

The Urgency of the Situation

BY JIM GALLANT

Ideas leaped from the open book to my mind, butted fruitlessly against resilient stuff there and limped back to their white beds in defeat. I pulled off my glasses and set them whirling lazily about my right hand—it had been a tiring day. I slouched down in the desk chair, conjured up an id-ish daydream and let it carry me away.

Suddenly I was in my chair again, arms and legs straining, stomach empty as planet Horn-Rimmed swung out of its orbit and tumbled in whirligig from the sky. Glass met hardwood with a staccato ping.

“Oh, no!”

I groped around in the darkness below my desk, touched one piece of glass enclosed in plastic, stuck my finger into a hole where something should have been, found two pieces of glass nearby and hoisted all the ruins to the desk top. I reared back to bring the wreckage into focus. “Damn!” The clock on the desk had lost its face, the desk lamp now had a twin.

I opened the desk drawer and deposited the remains there, studying them glumly for a moment. A square of black and white nearby attracted my attention and I finally made out that it was my ten year-old brother staring up at me from his West School class photograph. He was wearing his glasses when the picture was taken.

From the outdoor basketball court at West School, I watched Ellie Saunders spin on the merry-go-round. “Look out!” someone screamed and I turned my face. A black globe rushed at me, bigger and bigger. The sound “thunk!” snapped my head and I rode backward on a diving roly-coaster.

Light returned slowly, specked with wiggling worms. I looked

up. A circle of boys' faces shut off the sun and one of them said, “You OK?” He handed me the broken glass and twisted plastic. “Ought to keep your mind on business.” I would have hit him, but I had the broken glass and frame in my hand.

Fifteen minutes later, I walked jauntily across the playground toward home at peace with the world. I could hear the broken glass jangling rhythmically in the right-hand pocket of my plaid jacket. It was early spring and five o'clock was oak-shaded and orange, beautiful to eyes freshened with tears. Tomorrow I would carry to school a piece of white note paper with wavy blue edges. Written in my mother's large, precise handwriting, the message would say, “Please excuse Jimmy from all reading and written work. He broke his glasses yesterday and will not have them for several days.” No studying, no recitation. Good-natured chides from my classmates when Miss VanMitter announced my honorable discharge, which she would. It had been perfect.

The night ahead was an unexpected holiday and anything worth doing in life was possible in the four hours after supper. I could play electric football with my brother or develop pictures in my basement darkroom. I could sit in front of the fireplace and toast marshmallows and listen to Sam Spade on the radio. I don't remember reaching home. I don't remember what I did with my glorious, blurred vacation. I only recall planning the hours ahead as I marched toward home with the broken glasses in my pocket.

Broken glasses. What an asinine trick! I slammed the desk drawer. The examination was scheduled for Monday, the essay was due Tuesday. There were class assignments to be prepared, the letter about a job for next summer to be written. Ellie had to receive the dance invitation before the end of the week. And I was blind. I plodded downstairs to call home.

Mother answered the phone and I explained to her what had happened and the urgency of the situation. She was cheerful—Mothers always are. “Now don't you worry, Doctor Markson can have them by the first of the week. You just drop everything and get a good night's sleep.”

She wondered what I was laughing about.