of course. Wearing elaborate evening gowns and furs, facsimiles of Tallulah Bankhead, Carol Channing, Ethel Merman parade across the stage, appearing in skits, monologues, and songs, often being as entertaining as the originals.

There is always a striptease act, or an "exotic" dance. One boy with smooth, pale skin does an astounding Turkish belly dance. With his small, supple body, he is able to put every patch of himself into violent, orgiastic motion.

A sweet, dainty blond in a girl's bathing suit minces onto the stage. In a surprisingly vibrant, pure soprano,

she warbles a delicate ballad, while her soft, ladylike gestures harmoniously accompany her warm, honey voice. When she finishes, the crowd wildly applauds and asks for more.

Charles has met this golden-voiced soprano on several occasions. "She" is actually a dark, stocky Italian in his late thirties. When wearing his heavy, black-rimmed glasses, he looks more like a Gristede's green-grocer than like Jeanette MacDonald.

Offstage a record is played—Barbra Streisand in a song from "Funny Girl." A boy is cleverly costumed and made up to look very much like the young star. But more remarkable is the almost supernatural way he is able to place his body and personality behind the voice coming from the loudspeaker. Like a hand into a glove, he slips into the image the voice creates. You forget it is only play-acting and stagecraft. You come to believe Barbra Streisand is actually on the stage before you. Through his inspired performance, this entertainer brings the art of mime into the realm of the near-miraculous.

During the show, Charles occasionally glances over at Tony to see if he's enjoying himself. The boy seems to be eating it up. He laughs at all the jokes and applauds each act as enthusiastically as any queen present.

Charles presses his knee firmly against Tony. He has such a good feeling when the boy presses back.

After the show ends and they are walking up toward the beach, Charles decides that the time has come to honestly, simply ask THE question.

"Would it be all right with you, Tony, if we went back to the cottage now, instead of going to the bar?" And he takes the boy's hand in his own.

Tony with his hand returns the warm pressure and says, "That would be fine with me, Charles."

On the porch, Charles twists the knob of the cottage door. Ahhh, it's locked this time, he thinks, as he takes his key from his pants pocket. We'll have the whole house to ourselves.

Directly after they step into the living room, Charles can't wait any longer. He grabs Tony and with all the desire that has been dammed up within himself, he kisses the boy on his lips. How I've waited for this, he thinks, how I've wanted this!

But the lips against his are tight and stiff. Did I make a mistake? Maybe Tony doesn't like to kiss.

"I haven't done that with men, Charles. I'm not used to it."

"That's all right. It's funny, some kids find it harder to kiss a man than go down on him. They feel kissing makes a fairy of them."

Tony presses his arms around Charles. "I don't feel that way. I'm not afraid of being queer. Either I am or I'm not. A kiss can't change it one way or another. I guess I'm just inexperienced."

"Tony, I don't know how you feel about me. But I know that although I've known you for only a short time, I nevertheless feel deeply that to me you're something very special. No, don't say anything right now. Just listen. With all my heart, Tony, I want what will soon happen in the bedroom upstairs to be a good and beautiful experience for both of us. I only hope that I am able to please you as much as I can."

Tony responds to this by gently placing his hands on Charles's cheeks, then kissing his lips. He is still awkward, but more relaxed. And Charles is stirred by

the tender feeling the kiss conveys. He then leads Tony by the hand to the bedroom, where they silently slip out of their clothes.

It would be nice to leave the lights on, Charles thinks. It would be nice for my eyes to have pleasure, also. But he might be shy. This first time it's better in the dark. In the dark, he'll be more relaxed.

Charles then lies on his bed, his body aching for the body of his lover. O God, please make this good for us both, he prays.

Tony climbs on the bed and stretches out his full length upon Charles. Each limb touches each. Legs, sex, arms, lips, touch, and find pleasure.

Just the feel of his skin on mine is so wonderful Charles thinks. It's such a great joy, just lying beneath this beautiful body.

And Tony *must* be enjoying it too. His lips are stiff no longer. They move with eagerness and desire. When I press my tongue against them, they open, they let me in, they let me taste the sweet delights of the enchanted cave.

With increasing power, Tony pushes his loins, his hard, aspiring sex, against Charles, while Charles tries to blend his body with his lover's, to join Tony in this search of the flesh, this probe into nature for its greatest prize, that glorious height of joy where for one brief moment all men, Tony, Charles, all, join the gods.

As he rolls his loins and legs up to his lover, Charles is beyond thought. His mind has slipped away. His body is now in charge, his animal body that like an ocean wave tosses up to the sun, heaves, strikes, pushes, until with his lover, pushing, striving, pressing together, they reach that Olympian height of joy, the peak of

supreme satisfaction, where the rainbow fountain surges up to heaven, then falls, falls to earth.

Now they can both lie back and relax and experience the exquisite exhaustion which is also a part of the pleasure.

There is no need for words now. They both know it was good. Like a child, Tony nestles against Charles and soon falls asleep. But Charles does not want to sleep yet. He wants to savor this moment, to enjoy the still, quiet warmth of Now.

But his mind soon travels to tomorrow. Don't be too eager, don't try too hard, don't raise your hopes too high—or the fragile bird will fly away. Don't be too anxious. Just try your best to keep this boy with you and to love him.

Suddenly he hears a key turning in the front door, then footsteps ascending the stairs. Through the crack in the bedroom door a shadow stares at him. Emitting a sad whine, the door opens farther. Rays from the hallway lamp fall upon Tony but not on himself. A black silhouette hovers in the doorway, absorbing the sight of the two nude bodies, then finally it closes the door and disappears with the sound of footsteps going down the hall.

• • •

At 11:30 a.m., Sunday morning, loud strains of "Sadie, Sadie, Married Lady" strike through the walls of Charles's bedroom and annoyingly sting their way through his aural canal to maddeningly tickle his eardrum and thus trigger the buzzer of Charles's internal alarm clock, which wakes him up. For the first time

in his life, Charles dislikes Barbra Streisand. For sympathetic comfort he reaches over for the soothing warmth of Tony's body, but finds only empty space! Now he *does* open his eyes! Tony's gone! He looks over at the real alarm clock on the table beside him. It's 11:30 already! Boy, did I sleep!

After slipping on his robe, he steps into the hall and begins to walk toward the bathroom. But first he pokes his head down the stairs to see what's going on in the living room.

Before he sees anything, however, he smells. It's bacon, frying bacon and also hotcakes, yes, hotcakes—which is very odd, because they are the one dish that Louis can't cook.

"Hello, there" are the words coming from the face of a strange boy standing in front of the kitchen stove. "I'm fixing your breakfast."

"Fine, fine," says Charles in a froggy voice. "I'll be down to get it as soon as I can."

"I hope you didn't mind Barbra waking you this morning, Charles," says Bill Steel, with the Sunday paper in his lap.

"No, not at all, but I must admit the girl loses her glamor as a sleep-awakener," he replies and continues his journey to the bathroom.

After shaving and dressing, he joins Bill and his new friend at the breakfast table.

"This is Ronnie. Ronnie Davidson," Bill says as if the boy were something very special.

"I'm very pleased to meet you," says Ronnie, offering a curved, slender hand which is soft as a ripe persimmon. What a swish! thinks Charles. Then he drinks his orange juice.

"Where's Louis?" he asks Bill as he cuts up his pancakes.

"I don't know. He must have gone out early. When Ronnie and I got up, he was gone." Then Bill stupidly smiles over in the direction of Ronnie's back, by which smile he is trying to say to Charles, "Not bad, is he?"

Physically, the boy *is* rather cute, thinks Charles, but too much of a lady for my taste.

"And where's Tony?" Though this was the last question, it was the most important.

"Oh, he'll be back in a minute; he just stepped out for some cigarettes."

Charles is relieved. He hasn't been deserted.

"Would you like some more pancakes?" Ronnie asks Charles as he stands with his face glowing from the rays of light slanting in through the window.

I know that face, Charles thinks. I've seen it recently, too. Oh, no, it couldn't be *him*! He looks again. Lordy! It's no one else—the blond boy, the star of the walk on Friday night—this morning, he's our cook!

Bill repeats for Ronnie: "Do you want some more pancakes?" and Charles realizes that he has forgotten the boy is still standing beside him, waiting with a plate in his hand.

"Oh, yes, forgive me, I'm not altogether awake yet." As Ronnie serves him more pancakes, he wonders if the boy recognizes him. But Ronnie's eyes show no sign. I don't think so. It was too dark.

He can't help sneaking a look at Ronnie's ass when the boy turns around again. Pretty nice. Bill must have had a good session in bed last night, anyway.

When Ronnie leaves the room, Bill says: "What do you think of him, Charles? What a body that boy has!"

And in bed he does everything you could want. I really think he likes me, Charles. I really do. I know he's kind of nelly, but so what? Hell, that kid's the best lay I've had in years."

"Hello, sleepyhead," Tony says as he comes in the front door. "You're finally up. Hi, Bill; any chow left for me?" Very naturally, he puts his hand on Charles's shoulder, not at all caring that Bill is watching this gesture curiously.

Wonderful hand! thinks Charles. Its gentle pressure tells me that I am loved by my lover and he doesn't care who knows it. Oh, Charles, his heart is singing, there really are such things as rainbows, magic lanterns, and stories with happy endings.

• • •

The two lovers spend the rest of the day on the beach, lying on the sand. Today Charles feels no impatience. He is content to do nothing more than lie all day in the sun, as long as Tony is lying beside him. He doesn't even bother to notice who is on the beach today. He pays no attention to the boys walking by who greedily eye Tony's physical splendor, then look at Charles with envy.

When Bill and Ronnie join them on their blanket, however, he doesn't mind. He and Tony have decided Ronnie is a nice kid. He's bright and pleasant and is a great cook.

The only cloud in the day is the total absence of Louis. With a certain sympathy, Charles imagines the hurt unhappiness Louis is feeling now, the humiliated sorrow of the friend left out in the cold. If Tony had

been only a casual trick Louis wouldn't have minded, but he knows that this boy means more than any of the others.

At 5 o'clock, however, when Charles and Tony are sitting at the bar of the cottage and Louis walks in, he shows no signs of hurt or sorrow. He greets them both and affably accepts Charles's invitation to join them in a drink.

He seems bubbling over with gregariousness, in fact, and when Charles asks him how last night's party was, he enthusiastically launches into a full-scale description (while he turns his head away from Tony, directing the story straight at Charles, as if he were saying, "For a night or so you may sleep with this boy, but I am still your oldest friend and what's one toss in the hay against 15 years of friendship?").

Louis actually says, however:

"I have never seen anything so funny in my life! It was a shambles, an absolute shambles, but it was also the funniest affair that has ever been given on this island."

"What happened? How many showed up with phoney invitations?"

"Almost all of them! You know what the hustlers and hairdressers think of the uppity Miss W. Last night was their chance for revenge. They all made a point of showing up. Well, as soon as Miss W. got wind of what was happening she gathered together her royal guard of samurai weightlifters and planted herself at the front door like a rock. (Incidentally, she looked fabulous! As the Grand Mikado, of course, with a red and gold brocaded robe and a lacquered wig this high!)

"As each new arrival came up the walk, Miss W.

would examine her very closely, just like a doctor looking for crabs. If she found she had been examining a stranger, she would then imperiously say: 'I did not invite you to this party. Please go!' And after a glance at the samurai guards, they usually went. This system worked fine until the arrival of Killer McCoy."

"Killer McCoy?" asks Charles.

"You know, the plumber from Patchogue with her own boat?"

"You mean the big bull dike?"

"Yes, Killer McCoy. Well, the Killer went all out. She fixed herself up like Katishaw, the big lady in the 'Mikado,' wearing at least a bolt of flower-pattern sateen around her and a wig on her head which looked like a fat black pumpkin. In all her gaudy, elephantine glory, she sashays up the wooden walk to face a gravely studious Miss W. Offhandedly the Killer pushes forth her purple invitation. Miss W. intensely scrutinizes the invitation, then intensely scrutinizes her. She then rises up to her full height and determinedly says: 'I did not invite you to this party. Please go.' To which the Killer quickly retorts, 'You did, too, you son-of-a-bitch,' and with the steel-girder swing of one of her fists, she knocks Miss W. completely off the walk and into a patch of blue and pink begonias. The Killer, not through yet, then swings wide both of her arms and knocks off two of the weightlifters in a double play, after which the two remaining guards intelligently leap off the walk out of her way. The victorious Killer-Katishaw then clasps both of her fists above her head and proudly enters the party followed by a cheering army of gatecrashers."

"What happened to Miss W.?"

"I hear she finally woke up at 5 a.m. When she saw the earthquake that hit her house and the palatial gardens she immediately called her lawyer and told him to file papers to sue the entire community of Cherry Grove."

"Poor Miss W.! After all that money and work, she spent most of the party knocked out cold. It really sounds like quite a brawl!"

"It certainly was. The funniest thing, I think, is that it turns out Miss W. *did* invite Killer McCoy. She just didn't recognize her out of her jacket and jeans." Louis rises from his bar stool and puts his empty glass in the sink. "I think we'd better start packing, Charles, and get ready for the 6 o'clock ferry."

"Oh, I haven't told you yet. We don't have to take the train tonight, Louis. We can ride back to the city in a car."

"Oh?"

"Yeah, Bill has this friend Ronnie Davidson. He very nicely offered to drive us all back to the city around 8."

"But I would rather leave at 6, Charles," says Louis in a voice as hard as steel.

"But there's plenty of room. Ronnie said it is perfectly all right for you to come along. Why in God's name should we wait in Sayville for the damn milk train, when we're offered a comfortable ride back to the city in a car?"

He knows this is not the point. Logic is superfluous in this conversation. Louis is refusing the ride for the one reason that he did not choose the company.

"It's getting late, Charles. Are you going to leave with me at 6 o'clock or not?"

"I'm not."

For a moment Louis stands there, as if frozen. Then he looks at Tony, coldly, contemptuously.

"Then please excuse me," he says, swiftly turning his back on them both and walking toward the stairs. "I have to pack."

Charles takes a cube from the ice bucket and plops it into Tony's half-filled glass.

"I'm sorry that happened, Charles," Tony says.

"I am, too. And I'm not. I've really been waiting, wanting it to happen. It was as good a time and place as any. I hope he's still my friend, Tony, but I also hope he realizes today he's given me his very last order. C'mon, handsome," Charles says to the boy, playfully hitting his arm, "let's take a walk and see what's going on at the bar."

• • •

Charles, Bill and Tony are dumbfounded when Ronnie picks them up at the Sayville dock in a '64 block-long Cadillac convertible. He doesn't seem like the type to be able to drive one of these monsters, much less own one.

But I should have expected it, Charles thinks, after what Bill with a twinkle in his eye had told him about his new friend. Besides being the only son of a very wealthy Westchester family, Ronnie is also one of the top costume designers for NBC. All this and good in bed, too! What an odd partner for quiet, serious Bill Steel! Maybe Bill has finally found the enchanted Christmas tree from which he's plucked the magical boy.

I know I have. But I must be cautious. It's too soon to hope. Tony's going to meet me after work,

maybe about sharing an apartment together.

As it's warm tonight, they drive with the top down. Each mile more and more swiftly moving cars join them in the swooshing, turbulent cascade to Manhattan. He has always enjoyed this Sunday night ride back to the city with the streams of glaring light moving like a speed-mad modern pilgrimage to the enchanted and holy fortress of mystic night. There's something thrilling and dangerous about this zooming light and swift movement, and now it's doubly exciting with someone beside him who he knows enjoys the ride as much as he.

This boy now at my side, Charles thinks, is the only one I could ever really love, who sexually, emotionally could satisfy me, who could make me content to spend night after night alone with him, who could wipe out all possible reasons for my ever again cruising a bar or a T-room. He's the only one, I think, who could give me the courage to say "Goodbye forever" to Cherry Grove.

And he thinks: Whenever I've met someone I believed I could love, someone I wanted to see more than one night, or two, it just never worked out. And I would be left wondering whether the brief flight to heaven was worth the faster crash to earth. Will it be any different this time?

He doesn't know. But as their open car speeds down the headlight-studded highway and the vast, glittering profile of Manhattan suddenly rises up, full strength, before them, Charles feels the warmth of Tony's hand over his own and within his heart a surge of hope (for his lover, himself, their lives together) rises as high as the gleaming city before them.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE MEAT RACK

Between Cherry Grove and the Pines is a short stretch of land consisting of sand dunes, a marsh, and a small wood. It is a lovely place where on a cool summer day you can admire the pink delicacy of wild roses, the tall brown elegance of curving cattails; you can pluck ripe blueberries from bushes growing wild; you can look in wonder at a jackrabbit suddenly hopping across your path.

If you are daring, you can climb a tall sand dune which faces the sea (thus risking a \$500 fine. Dune-climbing is against the law because of the island's great sand erosion problem). But once on top you feel the risk is worth it, for from your high peak you can look down at a long glorious stretch of glittering beach and grey-blue ocean. On your right you can see the Grove, on your left the Pines. You can turn in the opposite direction and look right over the small wood and marsh to see the shimmering Great Long Island Bay and the toylike houses of Sayville shining in the sun.

But this area is not usually discussed because of its beauty, though it is beautiful. It is whispered about, snickered about, because of its strong, singular, sexual connotations.

The wood itself, the Rack proper, you might call it, is divided by many winding paths, some wider than others, some more secluded than others, some leading to the bay, others to the dunes. At almost any time during a summer day or night, someone is walking along these paths. Even on the darkest night, even when it's raining, there is usually someone here, someone looking for a lover, for sex.

What sex actually happens in this wood? It depends on many things. Is it during the week or the weekend? How warm is it? Is there a moon?

On an average July Saturday night, one can say that almost everything that can happen sexually between men does happen in the Rack—masturbation, exhibitionism, voyeurism, fellatio, sodomy, anilingus (using the cold legal terms). Sometimes these men will be completely dressed, at other times entirely nude. It is all according to their individual passion and the weather.

The time is important. Some men will venture into this wood only during the day, others only at night. Although it can be very frightening in the Rack during the night, more boys go at night.

But in the afternoon males of all types, from 17 to 60, dressed in shorts or bathing suits, can be seen nonchalantly ambling along the serpentine pathways, gracefully bowing beneath the bending pine trees, all seeming to be innocently enjoying the lambent loveliness of the peaceful afternoon.

Two boys are slowly approaching each other. Each holds his head high in the air, as if he were only interested in walking, nothing else, but each knows why the other is here. And as their eyes meet, each, in

one glance, sums up the other:

"Is he handsome enough? Young enough? Big enough? Do I like his face, his body? Is he really my type?" In an instant, these and many other questions shuffle through their minds, quickly adding up to a "yes" or a "no."

If it's "no" the two of them speedily pass each other by, continuing their hopeful quest for someone with the big affirmative. But what if these two boys do like each other? What if this lightning-quick assessment is a definite "yes"?

Let's say one is a brunette, the other a blond. They are both 23 years old and attractive. In each other's eyes they do see a "yes." They do desire each other.

Then both will come to a stop. One fellow, the brunette, let us say, is the bolder of the two. He slowly walks up to the blond. Then hesitantly places his hand on the bulge of the boy's swim suit. The boy lets him. The brunette likes the feeling of the bulge under his hand, the bulge which he feels quickly increasing in size and hardness. The brunette moves his head over to the blond and firmly kisses him on his lips.

But while their lips touch, out of the corner of his eyes the blond sees a heavy older man walking down the path toward them. The man stops and watches, stroking his crotch as he does so. He's harmless, but the blond doesn't like an audience.

He takes his friend's hand and they go off to find a less public place where they can continue their lovemaking undisturbed.

Both of these boys have rooms in the Grove where they could go right now, where there would be no

interruptions, where they could act out the whole drama of their passion lying on a clean, comfortable bed, instead of awkwardly standing in an open wood with poison ivy crawling around their legs.

But seldom does a boy take his friend out of this wood to his room. Why? Do they enjoy the danger? Do they enjoy the novelty of sex in the open? Does their esthetic sense somehow demand that they fulfill their longings amid the glories of nature? Or is each boy somehow afraid that by the time they reach a room the glow of desire between them will have vanished?

No, for many reasons these boys do not leave for a safer, more convenient place. They choose to stay in the Rack, where they soon find an out-of-the-way clearing near the bay.

Then they both pull down their trunks to the knees. Then they embrace. (Remember, in all this time not one word has been spoken. And they won't speak. They know how words easily can break the spell.) Now each fondles the other's sex, not quite certain yet what his respective role is. Finally the brunette decides. He bends his legs on the ground before the blond and slowly pushes his mouth between the boy's legs.

There is something so exciting about having sex while surrounded by flowers and trees and a brilliant afternoon sky! But even at the climax of his pleasure, the blond boy is nervous and unhappy. He doesn't understand the driving compulsion that has brought him almost against his will to the Rack this afternoon. He bitterly hates this passion that is tyrannically stealing his self-control.

In long, painful spasms, he finally comes. The brunette stands up. If their faces were to meet at this moment, he would see cold hate in the other boy's eyes. The blond turns his back upon him as he pulls up his bathing suit. Then he vanishes through the bushes without saying a word.

It often happens this way.

But then again this blond may understand his compulsions and, instead of fighting them, try to go along with them, thus having more control over them. He may realize he is very much attracted to the brunette and that he owes the boy something. So, instead of pulling up his swimsuit, he pulls it down and off. He then places his back against his lover's chest. By this move he is telling the brunette how he should have his sexual fulfillment. He sighs as he feels the brunette's body pressing against him.

These two boys kissed. But others usually don't. To many, kissing is a much more intimate, more personal thing than fellatio. A man will swallow the semen of 15 men, but not kiss or want to kiss one of them.

There are some boys, however, who differ from this blond and brunette, who are not especially interested in privacy. They like adventure more.

A young Puerto Rican boy with a smooth, nut-brown body has just met a thirtyish fellow who is now passionately blowing him. But this isn't enough for the boy. He wants more.

Another man approaches. As he comes closer, the boy smiles at him. The man unzips his fly. The boy reaches over to kiss him while his hand slips into the man's fly.

A fourth person walks toward them from the rear. He is quickly stirred by the back view of the Puerto Rican and takes off his bathing suit completely. He then presses his sex against the boy's silky-smooth buttocks. The boy doesn't mind. He doesn't mind even when the man swiftly thrusts his sex into him. While he is being screwed by this man and blown by another, he himself bends down and sucks off the third.

Many more come into the picture, become excited, form their own groups, until one by one each has an orgasm. Then some leave and go back to the Grove. Not all, however. The afternoon is young. Many desire more experiences. They have purposely held off from coming so they can still blow several more boys that day.

But on some afternoons it seems as though nothing happens. Several good-looking men will be wandering in the woods, but no one is finding his right partner. Either that, or they are all afraid. They wait for someone else to make the first move.

The Rack becomes like a Mack Sennett comedy, with many boys hurriedly chasing each other up hills, around bushes, along the beach, through the marshland, popping up from a dune, materializing from around a cluster of trees.

Nothing happens for hours, but then one attractive boy will suddenly stop, strip, give himself to someone. Then all will stop. All will join in.

There is one very good-looking fellow who is seen in the Rack almost every day. Tall, blond, in his early thirties, he is very handsome in a wholesome, Scandinavian way. Dressed only in a small, white

bathing suit, he patiently walks along the paths, looking for someone young and masculine, something like himself, who would be willing to "service" him. When he finds the right boy, he lets this boy go down on him while an excited group of men gathers around to watch. He doesn't mind. Perhaps this is part of what he really wants.

I hear, from people who know him, that in the city he is a successful engineer. On the island, he never goes to the bars or gay parties. He spends most of his time, in fact, at the beach, playing with small children—that is, when he isn't in the Rack.

This wood can be a heartless place. In the Rack a lonely boy suddenly meets the first person he thinks he could permanently love. And with this person he has the most glorious sexual experiences of his life.

Then the next afternoon on the beach, he sees this same person to whom he unrestrictedly gave his body the day before, with whom he felt the greatest passion he's ever known. The fellow averts his face, makes it clear he won't speak, he never wants to see the boy again.

Once two boys make love in the Rack, they undoubtedly will never, together, make love again.

The Rack exists apart from the other activities at the Grove, but it is always there.

At night the Rack is transformed. Darkness changes everything; the darker it is, the greater the change.

It is 2:30 a.m. A quite handsome fellow in his late thirties is leaning against the crowded hotel bar. He is bored. There are a few interesting numbers here and there, but they are more interested in talking or dancing than in sex. They will do him no good, and

he feels very horny tonight. He leaves the bar and slowly ambles down toward the Rack.

After he reaches the end of the walk, he steps into sand which he trudges through, headed for the shadowy clumps of trees whose black outline is all he can see. The moon is hidden behind a cloud.

He has been here so many times before that he has no trouble finding his way. He even knows where to avoid the large tree roots that trip you when you're not careful. He stops in a little clearing from where he can see the few late, twinkling lights of Long Island. And leaning against a tree he sees a dark figure.

It must be someone young, he thinks. The slender outline is young looking. He approaches the fellow, who seems to be interested in him, also. They tentatively touch each other, kiss. Then they take off their clothes and have a brief, but warm, enjoyable experience.

But while the older man is slipping his pants back on, the moon suddenly appears from behind the cloud, and for the first time he actually sees the face of his partner, the face he has just been so ardently kissing. He shudders. It's an ugly face, a face that in the sunlight would repel him.

But the man thinks, so what? We two had several good, satisfying moments. I don't regret them. He waves goodbye to the boy, then walks back to the sandy path, where he enjoys the cool ocean breeze drifting over the dunes.

Many men who would never step into the Rack during the day come there at night. Most of them are what is called "Closet Queens." They may be just

very quiet, shy types. Or those that have good reason to fear exposure and blackmail, men in high, responsible positions, men with wives and children to worry about. They feel they can't afford being seen in a gay bar or costume party, but they will often venture at 3 o'clock in the morning into where they can't be seen—the Rack.

Who exactly will the people be in this dark wood on a late July night? Actors, models, some quite well-known personalities, old and young, poor and rich, all now on the same level because of the darkness. In this darkness they go wild, taking off all their clothes, doing weird sexual things they have never done before. The darkness protects them, gives them a freedom they never had before.

Unusual things happen in this darkness. A very desirable young stage actor is on his knees in the dirt before an aging, baldheaded hairdresser. Neither knows what the other looks like. He can only judge by the touch of skin. But this touch they like. The actor's mouth goes crazy. After it's over they both feel that they had a great time. They both feel that during that time they were with an ideal partner.

It also happens that oldtime, strictly platonic friends who had never considered having sex with each other will meet in the dark, not knowing who the other is, and have rapturous intercourse.

There are less inhibitions at night. There is more kissing than in the day. But this wood is still far from being an old-fashionedly romantic place. Romance requires love, not sex. It requires choice and discrimination. Romance does not fit in with wholesale promiscuity.

The Rack at Cherry Grove is a place where prom-

iscuity is almost worshiped. It is a place for letting your hair fall all the way to the ground, for digging deep within yourself to the very core of your animal instinct, then freeing this instinct, letting it go wild.

I know of no place in America or abroad to compare with the Rack. Our modern civilization is so hemmed in by archaic laws and worthless customs. Sex is still a dirty word. A frightened world presses the lid on our pure animal desires. Attempting to fight these desires, to cage them, only makes so many of us neurotics, or criminals, or both.

I am in favor of the Rack. I am in favor of any place where a man can discover what he really is. I am in favor of a place where men (and women, too, I add) can walk proudly through the nature to which they at least partially belong. I am in favor of every place where man, as the superb animal he is, can freely give himself to his natural passions.

It will be a long time before these ideal playgrounds will exist. It probably would be easier to go back in time to ancient Greece than to count on there being one in the future.

I mentioned women a while back. Women should be in this playground, too. Let them also explore their passions. Let them try to bring homosexuals into their camp, if they can. The perfect Rack would be a place where both men and women could completely shed their civilized veneer, where they could be animals just for an evening.

But why do we need Racks? Why does Cherry Grove need one? Every person at the Grove has a room where he can take a boy. There are many convenient places to pick up a trick—like the beach, the

bars, the round-the-clock cocktail, dinner, costume parties. Why, when the law and the Grove's straight inhabitants object so strenuously to the Rack, why do the boys still trudge night after night down to this dangerous wood?

Only in a Rack can so many of our frustrated desires be satisfied.

At the bar a chorus boy glances at a hairdresser, who returns the look. They are both attracted to what they see—the faces, the physiques. If the two of them were deaf-mutes and used sign language, the evening would undoubtedly turn out fine. But they aren't. And the chorus boy is very vain and the hairdresser is timid.

But the chorus boy finally screws up enough courage to walk over to the hairdresser and say something like, "This place is sure crowded tonight, isn't it?" to him. Then the hairdresser smiles, perhaps too much, and says:

"It thertainly ith."

This is enough for the other boy. He tries as quickly as possible to slide away from the hurt, disappointed hairdresser.

But these boys, if they met in the Rack, would not talk, they would only see and feel and for a brief time enjoy ecstatic intercourse that could never have happened otherwise.

Take an antique dealer, in his late forties. He is standing at the bar, though he is only there to look. He sees many attractive boys. He likes one especially, a dark 19-year-old, who is gaily talking to his friends. Out of the corner of his eye, the boy sees the older man. He actually likes older men, and likes this one.

But he knows his gay young friends would laugh at him cruelly if he left the bar now with this old guy.

The antique dealer, in turn, resigned himself many years ago to buying his sex. He only has sex with hustlers. He will not talk to this boy, for he thinks, "Surrounded by all of his good-looking friends, why would he ever be interested in me?"

But after the bar closes, the man walks toward the Rack one way; the boy, after leaving his friends, goes there by another. Surrounded by a warm, comfortable night of pine trees and bird song, beneath a canopy of stars, they silently embrace, not knowing each other, knowing they will probably never meet each other again. Yet in a brief time the man and the boy are able to shed all their bitter, sexual longings. They have a consummate, purely sensual experience which, without the Rack, could never have happened.

The Meat Rack will undoubtedly not be in existence next summer.

As this season ended more and more police patrolled the Grove, and the Meat Rack itself was raided several times. But, surprisingly enough, it isn't the law that is spelling the end of this place. It's "progress."

Directly after a bill was passed in Congress making the island a national park, in the very center of the Rack five houses sprouted up like mushrooms. They were hurriedly built to come under this new law. Twenty-seven more houses will be constructed in this same area before next summer. So next summer this beautiful wood will be gone.

There is talk that the Rack will simply move to the other side of the Grove, or to the Pines, perhaps back to the Sunken Forest where it is said to have been many

years ago.

But I can't see how any of these can possibly be as good as was this Rack that I've just described.

There was something just right about this quiet wood near the bay. It was a beautiful place, a beautiful place to make love, and I sincerely believe that the naked boys who made love there never in any way spoiled that beauty.

## CHAPTER THREE

### VIGNETTES

There is something beautifully mysterious in the walks during a foggy night. From a distance the cottage windows shine like extraordinary jewels, and as you walk closer they enlarge and change shape. Colored glass, and bottles filled with colored water, become like the magical ornaments in Ali Baba's cave.

When you are directly in front of it, a window changes again. You are suddenly in a dark theater, looking at a subtly lighted stage set. Quite clearly you see an older man, handing his young friend a drink. You wonder what is between them. Are they lovers, or friends? In every man's life there is material for a book, someone once said. In this window, during this one minute of eavesdropping, there is also a book.

• • •

Quite a few lesbians spend their summers at the Grove. Many of them are very obvious, dressing, talking, acting as much as possible like men. But they never look like actual, grownup men, no matter what trousers and shirts they wear. Most of the butch ones look like fat, 14-year-old boys.

But I remember one afternoon I was standing on

the dock, seeing a friend off on the ferry. Coming toward the boat, I saw a figure in levis and a white shirt. From afar he looked very much like a swaggering hustler-type, and as he came closer, I thought he was handsome, a type of fellow that I would usually find attractive.

Then I noticed his friends. They were dikes. I looked the fellow over again. It was amazing. I had never seen anything like it. The "boy" was a dike. I would have sworn a moment before that "he" was a good-looking piece of trade.

"Stop looking at them," my friend whispered to me. "That's a bunch of tough cookies. They'd think nothing of bashing your face in."

I thought my friend was exaggerating. It was my business if I wanted to look at this unusual human being or not.

Yes, the skin was much too clear and soft for a man. A razor was never needed upon those downy cheeks. Her arms were much too pale and slim for a man.

But I was fascinated by those arms. There were four large tattoos on them; one of them was a heart, inside of which was printed "Betty," another was a bleeding dagger entwined with roses.

My "hustler" was a freak, but, like the ancient statues of hermaphrodites, a beautiful one.

Suddenly my friend jerked my arm and pushed me away. I understood why. I had been doing a very curious thing. Unconsciously my eyes had traveled down the "hustler's" denim shirt, to "his" levis. There they were studying the "boy's" fly, looking for what obviously could never be there at all.

• • •

A handful or so of straight people live at the Grove. A few older couples have been living here for many years. Younger ones with children come to the Grove for a season or two. Half of these straight people stay apart from the gay social activity. But living in a colony of queers does not seem to bother them. They come back to the Grove season after season.

But there are a few older couples and older, unattached women who do join in the Grove's gay festivities. The women, dressed in crazy slacks and picture hats, seem to enjoy themselves more than their husbands. They more easily catch the Grove spirit. They become in some ways very much like queens themselves.

More about lesbians: They do very little fraternizing with the boys. Seldom do they go to the parties or dinners given by the male homosexuals.

I asked a lesbian friend about this.

"Of course, they don't," she answered. "Why should they? The two groups actually have very little in common. Dikes are very serious. They have little sense of humor. They usually think of themselves as gruff, silent, serious men. Queens, on the other hand, like to joke and laugh. They like the wild, promiscuous parties that dikes hate. They like to let their hair down, while dikes like to cut it off. Just because they both desire sexual intercourse with their own sex, is no reason that they should like each other or spend time together."

• • •

Along with drinking and phonograph music, laughter is a ubiquitous element in the Grove. On a quiet weekday, I will be taking a walk in a Cherry Grove that

seems almost deserted, when suddenly I will hear a man's loud laughter coming out of nowhere. In the middle of the night, while I'm lying on my bed, I'll be awakened by the laughter of two or three boys coming home from a friend's house. And one night the laughter coming from the apartment below mine prevented me from getting any sleep the whole night through. My neighbors were having a party which consisted completely of drinks and laughter.

• • •

There are maybe seven or eight colored cooks working in the Grove. They are all over 60. All are very heavy. All are always dressed in white trousers, aprons, and shirts. And all are gay.

It is a fascinating experience to be strolling late at night along the narrow wooden walk and suddenly see two or three of these large, white, voluminous figures approaching you. First you hear their strange, peevish, girlish, gossipy voices. Then, when you're closer, with astonished eyes you see that these sweet-talking great white balloons have no heads. Where the white shirts end, there is nothing but darkness.

You can't help smiling. And after they pass, you can't help but turn around and watch the large snowballs melt into the black coalbin of the night.

• • •

The S-and-M boys come to the Grove in waves, usually at the first and last of the season. They are easily recognized in their standard uniform of levis, T-shirts, black leather caps, boots, jackets, belts.

During the 9-to-5 hours of the weekdays they often

hold down good jobs in the big corporations of the city. They skillfully keep their bizarre nocturnal and weekend activities well hidden.

Many S-and-M-ers at the Grove are quite socially acceptable among the "normal" queers. Many of them, despite the fact of their hard, muscular bodies and their black leather clothes, are effeminate when they open their mouths.

Occasionally a sadist on the prowl will approach a boy and say outright, "I'd like to take you home and beat your ass off." But usually he doesn't show his cards so soon. He waits till the two of them are alone. He tells the boy to strip, though he remains completely dressed in his leather jacket, boots, belt, etc.

While the boy kneels before him with his mouth eagerly sucking him, the sadist will reach down to fondle the boy's nipples, fondle at first, but gradually tighten, twist, dig in with his nails. The boy feels pain but he doesn't say stop. The sadist continues. While the boy is still sucking, the sadist ever so carefully removes his belt, then runs it under the boy's nose, letting him smell the odor of leather which gives him an introduction to what soon will come. Then, ever so gently, he lets the belt fall upon the back of the naked figure below him.

The ritual has begun. Each partner knows his role. The sadist will thoughtfully endeavor to give the boy that tiny bit more of pain than he thinks the boy can take. The boy, in turn, will try to take that little bit more of pain than he thinks would please the sadist. The belt comes down much harder this time. The Master has found a Slave.

• • •

There is a lot of drinking at the Grove, but very little dope-taking. A few are known to take pills: amphetamines (the uppies) and barbiturates (the downies). (When you need a dexie for stimulation, then a seconal for sleep, then a dexie for stimulation again, etc., you are on what is known as "The Merry-Go-Round.") There are rumors of occasional reefer parties. A boy was once picked up by the police while he was in the middle of a mescaline experience. But no one has heard of real junkies' being on the island.

A season back, however, poppers were very much in fashion. They are odd little things, tiny glass vials in yellow cloth coverings. When you break one and inhale it a gas is released, called amyl nitrite, which makes your heart beat faster and seems to affect your sense of balance. You suddenly feel you're on a ship during a storm and everything is peculiarly funny and frightening.

It lasts for only a minute or so and has no after-effects. It is generally considered harmless. It is used medically by persons with heart or asthma conditions. It is not addictive or illegal and in some areas can be bought in a drugstore without a prescription.

In the Grove boys used them for sex. At the point of orgasm, a lover would pop one under his own and his partner's nostrils and it would give the act a greater thrill for them.

But most Grovers kept away from these odd yellow things and the strange sensations they produced. They remembered a story that took place in the city.

A slim, good-looking boy was being screwed by a big Negro. Just as the Negro was about to come, he snapped a popper. He first inhaled it, then he passed

it to the boy, then he inhaled it again himself.

The tremendous stimulation from the sexual act and the drug tore at his heart and broke it. At the height of the orgasm, the man died.

For several minutes the boy lay there, not realizing that the body above and in him was that of a dead man.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE MEAT RACK RAID

It was Saturday night. The time was 3:30 a.m., and I couldn't sleep. I should be able to sleep, I thought. Early in the evening I had been at the hotel bar, where I had gossiped with various friends, cruised the new talent, watched the triple lines of gyrating Hully-Gullyers on the dance floor. Afterwards I had taken a walk, during which I met a boy with whom I had pleasant, casual sex. It was enough for an evening, I thought. I should be able to sleep.

The beach house was quiet. My roommates hadn't come back yet from their rounds of the island. There was no reason why I shouldn't sleep. Nevertheless I tossed and turned, striving for but never coming near Morpheus Country.

I decided to get up. It was foolish to lie there, unhappily striving for the unobtainable. It still was the weekend. Outside the windows of my bedroom I could hear laughter and singing. I was sure there were still many interesting young men on the walks, strolling up and down or standing in the shadows of the houses.

And there was the Meat Rack. It was dangerous going down there, especially on a Saturday night, the most likely time for a raid, but I had been there on several Saturdays before and nothing had gone wrong.

The police boat was not at the Cherry Grove dock as it had been 2 weeks before. No blue uniforms were seen around the hotel, or patrolling the walks.

Earlier in the evening a friend of mine who knows most of the important people at the Grove assured me that the police had finished with their harassment of the island for the summer.

So I felt safe as I walked through the dark shadows.

It was the warmest night of the season, so I wore only a pair of shorts and a sport shirt.

I passed several figures in the shadows. Some had possibilities, I thought, but there was no privacy on the walks and I was shy and feared being rebuffed by anyone.

I continued walking past many of the most charming of the Grove houses: Hint of Mint, Belvedere, La Galleria, Maison Verre, Victoria and Albert, Trade-ing Post, until I reached the very end of the community.

At the end of the walk, I looked up and saw a half moon, the curve of the dunes, the light blanket of fog on the sand that made the small valley look like a snowy waste near the North Pole. I began walking down the path leading toward the grove of pines where I knew the most lively activity of the Rack usually took place.

Just before stepping into the tiny forest, however, I saw a light flashing on the deck of one of the new houses that was just being completed. It could be the police, I thought, but more likely it was just some boys doing a little exploring. I continued my walk into the heart of the Rack.

I passed two men coming out. I only had a faint look at them, but they seemed rather heavy. There were not many heavy boys at Cherry Grove. Then I noticed they

had turned and were slowly following me.

This was a bit odd, too. Were both of these boys interested in me? Unfortunately, it wasn't odd enough to change my direction. I kept going, farther into the wood.

In a small clearing on the edge of the marshes I stopped and looked around. No one else was there. Then the two men who were following me passed by and stood under some trees. I was curious. I walked up to them and tried to look at them more closely. Neither of them interested me, however, so I walked away.

A new figure approached me. He was dressed in a sweater and slacks.

"Nothing much going on here tonight, is there?" he said.

"No," I said, a bit annoyed. "I've just got here."

People usually did not talk in the Rack. It was a place for pantomime and gesture, touching, feeling. Talk spoiled things. I walked off.

A very tall man wearing a jacket stood near the trees. His outline against the moon interested me, but I was unwilling to approach him here. Then I heard some noise. Two men in sweat shirts came out from the marshes. This was another warning: the gay boys seldom ventured into the marshes.

And all of these men in this clearing were large and fat, which the gay population of the Grove was not. But this observation, like the others, did not deter me either, tragically enough.

I walked up the path which led farther into the Rack to another, more isolated clearing, wondering if the tall outline would follow me. He did. He stood very close to me with his feet spread apart. My hand gently trav-

eled toward him.

He grabbed it.

"I'm a police officer and you're under arrest," he said.

I tried to run but I was surrounded by all the fat men, the five I had already seen. All of them were cops. They pinned me to the ground and put handcuffs on me.

"Please," I screamed at them. "Please, let me go. What did I do? I didn't do anything. Let me go."

"Shut up," the cop in the sweater said, as he pushed me out of the Rack toward the dunes. "You scream any more and we'll knock you out." They didn't want me warning any other gay boys who might be tempted to take the path that I had taken that night.

"Please let me go," I pleaded, but it was useless. I was caught. There was nothing now for me to do but endure this arrest, the many grueling hours ahead, and just hope for the best.

As we climbed the dune facing the ocean, I asked the cop in the sweater, "What's the charge?"

"Disorderly Conduct. Don't worry, fellow, you'll just be fined 5 or 10 dollars and then let go."

"But I don't have any money on me."

"Don't worry, we've made a big haul tonight. One of your buddies will help you out."

What's the purpose of all this, I thought, if it's just for 5 or 10 dollars?

Then I remembered Joey Daly, a friend of mine who had been caught in a raid 2 years ago. It was only a fine for him, also, but then they published his name in a Long Island paper and he lost his job at CBS because of it.

I thought of my job and of my family. What if my

family should find out?

A man with a pad of yellow paper and a flashlight took down my name and address. Then the policeman wearing the sweater wrote something on my neck with some sort of marker. (I discovered later that what he wrote was his initials.) Then another cop pulled me over to an automobile and handcuffed me to the steering wheel.

I tried pulling my hand out of the steel bracelet. If I could only get this thing off, I thought, perhaps I could open the door of this car and sneak away. But it was impossible, I was only hurting myself. I soon gave up trying.

"Hey," I heard one cop calling to the others. "Look what we got." In the glare I could just make out two of the fat cops leading two thin figures toward the cars.

"One's a dame!" another cop said.

"They were bare-ass swimming in the ocean." The boy and girl, now partially dressed, were pushed into another car.

Later I was placed in the same car with the boy and girl and we were driven up the beach, quite a long way, to Davis Park.

The boy said to the girl, "It's just an experience. What can they do to us? We just have to try and enjoy it as much as we can!" But then he broke into a hysterical laugh that belied his words.

The girl said little. She was still very wet, her bathing suit and jacket were wet, and she felt very cold.

At Davis Park, 10 unhappy men were sitting on the wooden walk, all of them handcuffed to each other. (I heard the police arrested 17 altogether.) They looked up at the boy and girl.

I recognized three of them from the Grove.

"I'm freezing," the girl said. "Have you anything dry I could wear? I'm sure I'm catching pneumonia."

The police took the girl into a hut they were using as a police station and then had me sit down with the other prisoners.

"I'm not going to plead guilty," said a fellow dressed rather well in blue slacks and a cashmere sweater.

"But it's only going to be a fine," another man said. "The last time they had a raid, it was only \$15."

"You plead as you like, but I can't have a thing like this on my record. I have an important job. This could ruin me. Anyway, I was only sitting on a sand dune, watching the ocean, when these big lumoxes pounced on me."

"But if you plead not guilty, do you realize what you'll have to go through? You'll have to fight it. You'll have to stay in jail until someone bails you out. You'll have to get a lawyer. Just think how much it's going to cost you to get a lawyer from New York to come all the way out here! And how do you think you're going to win this case? You'll have the testimony of five police officers against you."

"Sure, sure," the blue trousers said, "I know that. But just think, you plead guilty and you're in their hands. They could put you in jail for a month. They could fine you \$500 if they wanted to."

"No, no. It's never more than 25. That guy that was picked up last month only paid 15."

One by one we were taken into the small cottage where we were questioned about our addresses, our occupations, etc. All the answers were put down on a form.

Six of the prisoners were then taken to the dock where they boarded a boat taking them to the mainland. The "swimmers" and myself, in a jeep, went the long way around, by land.

It was really a rather beautiful ride. The time was near dawn and we rode on the beach right on the edge of the surf.

"Well, we're at least getting a free tour of Fire Island," the boy said. The girl, however, was still cold and her teeth were chattering.

Until I felt the strong urgings of my bladder, I wasn't minding the ride. But now I desperately needed a men's room. I must control it, I thought, but I knew it was a long way before Patchogue.

"I need to urinate," I finally loudly announced to our captors. Don't say I didn't warn you, I would be able to tell them later, after pissing all over the back seat of their car.

But by superhuman effort I managed to hold it in until we reached the Brookhaven Police Station. There I rushed into the men's room and managed to relieve myself—which is no easy matter, I'll tell you, when you're handcuffed.

I was then placed on a wooden bench beside two of the fellows I had seen at Davis Park.

"Have they told you anything here?" I asked.

"One of the cops told us," he said, "that we were charged with Disorderly Conduct, something about outraging public decency. It's only a misdemeanor and means only a fine. He said if we pleaded not guilty, the charge would be greater, maybe even sodomy—"

"What are you pleading?" I asked him.

"Do we have any choice?"

We really didn't, I knew that.

I looked at the group of us sitting there. Except for the two young boys and the swimmers, we were all very much alike. In our thirties, with fairly good jobs, probably all college graduates, no swishes, all of us usually able to function well enough in the straight world.

"Frankly, I'm scared to death," the other man on the bench said. "I've been working for my firm for 10 years. If my boss should ever hear of this it's goodbye, job."

A fellow sitting on the bench opposite me had been arrested while wearing only a pair of shorts. He was a handsome, blond boy with a magnificent build.

"See the boy without a shirt?" my neighbor asked. "He and the fellow he's handcuffed to are from Sweden. They've just been in this country 2 weeks. Imagine how they feel! A fine impression of America they're going to bring back to Stockholm."

My name was called and I was ushered into an office where the cop who wore the sweater, the one that had first spoken to me in the Rack, was sitting at a desk. He asked me more questions, filled out more forms.

"You're charged with going to a beach with the intention of committing lewd and unnatural acts which offend the public decency."

"So what does this mean?"

"It's really just Disorderly Conduct, like having a fight in the streets. It's the smallest offense we can charge you with. You'll just be fined 10 or 15 dollars."

"But I don't have a penny on me."

"One of your friends will."

"But they're all the way I am. Who takes money with them when taking a moonlight walk?"

"Listen, mister, don't come to me with your problems. You've had warnings all summer. You knew the chances you were taking when you stepped into those bushes. Most of the guys here think you queers are being let off too easy. They thought you should have got a little roughing up back there in the woods. You're lucky, I can tell you. Now get back in the waiting room."

This time I sat next to the Swedish boys.

"Are you pleading guilty?" one asked me with a slight accent.

"I haven't made up my mind yet," I answered. "What about you?"

"I don't know what I should do."

"If you were smart," I told him, "you might put up a fight. Insist on speaking to your consul. Tell them you didn't think you were breaking any law. You'd probably get the whole case thrown out."

"I don't know," he said.

One by one we were called into an office where the judge was sitting at a desk. He was in his thirties, wore glasses, and seemed to be very cold about the whole matter.

Before it was my turn, I was standing next to the fellow in the blue slacks who had been so angry and indignant at Davis Park.

"What are you pleading?" I asked.

"Guilty," he sighed. "What else can we do?"

It was true. We were all afraid. We were all ignorant of our rights, of the possibilities of what could happen to us. I was angry there was no one here on our side, no counsel to give us any advice. We could insist on a lawyer, but as it was Sunday, this would undoubtedly mean that much more time in jail.

After my name was called, I stood before the judge, who read me the same charge the policeman had recited. "Guilty or not guilty?" he asked.

Was I, or wasn't I? In my heart I had not committed any offense against nature or public decency, but according to the law where did I stand? Could I afford to fight this?

"Guilty," I said, immediately feeling *very* guilty over my cowardly weakness.

"You are hereby fined \$50," he said. "If the fine isn't paid by 1 o'clock this afternoon you will be placed in jail for a period of 10 days."

Fifty dollars! We were all fined \$50, twice as much as anyone in one of these raids had been fined before!

And we all meekly, cowardly paid it. The Swedish boys, the indignant fellow in the blue slacks, all of us.

All except the swimmers, that is. They pleaded not guilty. They protested they were not bothering anybody by taking a nude swim at 3 in the morning. And their fine was reduced to \$10 each. Of course, *they* had nothing to lose by fighting it.

We were allowed to make two telephone calls. My house at the Grove didn't have a phone so I called a friend, but I didn't get an answer. I called another friend. He was there but he said he didn't have the money with him but would try to get it.

All 17 of us were now madly telephoning. At least I had friends on the island. The Swedish boys were staying at the hotel. They knew of no one who could help them.

The swimmers had someone coming to pay their fine, but when I asked if their friend could help me, they said he hadn't enough money. I then pictured myself

spending 10 days in jail because of the lack of \$50.

Suddenly a police officer came into the room where we were sitting and said, "Relax, everybody. All of your fines are going to be paid."

It seemed like a miracle.

"The man who runs the water taxi service to the Grove is paying for all of you." It sounded unbelievable.

In the room with the judge was a small, thin man holding a large bundle of money in his hand. After he gave the judge three or four bills, the judge wrote out a receipt for each of us.

It was a great gesture on the part of this little man, I thought. His ferry service did depend upon these boys, these fairies. This gesture was good for business. Nevertheless, he was not compelled to pay these fines. And he was taking a chance. Would all of the 17 pay him back?

On the boat going back to Cherry Grove, we 17 former jailmates were all laughing about our experience, joking about the policemen, about the fact that none of our captors had been in the least attractive. It was a grueling, mortifying, costly thing, but none of us really felt guilty about it. We were all just hoping there would be no reverberations from it and we could completely forget the incident as soon as possible.

One of the fellows, a college instructor, turned toward me.

"I don't understand why, at the first of the year, each house in the Grove doesn't contribute \$10 toward a fund for the use of a lawyer in case of an emergency like this," he said. "We pay for a doctor to be out here. Why not a lawyer? Each gay person in the Grove is just as liable to be arrested as they are to have a broken

leg. Sure, we were warned about going to the Rack, but next season it might not be the Rack. Why couldn't it be the bar at the hotel, or the Sea Shack? They could easily arrest everyone at the bar any time they wanted to, on some trumped-up charge or other."

"I've been thinking of that myself. What if we had had a good lawyer with us this morning and we all stood together and pleaded not guilty? Their jail couldn't hold us all. We would certainly shake up that little town. But then who of us could have afforded the publicity?"

"None of us. We queens are all cowards at the smallest sign of trouble. But it's time we woke up—before it's too late. In those big books up in Albany queers are criminals, not much different from thieves and murderers. Each time a faggot does what comes natural to him he's committing a felony. We're all at the mercy of the Albany boys, and who knows what is in the future for us? How many queer-hunts are up their sleeves? Will we always say meekly 'Guilty, Judge' and go off to jail or maybe to prison without putting up one bit of resistance? Shouldn't we think of some way to protect ourselves?"

The boat had now reached the dock at Cherry Grove. Friends were there waving and screaming, holding drinks for us in their hands.

The raid had started at 3 a.m. that morning and now, at 11 a.m., it was all over. We hoped it was, anyway.

P.S. In a week's time each and every one of the 17 former jailmates had paid his fine to the water taxi service.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

I believe it would be very useful if an authorized sociologist were one summer to undertake a thorough, scientific study of Cherry Grove.

Once complete discretion and anonymity were assured, the gay inhabitants would be quite willing to answer any of the questions of a responsible interviewer. It is certain that many of them would welcome the chance to describe their lives and express their viewpoint. Afterwards they would be very much interested in reading the results of these interviews, a book, perhaps, which might honestly analyze homosexual life. Alfred Kinsey, I'm sure, would have been welcome at Cherry Grove.

The scientist at the Grove, however, would not find an altogether accurate cross section of the American homosexual. Many, perhaps the majority of gay men, would hesitate before venturing into so open and obviously gay a place. These more careful, discreet men prefer the company of their quiet gay and straight friends to the often shrill, almost gay-bar atmosphere of the Grove. Other men stay away from the island because they prefer the more masculine straight, trade, or hustler types who are generally rare at the Grove.

But from the Grove homosexual the sociologist could

discover many interesting facts. What are his sexual preferences? How many straight friends does he have and how many of them know he is gay? What are the causes of homosexual promiscuity? What does the homosexual expect of the future as he grows older? What are the psychological motives of the trade, closet, drag, browning queen?

An accurate picture of the Cherry Grove homosexual would be a great help, I believe, to a truer, more detailed picture of the whole gay way of life in America.

This would be important. The homosexual is exerting a growing influence on the social and cultural life of this country. Talented, intelligent homosexuals have key positions in the fashion world, the literary world, every branch of the entertainment industry. Every American home is being influenced in some way by homosexuals. It is time that all Americans learn more about these men whose importance to society is increasing daily.

It is now common knowledge that the United States is now undergoing a sexual revolution. A new morality is dramatically changing the habits and customs of the nation. Puritan reactionaries undoubtedly call this "new" morality IMMORALITY, as with Goldwater they look backwards at what they believe was a more stable, moral world. With angry fear they view the new sexual freedom that is now sweeping across the land.

Continence, chastity, virginity are no longer states of particular virtue. Birth control, pre- and extra-marital intercourse, the deviate sexual acts of a husband and wife are no longer sins to cause guilt and anxiety. Boys are no longer told by ignorant fathers that masturbation is the cause of acne and insanity. And homosexu-

ality is no longer a valid reason for one man to jeer at, or beat up another. It is no longer a forbidden topic which society hides with the skeleton in the closet.

The new, evolving status of the American homosexual and the public's new awareness of him are important parts of the sexual revolution. There are many signs of this change in status: the lengthy, serious articles in the New York Times and in *Life* magazine (which tried to be truthful and fair); the many physique magazines and homosexual reviews to be found on the newsstands of all the large cities; the publishing and literary interest in such books as "Notre Dame des Fleurs," "Naked Lunch," and "City of Night," besides the many factual studies of homosexuality. These are all strong indications of the American public's increasing awareness of and curiosity about the gay world around them.

The book "City of Night" is of particular interest. Though it deals exclusively with the most sordid aspects of homosexuality, it is nevertheless a frank, honest book. It has great literary deficiencies, but these, I believe, are amply made up for by its value as a social document, a document which covers a whole realm of the gay life that American writers had never dealt with before. I was quite astounded when this very special book became a national bestseller. Homosexuals alone could not possibly account for its large sales. It has often amused me to see a respectable, suburban housewife with this inflammable book under her arm. There must have been thousands of heterosexuals who paid \$6 for this extraordinary novel.

We can all remember when novelists and playwrights were forbidden even to mention the subject.

A play like "The Captive," concerning lesbianism, for instance, was yanked off Broadway after only three performances, even though this was a tasteful play without eroticism or obscenity and the only lesbian in the story never appeared on the stage. As the homosexual character in "The Green Bay Tree" was a vicious monster, this play was allowed to run a few nights longer.

Real ground was broken in "The Children's Hour" when Lillian Hellman allowed a sympathetic character to subconsciously become a latent lezzie. This was not cause for the gay world to rejoice, however, as the poor butch schoolteacher was forced to pay for her latent lust by hanging herself. Besides this, the subject of homosexuality itself was treated as an abomination. As another sign of the changing times, when a new film version of the play was recently presented, it seemed laughable and strangely dated. When Shirley MacLaine discovers she's hot for Audrey Hepburn, why the big production with the rope and chair? Why doesn't she simply clue in her square friend, either that or dump her and hop on the next train for the Village, where a girl like her can really swing?

A more important step forward in the fair characterization of the homosexual was made by Shelagh Delaney in her play "A Taste of Honey." The gay boy who befriended the heroine was neither a drag queen nor a monster, but an ordinary, likable, sympathetic character who just happened to also be gay. (He also did not have to later atone for his effeminacy by killing himself or being run over by a truck.) The fact that this character was in a successful Broadway play, and a movie later on, decisively shows that the public is ready to accept the depiction of homosexuality in

unbiased, truthful terms.

The reaction of Americans to the Walter Jenkins case is another indication of a new, widespread sympathy for the sexual deviate. The newspapers, the commentators, and the general public were either calmly sympathetic to this man's plight or altogether silent. Most Republicans were leery of using the case against Johnson. They knew that too strong a stand against homosexuality could easily backfire. (What Pandora's box of personal scandal might the Democrats not use against the Republicans, if given enough cause?) The election results clearly demonstrated that the Jenkins episode had little or no effect on Johnson's great victory.

Here was a man who had been a tireless worker for the President, who had a wife and six children, who was highly esteemed by all of his friends and colleagues. How inhuman it would have been to discount his distinguished record as a Government worker and family man, all because of two sordid but essentially trivial incidents at a YMCA! From all indications the majority of the public was on the side of J. Edgar Hoover, who, in sending flowers to Jenkins' hospital room, revealed a humanity that many of us did not previously consider existed in him.

The sudden revelation that a public figure is a homosexual no longer automatically ruins his career. The great actor John Gielgud is not considered less great an artist because he was once arrested in England for soliciting. There are many examples of artists and entertainers known by the public to be homosexual yet not robbed of their livelihood because of this.

As one standard bearer of the sexual revolution, the brilliant novelist and poet, Paul Goodman, has been

writing books on progressive education. He believes that children should be allowed as much sexual freedom as they like. The only restrictions on their sexual play would be measures to prevent any unwanted babies and the sexual coercion of one child by another. Many advanced educators agree with Goodman that by allowing children as much opportunity for sexual pleasure as they like (with members of their own or opposite sex) they are increasing the chances of these children's becoming happier, less neurotic adults.

Why shouldn't children have as much sexual freedom as they like? (Has any man ever regretted any of the sexual adventures of his childhood? More likely he wishes he had had more!)

And if children should be granted sexual freedom, why shouldn't adults?

Many leading American judges and lawyers believe that it is time that the sex laws in every state be drastically overhauled. Like the children, adults in the privacy of their homes should be allowed to indulge in whatever sexual practices they desire, as long as there is no coercion involved. These American jurists believe the ridiculous sodomy laws (which in legal terms cover any sexual act between persons (or animals) that does not lead to procreation) should be wiped off the books.

The radical change of state sex laws should be the first goal for all homosexuals who believe in the necessary improvement of their condition in this country.

There is no reason why the largest and most powerful of world nations should lag behind little countries like Sweden and Norway which have adopted progressive sexual reforms that have been successfully practiced for several years now. By granting its people sex edu-

cation plus freedom, the Swedish Government has radically minimized the number of sex crimes and other sexual problems in the nation.

And these reforms have not insidiously triggered the Decline and Fall of these Scandinavian countries, as the puritan moralists would have us believe. These small, advanced nations are as prosperous and law-abiding as any of their less progressive neighbors.

As an example of how sex reform can channel sex behavior into patterns more socially in harmony with the community as a whole, it is a well-known fact that there are actually fewer homosexuals in countries where it is not against the law. In the sexually tolerant countries of Scandinavia, France, Italy, and Spain, there is statistically less overt homosexuality than in countries like England, Germany, and the United States where anachronistic, puritanical sex laws are still on the books. It seems that when there are less restrictions against bedding down with more girls, boys will more frequently turn to them, abandoning (let's face it) the sensually enjoyable, but less socially gratifying or fulfilling pleasure of love with boys.

Slowly, but inevitably, each state in this country will have its own sexual reform. Private sexual acts between consenting adults will be strictly a matter for the individuals concerned. Homosexuals will be treated as first-class citizens, as homosexuality itself will no longer be considered a crime or a disease but simply a sexually variant way of living.

Heterosexuals must learn to tolerate and understand their homosexual brethren. Some intelligent straight men and women do already. They have found it makes life more interesting, having a few gay friends. Person-

ality and intelligence are the important factors in a friendship, not sex variance.

I think these intelligent straight people will be those who, with the prodding of their gay friends, will eventually be powerful enough to exert the pressure necessary for a change in the puritan sex laws which will then clear the air for both straights and homosexuals.

Only then will such a place as Cherry Grove be free from fear, fear of straight outsiders coming in and pushing them out, fear of raiding parties from Sayville, fear of the death of the Grove itself.

There were ominous signs in the Grove last summer. More and more straight tourists could be seen staring at the luxuriant flowers and shrubbery, the clean, spacious beaches, the trim little cottages with their brave flags rustling in the breeze. You could see the obvious envy and desire in their eyes. You could almost hear them saying to each other: "Wouldn't this be a nice place to live, once we got rid of all the queers?"

And every weekend extra boatloads of Long Island policemen invaded the Grove. They were all over, patrolling the walks, poking into the bars and even into some private parties. The better looking ones wore casual civvies and spent hours in dark sections of the walks, trying to entrap unwary boys.

Why was this extra, unnecessary number of cops in the Grove this season? Was it a local matter (a few of the Grove straight residents making complaining calls to the mainland), or an order from Albany? Had the Government possibly put on pressure to clean up this community before it became a part of a National Park?

Whatever the cause, this intense pressure from the

law started many Grovers thinking that perhaps next year it would be better to vacation elsewhere, that the State and Government might decide to wipe out the Grove altogether.

And they could easily do it. It would take little to break any unified stand the Grove property owners might try to make. Few queens have the ability or capacity to stand up to the law, even if they wanted to. And usually they don't. They fly at the first sign of trouble.

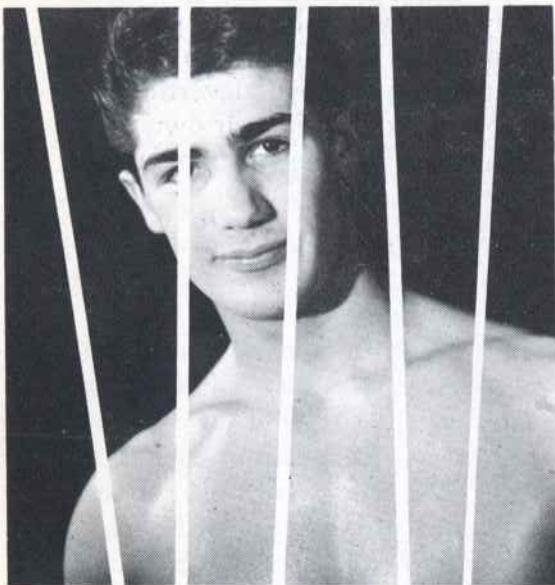
It would be a shame for the Grove to become like any other ordinary, straight seaside resort. It would be as though it had died. The Grove is a distinctive community of unusual charm where many people have found excitement, fun, and pleasure that could not be found anywhere else. And, practically speaking, the law's discouraging the boys from going to the Grove only sends them elsewhere (the Hamptons and Montauk are swelling) to where the same cycle of trouble would begin again.

"How can you defend this screaming, degenerate cesspool?" Mrs. Average-American-Housewife might say. "Men dressing like women, behaving against the laws of nature, acting like freaks!!"

I would tell her: "Madame, there are more ways to live in this world than you are aware of. Men have loved men since the days of Adam. If nature had not meant for boys to occasionally love boys, it would never have existed. Please, Madame, think with a free, open mind. Try to intelligently understand the gay boys that you see around you more and more every day. One of them might be your son."

Cherry Grove has been a homosexual town since the

day it first existed, 40 or so years ago. This community conclusively proves, I believe, that homosexuals when left alone can create a lively, lovely place to spend a summer. Though there are many who do not approve of its unusual social pattern, the Grove nevertheless amply demonstrates that homosexuals on their own can create a pleasurable, creative, often beautiful way of living.



QUOTES:

"Didn't you get a look at his equipment?"

"Then he comes over to me with that thing of his looking like a big hammer and says 'Turn over.' "



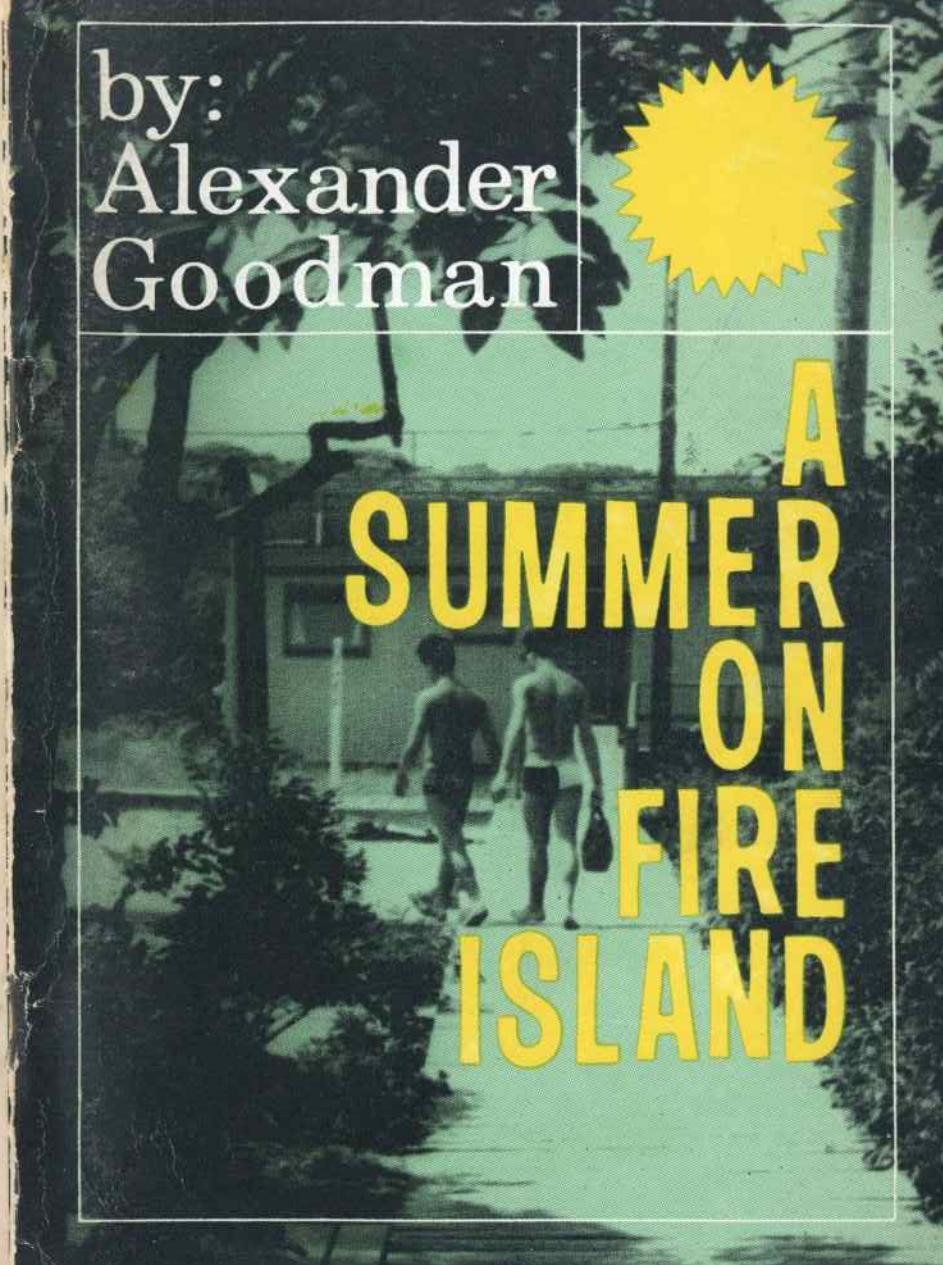
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