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New Horizons

through **READING** and **LITERATURE**

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NEW HORIZONS through READING and LITERATURE

Book 2

Understanding—Yourself and Others

Action—Sports and Outdoor Life

Adventure—Strength and Courage

Discovery—Nature, Science, and

Invention

Achievement—Dreams and Deeds

Heritage—Laughter and Tears

New Horizons

through READING

John E. Brewton

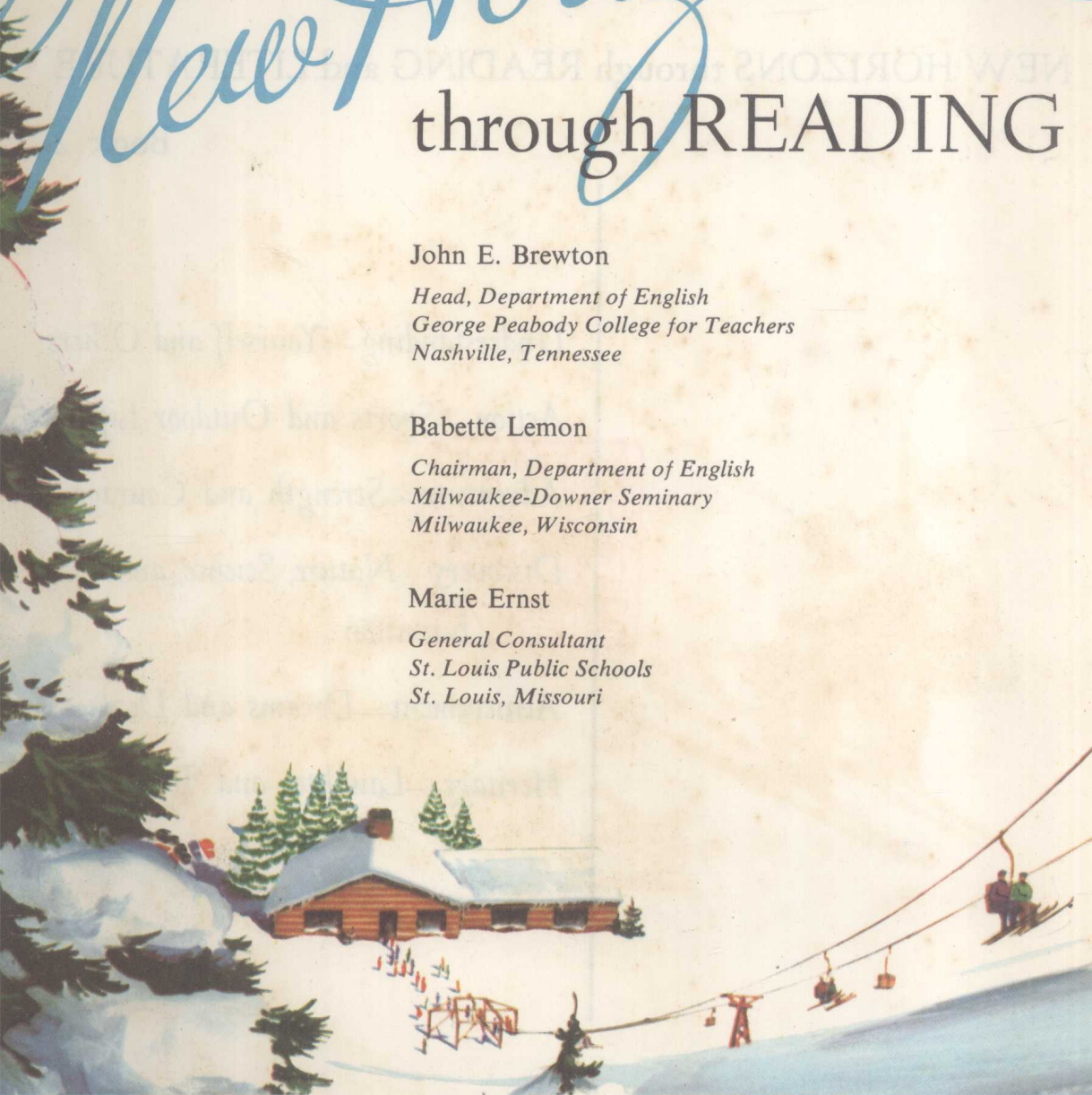
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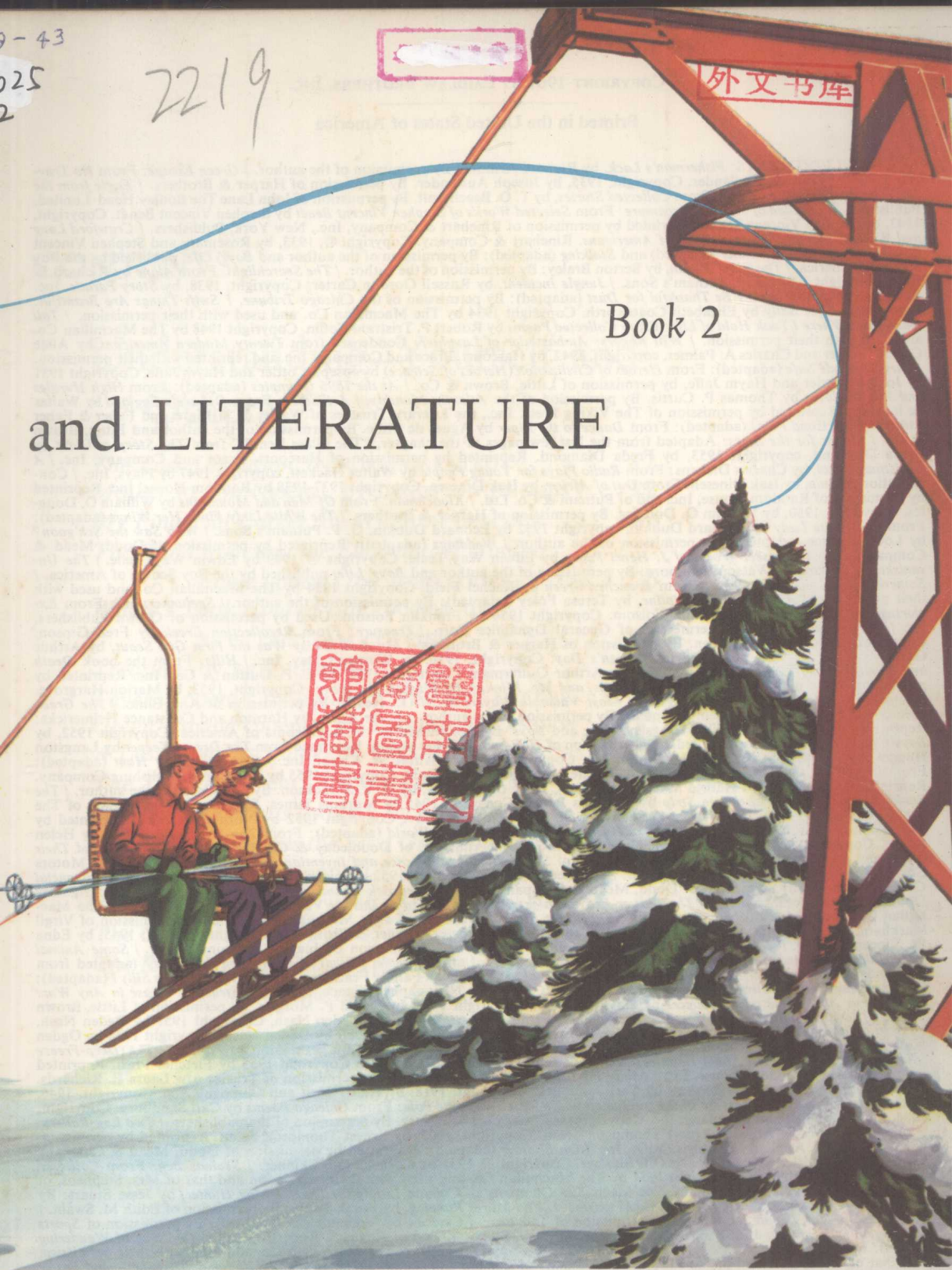
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Book 2

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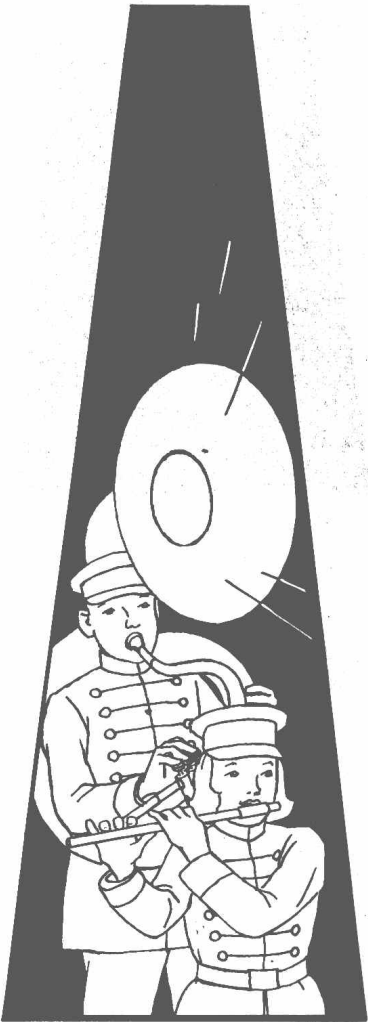
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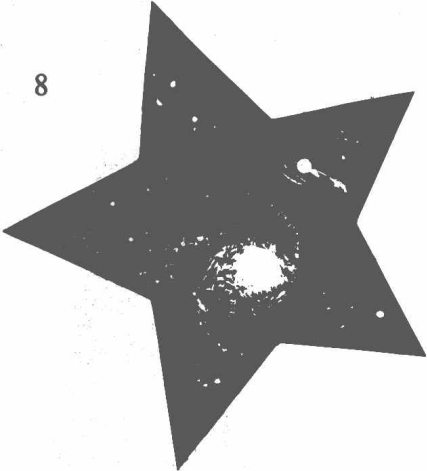


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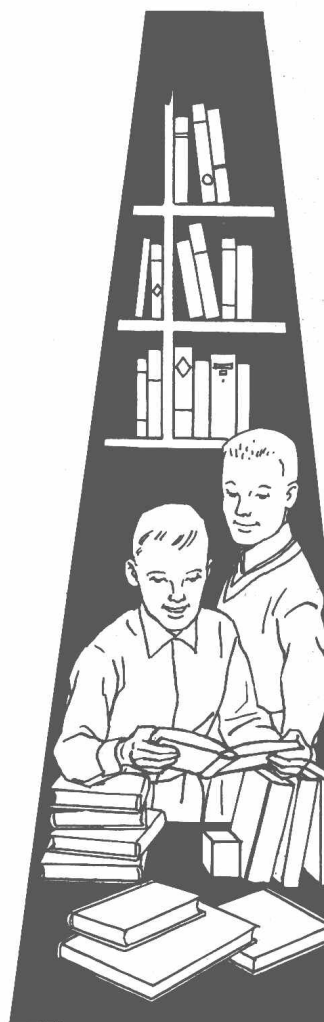
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SECTION

1

Understanding— Yourself and Others

*We have tomorrow
Bright before us
Like a flame.*

LANGSTON HUGHES

Of course Harry really loved his mother—he just didn't know how much.

The Torn Invitation

by NORMAN KATKOV



At fifteen, in the spring of his sophomore year at Hamilton High School, Harry Wojick was as big as a college senior, a long, thin, big-boned left-hander, who could anchor a leg in first base and stretch half-way to right field for a bad throw from his shortstop.

Now, in the waning daylight, he turned into Glover Street toward his home and crossed the sidewalk at an angle, his arms swinging as he moved onto the unpaved road. For a few feet he ran easily, bringing his knees up high, until, without warning, he stopped short and bent low to field an imaginary ball cleanly, beating the runner by a mile. He straightened up, grinning in the half darkness, and blushing a little from the applause at the brilliant play he had made.

Harry Wojick came off the street onto the opposite sidewalk. He passed the four-family flat in the middle of the block. He passed the empty lot and beyond it the condemned building with all the windows long since broken, and then he turned into the cement walk which ran the length of his house.

The windows were raised in the kitchen, and he smelled the roast. He smelled the asparagus for the roast and the fried po-

tatoes with onions that nobody made like Ma, and he was suddenly terribly hungry after the three hours of baseball practice.

When he came into the kitchen, Theresa Wojick turned from the stove, smiling at her son, rubbing her hands on her apron as she walked to meet him. She held him at the elbows, examining him carefully, her face warm and her eyes gentle, welcoming him as though he had returned from a long and perilous journey. She was a tall woman with large, capable hands and black, unkempt hair shot through with gray. She held Harry and she said, "Hello, my little son. Will you eat supper?" joking with him as always.

He put his cheek to hers, noticing again the redness of her chapped hands. "She could try to do something about it," he said to himself, as she released him, remembering the mothers of his teammates who lived above the flats on Livingston Drive and Harding Boulevard and scattered through Maple Heights. They were mothers with manicures—and they were thin—and their hair was always set just right.

Harry went to the sink to wash and, turning, saw the table set for three. He thought for an instant that his father was

home, that Peter Wojick had not gone to his night watchman's job in the office building downtown. But he saw that the hooks on the wall near the door were empty of cap and coat.

"For Frankie Thomas," his mother whispered, looking at her son. "His mother is gone again till half the night, and leaves cold cuts. Boy like Frankie to eat cold cuts!" she whispered. "You call him, Harry."

"Why can't she learn to speak English?" he asked himself savagely, turning away. "She's been here long enough!"

Harry walked through the short hall and stood under the arch which led into the living room. He saw the frail, black-haired boy with whom he had grown up sitting in the chair under the lamp. "Hey, Frankie," Harry said. "Come on and eat." Harry whistled shrilly and came back into the kitchen.

He pulled the chair out and held it suspended off the clean, bare floor, his fingers tightening on the wood. There, next to his plate, was the white, square envelope, and atop it, covered by a transparent sheet of thin paper, was the embossed invitation.

Harry looked at his mother, who had her back to him, busy at the stove. He heard Frankie coming through the house and knew it was Frankie's work, *knew* it. He moved the chair at last and sat down, and, without touching it—his hands holding his knees—he read the invitation from the faculty of Hamilton High School to an open house in honor of all the students' mothers.

It was for tomorrow.

Harry knew *that*, all right. He had

known it for ten days and had kept it secret. He looked up from the announcement as Frankie sat down across the table.

Harry's mother was sitting between them, and as she handed her son the roast she said, "I asked Frankie maybe he has this invitation, Harry. I heard by Celusik, the grocery man, about this open house. Must be open house for junior, senior mothers." Frankie had skipped a grade.

Harry was busy with the roast. "It's for everyone," he said, watching the roast. "Didn't you get one, Ma?" and he looked across at Frankie. He handed the platter to Frankie and turned to his mother. "They mailed them out," Harry said, remembering now that morning when he had waited for the postman on the corner, taken the envelopes from him, searched for the square, white one, and torn it up, scattering the pieces in the empty lot. Then he had run home and dropped the rest of the mail in the black metal box beside the door.

"Maybe they make a mistake," his mother said.

She reached for a thick slice of the rye bread she baked herself and held it flat in her left hand. She buttered it completely and thickly and brought it to her mouth, taking a large bite, and Harry wanted to leave the table and this house. He remembered the homes on Maple Heights to which he had been invited, where they called it dinner and ate in dining rooms with tablecloths; where George Sidley's mother sat at one end of the table and broke her bread piece by piece, buttering it lightly and eating slowly.



"Frankie's Ma got this invitation," Theresa Wojick said, nodding at their guest, who lived with his divorced mother in one of the upstairs apartments of the four-family flat. "How long she got the open house, Frankie?"

"Mother had it," Frankie said. "She—we didn't talk about it."

She turned to Harry, smiling at her son. "You eat, Harry. Big ballplayer must eat good," she said.

Harry ate. The three sat in silence.

Later, while Theresa Wojick set out the dessert plates, Frankie said, "How's practice going, Harry?"

"All right, I guess." He wanted this supper finished.

Theresa Wojick filled the dessert plates with pudding. As she sat down she said

to Frankie, "Your Ma goes to this open house?"

"I don't know," he answered. "She—well, you know, she's pretty busy. One of my aunts is sick and I think she's going to be with her for a few days. She packed her suitcase when she left today."

"Ma," Harry said.

She set her coffee cup down.

"I wanted to tell you, Ma," he said. "I meant to tell you about it and then I forgot, I guess."

"Easy to forget," she said.

"It wouldn't make any difference anyway, Ma," Harry lied. "We've got that game with Central next week and the coach is worried. He's been working us hard all week. He's got a game for tomorrow. You know, he picks two teams from the squad and we play each other."

"I've got to go," Frankie said. "Thanks very much for supper, Mrs. Wojick."

"You're welcome, Frankie. Here"—she reached across the table—"here is the invitation, Frankie."

He held it, shifting it from one hand to the other. "Thanks," he said, moving toward the kitchen door. "Thanks. Thanks." And he was gone.

"I won't be finished with the game until about six o'clock, Ma," Harry said.

She nodded. Harry watched her walking to the sink. "Do you want me to miss practice, Ma?" he asked.

She had her back to him.

"We'll go next year, Ma. I'll be a regular on the team then. We can go next year," he said, but she didn't turn, or move, nor did she answer him, and he left the kitchen quickly. He went into the liv-

ing room and stood before the windows, his hands in his pockets. He tried to blame Frankie and couldn't, and he tried to blame Theresa Wojick and couldn't. He was seldom a liar, but he just didn't want her there with George Sidley's mother and Erick Portland's mother.

Harry heard the water running in the sink and the clatter of dishes, and he went back into the kitchen. He opened the cabinet door, reaching for one of the dish towels his mother had cut from sugar sacks and washed white and soft. She took it from his hand.

"You rest, Harry," his mother said. "Big ball game tomorrow. You must rest up for the ball game." She turned from him to the sink.

"All right," he thought, and now he left the house, going out into the vestibule and then to the rear porch. "Let her wash her own dishes," he thought, and walked out to the sidewalk.

Frankie said, "Hi, Harry." He was leaning against the fence in front of Harry's house. He said, "I didn't want to jam you up, Harry."

"You didn't jam me up."

"That ought to be a pretty good game tomorrow, that intra-squad game," Frankie said. "Think I'll watch it."

"There isn't any intra-squad game," Harry muttered. "What gave you that idea?"

"You said—"

"I said!—I say a lot of things." He felt the meanness in him. He started to walk away, but Frankie took his arm.

"I've got enough for a movie," Frankie said.

"I'm busy," Harry said, jerking his arm free. He left Frankie there, walking down Glover Street. He passed the corner and went on aimlessly.

When he came home he entered the house through the front door and moved through the living room in darkness, turning into the short corridor which led to his bedroom. He could see the cracks of light below the bathroom door and heard the water running; he wondered if there was ever a time in this house when the water *wasn't* running. He made it to his bedroom and undressed in the darkness, dropping his clothes on the floor and crawling into the turned-down bed.

"All right," he thought, "this time tomorrow it'll be over." He'd be finished with it. He had a club meeting tomorrow night in the church basement; maybe he wouldn't even come home for supper. He heard the bathroom door open and his mother moving around the house. He lay still, his eyes closed, his breath coming evenly as he simulated sleep, but the sound of her footsteps faded.

For a bad moment he thought of his Ma, saw her again at the kitchen table during supper, but he chased the scene from his mind and went, instead, to the baseball field, seeing himself leading infield practice, and thus, at last, fell asleep.

The first thing he noticed as soon as he opened his eyes in the morning was his clothes, arranged neatly on the chair beside the bed, the shoes together on the floor and clean socks draped across his shoes. He dressed quickly.

The kitchen was deserted. He saw his

cornflakes and the orange juice and the milk before his chair, but he stood behind it, gulping the juice. As he set the empty glass on the table his mother came in from the rear porch.

"You didn't eat, Harry," she said.

"I'm late, Ma. I've got a test this morning. I've got to study for the test." He wanted to be out of here now as he turned from the table, saw that her hands were full.

She held the clean, freshly dried sweat-shirt and the two pairs of wool socks, and he knew now why the water had been running in the bathroom last night. "For your game today, Harry," she said. "You bring me tonight your dirty stuff." And she reached for the folded newspaper on the cabinet.

Harry watched her wrap the bundle and he wanted to kiss her, suddenly. He wanted to put his arms around her and hold her as she tied the bundle carefully with the string she always saved. But he only took the package from her and said thanks and left.

All the way up to school he promised he'd make it up to her. He'd start tonight. No club meeting for him tonight, he promised. He'd sit in the kitchen with Ma; she liked him there studying while she worked. He'd take her for a walk if she wanted. Saturday and Sunday he was staying home the whole time, that's all.

He came into school on the Livingston Drive side. His locker was on the first floor. He put the package inside, took his books, and slammed the locker shut. The

bell sounded for first hour and Harry went upstairs to his English class.

Pete Overholt, the team's catcher, sat behind Harry. As they waited for the tardy bell, he nudged Harry. "Look at the women," he whispered. "Look at 'em, Harry!"

Harry looked. Not a girl in the class wore saddle shoes or a boy's shirt with the sleeves rolled above the elbows. They were in Sunday dresses and suits and high heels.

"The open house," Pete whispered. "All of them showing off for their mothers."

The tardy bell sounded, and Harry saw Miss Liggett look up from the desk. He wasn't called on during the hour, and afterward, on his way to study hall, he waved to George Sidley, who played third base, and to Bernie Cremmens, the right fielder. They were both wearing sports jackets and regular shirts, and they wore ties. Harry looked down at his sweater, worn over the skivvy shirt. His corduroys were clean, but they were corduroys, and around him, in the study hall, was a sea of gray flannels.

There was only one lunch period today because they had to get the cafeteria ready for the open house. Harry bought a sandwich and a glass of milk. Then, moving away from the cashier's cage, he saw that half the guys on the team, sitting at the table they shared every day, were dressed up, too. He sat down in a far corner with two guys he didn't know, ate quickly, and left by the side door so he wouldn't have to pass Sidley and Cremmens and the others.

He went to his locker for his afternoon