

Away Out West in the

By RICHARD DONOVAN and DWIGHT WHITNEY

California is now our fourth-largest-producing state, with a crop that may top \$300,000,000 in 1951. It's mainly due to a \$7,600-a-year government expert who refuses offers that would make him millions

THE big man in the pin-stripe suit bustled into one of a number of frame buildings at the U.S. Department of Agriculture's cotton experimental farm, near Bakersfield, in the rich and booming San Joaquin Valley of California. It was a blistering, late-summer afternoon in 1947, the height of the growing season in this fourth largest cotton-producing region of the United States. The big man's face wore a look of benevolence as he gazed down upon a stocky, round-faced, khaki-clad civil servant who had risen politely from the desk. "George," he boomed, "how would you like to make a million dollars next year?"

George J. Harrison, then a \$6,200-a-year senior agronomist in charge of the farm, fingered his bald spot gingerly.

"You know more about raising cotton than any man alive," the big man persisted. "Now, suppose I put a million dollars in 10,000 acres and dig 60 or 70 wells for irrigation and we split the net fifty-fifty? Suppose we get two million back next year—and all you put in is your brains?" The big man slapped a huge palm on the desk. "How about it, boy?"

Harrison took out a ten-cent cigar and lighted it. "Nope," he said.

Two weeks later, Harrison refused for the eighth time to become director of a large San Joaquin cotton co-operative. The same day, the Agriculture Department offered him a promotion from field research work to chair duty, shuffling papers as a district administrator. Harrison declined the

promotion on the grounds that he was a scientist, nothing more. On a Bakersfield street some weeks later, a vice-president of a San Joaquin cotton-ginning corporation, which had been trying to get Harrison to manage one of its farms for 40 per cent of the net, spotted him climbing from his aging sedan.

"George," he said happily, "I got something so good I hate to tell you about it. Come on up to the office."

"I have to meet my wife," Harrison said.

"Not now! Your wife can wait. Dammit, there's a million dollars in this place!"

The vice-president peered intently at Harrison, saw that the answer was no, and after a moment said very solemnly:

"Tell me something, will yuh, George? What have you got that's so much better than a million dollars?"

George Harrison smiled but didn't bother to answer. Few people would understand about the things in his life that are worth more than a million dollars.

For instance, it is worth a great deal to him to be able to rise at 4:00 A.M. daily, six weeks out of every year, and tie up the flowers of 3,500 experimental cotton plants that might otherwise be cross-pollinated by wandering insects. The long years he has spent in his cramped basement laboratory, peering and poking at near-invisible cotton fibers to test their tensile strength, coarseness, moisture content, spinning and dyeing qualities, and general

characteristics are worth another inestimable sum.

He finds no cause for complaint in the fact that he's had only 23 days' vacation in the last 17 years, nor is he upset by the abusive letters he gets regularly from the people he serves, or by the sight of dozens of San Joaquin growers building fortunes on new cotton strains he has developed. He doesn't mind the hundreds of field trips he has to make, sometimes in foggy drizzle, sometimes in 115-degree desert heat, to look at somebody's sick cotton. And he is well satisfied with the prospect of retiring at sixty (he is now fifty-six) on a \$4,000-a-year pension, a good deal less than many growers make in a week.

All this, Harrison insists, is part of the kind of life money cannot buy.

"If I were in the big foot race for money," he says, "I wouldn't have a frame of mind for doing good work. It's all in what you want. I like the frame of mind. So the money profits have to go."

But there are other kinds of profits. In a recent newspaper poll of San Joaquin residents on the question, "Who are the 10 greatest living men?" for example, the name of George Harrison turned up almost as often as those of Generals Eisenhower and MacArthur, Pope Pius and Senator Taft. In puzzlement, the paper sent a reporter out among some of the two-car farmers in the lower valley to learn who Harrison was.

"You must be a stranger here, sonny," said one wizened grower, sizing the reporter up sourly. "George Harrison is the boss around here. He tells us what we ought to plant and we're smart enough to plant it, no questions asked. He don't own stick or stone himself, but a million acres of cotton depend on his say-so. If that don't answer the question, you can tell your newspaper that George Harrison gave us the best cotton in the U.S.A. and showed us how to raise more of it to the acre than any place in the world. That's who George Harrison is, sonny."

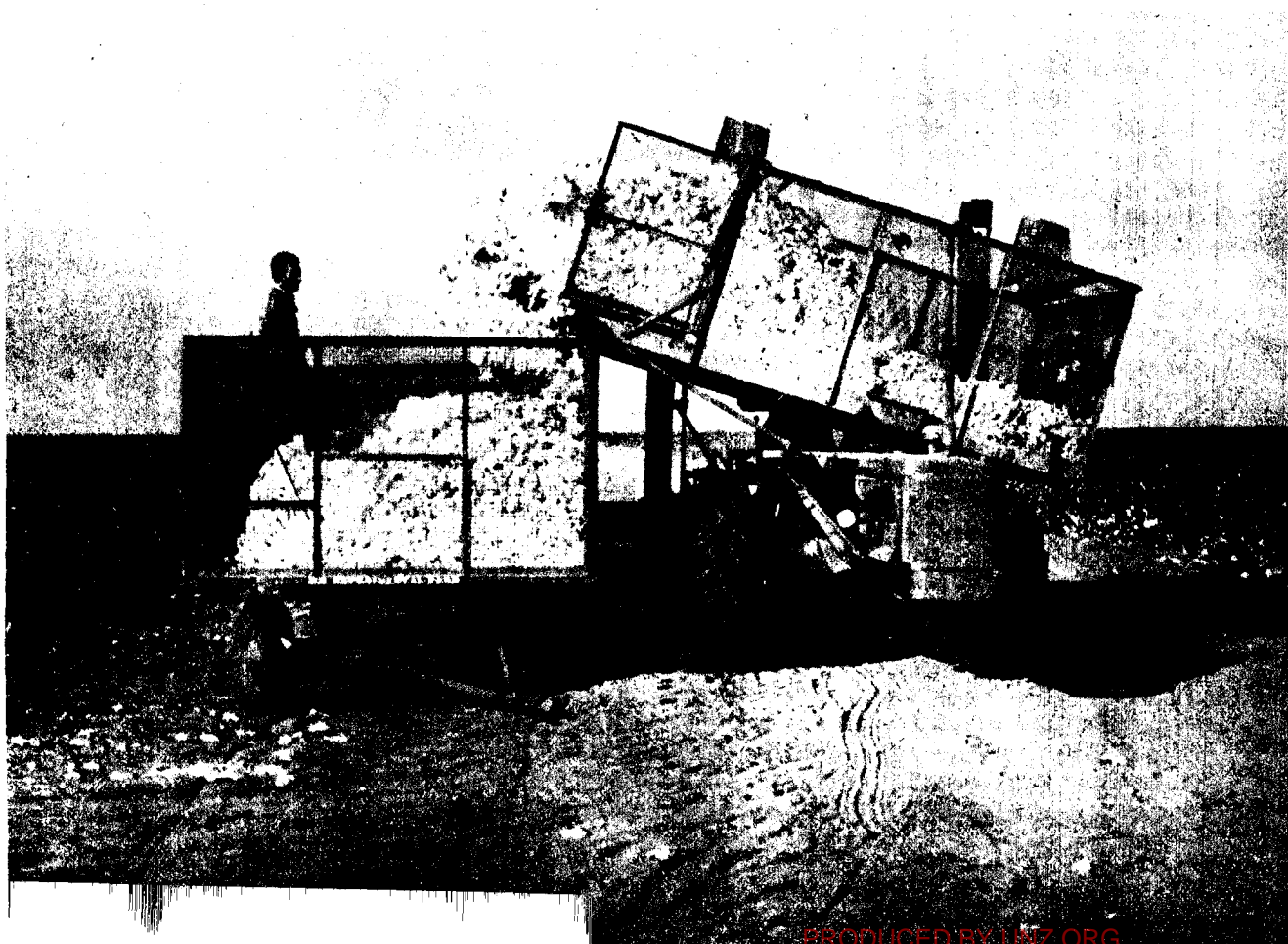
Vehement partisanship of this kind pops up all over the valley whenever the name of George Harrison is mentioned. Occasionally it leads to pardonable inaccuracies such as the above statement that California grows more cotton to the acre than any place in the world. Actually, Arizona, the national leader in pounds-per-acre production, led California by 649 to 634 pounds in 1949, and 825 to 805 in 1950 (but California produced more than twice as much cotton as Arizona last year). Arizona's edge in the pounds-per-acre department does not take any of the bloom from the San Joaquin's enthusiasm for Harrison, however.

The reason is that in 17 years of grinding labor Harrison has literally turned California cotton from a sickly agricultural side line into the most valuable field crop in the state. The yearly income of all San Joaquin cotton growers in 1934 was \$20,600,000. By 1950 it had risen to almost \$225,000,000, and it should top \$300,000,000 this year, thanks largely to Harrison's development of new high-yield, high-quality strains of Acala cotton—the only kind of cotton that can be grown under California's unique one-variety law, passed to eliminate inferior strains.

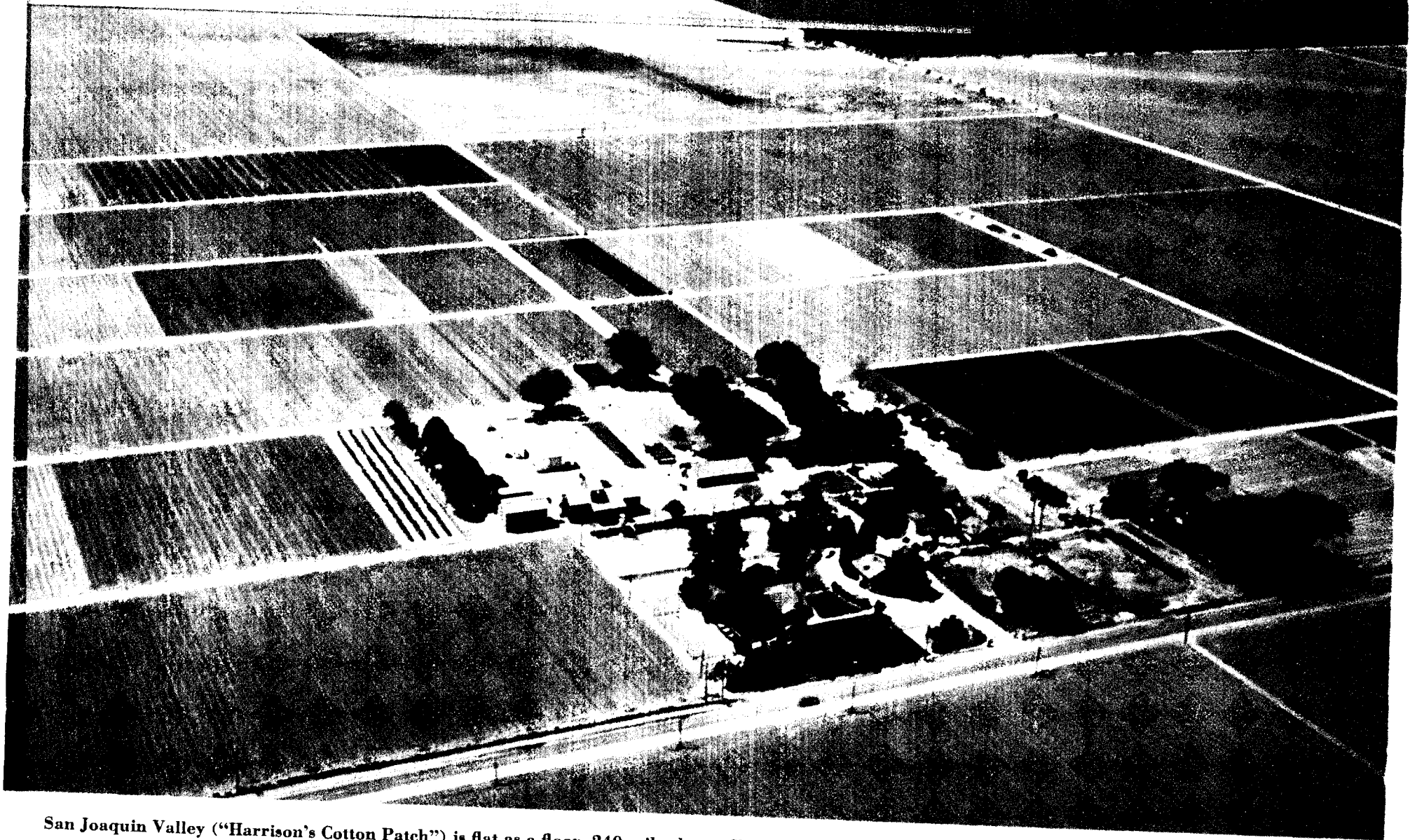
At various times, Harrison has had to teach supposedly experienced farmers the very fundamentals of cotton growing—how (Continued on page 47)

There's no room in the San Joaquin Valley for the sentimental "one-man, one-mule" version of cotton raising. It is almost all mechanized. Here a picker is unloading its white cargo

U.S. DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE



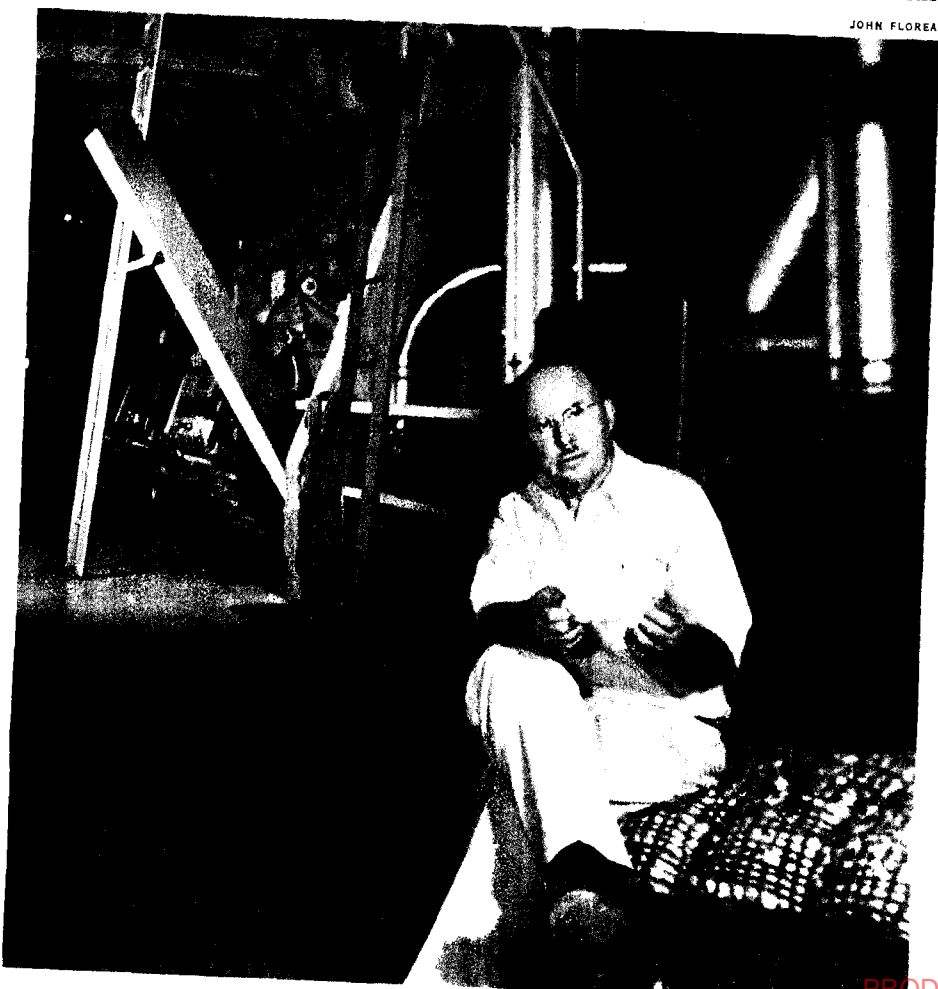
Land of Cotton



San Joaquin Valley ("Harrison's Cotton Patch") is flat as a floor, 240 miles long. Units here house U.S. Experimental Station near Shafter, Cal. JOHN FLOREA

Grateful growers donated \$36,000 for building and ginning equipment at the station, where George Harrison studies his special cotton strains

JOHN FLOREA



Gordon Smith, Shafter station's assistant manager, checks samples of plants constantly being developed to raise quality of valley cotton

STANLEY E. JONES



UNCLE STINKY

By WILLIAM R. SCOTT

He was the same age as me, and a real pain in the neck. I didn't see why my father had to make such a fuss over him, just because he was an orphan

IT WAS Friday and I was walking home with Scooter Pugh at noon, feeling like somebody died or something. I couldn't think of anything to say. Scooter couldn't think of anything to say, either—anyway, not anything worth saying.

"Why don't we slow up and walk with your Uncle Stinky?" he asked me, giving me a dirty grin. "Maybe I ought to ask him how it is, living in a big city."

"Knock it off," I said. Fletcher was walking along about a hundred feet behind us with his hands in his pockets and like he was looking for something on the sidewalk. That's how he always walked. It gave me a pain just watching him walk, that uncle of mine from Chicago.

"Don't remind me of him," I told Scooter. "You'll ruin my day." Heck fire, my day was already ruined. Everything was a mess.

"How do you and him get along around home?" Scooter asked me.

"We don't," I said. "I just ignore the drip." And then, because I wanted to change the subject, I said, "When you leaving, Scoot?" I'd asked him before and I knew when he was going. It was something to say.

"Tomorrow," he said.

I knew that all the time. "You sorry about moving?" I asked him. I figured he was, probably.

"Cripes, no," he said, looking at me. "Are you kidding? Tickled to death to get outa this one-horse town. Over there I can play some real baseball. Someday I might wind up with the Tulsa Oilers, even."

"I expect so," I said. I believed he could do it. He was hot.

"I kinda hate to leave you guys without a pitcher, though," he said. "I guess you won't have much of a team."

"You can say that again," I told him. I didn't consider he was bragging. That's how it was. Without Scooter to pitch, we might as well drop baseball. That's why I felt so low, mostly. That and Fletcher.

It was a warm sunshiny day with a few little white clouds loafing around in the blue sky, and the sidewalk was covered with the dried maple buds that looked like dead tadpoles, and the grass was green and the birds were singing all over the place. The birds felt good; they didn't have to worry about not having a pitcher. It was baseball weather, but there wasn't any use thinking about that.

"I guess my old man will pull down plenty dough working in that airplane factory," Scooter said. "I'm sure glad we're moving, boy."

I hated to hear him talk like that. A lot of the guys didn't much like Scooter, saying he was a loudmouth and a bully, but he was still the best athlete in the eighth grade. We were the battery—me catching and him pitching. That's how it had been the two summers he'd lived in Rock Creek. It wouldn't be that way any more.

"Oh-oh," Scooter said warningly, nudging me.

I looked up, and Fuzzy Jones was leaning against the big maple tree up by the lumberyard, watching us. I felt a kind of tightening up inside me, because Fuzzy was a tough kid and always doing stuff you ought to slug him for. But he wouldn't start anything by himself while Scooter was with me. I guess he was a little leery of tangling with Scooter. Anyway, he never started no trouble unless Alvin An-

derson, his buddy, was around to help him out. I guess I knew I'd have to fight Fuzzy someday, or else backwater, and it worried me sometimes, like now. We kept walking, and he leaned against the tree, sucking on a cigarette and watching us in that tough way, and I thought: I just wish he'd go ahead and start it now, while Scooter is still here.

When we were about to pass him he spit through the gap in his teeth, hitting the sidewalk in front of us. It made the hair kind of stand up on the back of my neck. "Watch out, guy," I said, and I would of stopped, I guess, only Scooter kept going. So I gave Fuzzy a tough look and kept going, too. "We shoulda clobbered that jerk," I said.

"Cripes, man, not before lunch," Scooter said, grinning. "I'd hit him so hard it would spoil my appetite. He's all blow and no go, anyhow."

That's how Scooter was. I mean, nothing fazed him. He just had contempt for Fuzzy Jones. I don't know what was wrong with that Fuzzy and Alvin Anderson. Just crummy, I guess. Just bad apples. When we got to our house I turned in at the gate. "See you, Scooter," I said.

"If I don't see you first," he said.

I went in the house, and Dad was listening to the news on the radio. "Where's Fletcher?" he asked me.

I said, "He's coming, I guess."

"You too high and mighty to walk home with him?"

"He knows the route by now," I said. "He don't need no guide."

I went in the bathroom and washed my hands, and Fletcher was waiting to get in when I came out. We didn't look at each other. I was sick of looking at him, always having him around. Him and his curly yellow hair and pink face and long skinny arms and legs and his thick-rimmed spectacles. All day long in the same classroom. Some uncle, I thought. I went into the dining room and sat down at the table, and Mom brought in the food and put it on the table and smiled at me, and when Fletcher came in everybody sat down.

BEFORE he came, we always had lunch in the kitchen. What was he, some kind of big-shot company we had to entertain in the dining room? But I had more important things to think about—like Scooter moving tomorrow. I couldn't do anything about that. Like Fuzzy always looking at me, like knowing someday I would have to fight him or show yellow. I didn't know for sure whether I could do anything about that, either. I knew how it would be. Alvin Anderson tripping me from behind, shoving me, stuff like that. Maybe I could whip Fuzzy alone, but not both of them. All the guys would be saying, "All right now, fight clean, you guys. No dirty stuff." But let somebody start dirty stuff, and nobody would try to stop it. Nobody ever stopped Alvin from helping Fuzzy. They were scared to, I guess.

I guess the only guy around that wasn't scared of Fuzzy and Alvin was Scooter, and he was always telling me, "Ignore them bums, Joe. They're beneath your dignity, man." One reason I hated to see Scooter leave so bad was because I always figured he was what kept Fuzzy from calling me out. That's what I had to think about that Friday at lunch. Cripes.

"How's she going, Fletcher?" Dad said. He always said that.

"Oh, all right, I guess." Fletcher always said that too.

I was eating black-eyed peas and pork chops and mashed potatoes and sliced tomatoes. Before Fletcher came we usually had sandwiches and milk and pie or something for lunch. I didn't mind having pork chops and stuff for lunch, but it kind of hacked me to know it was because of him. I overheard Dad tell Mom the day he brought Fletcher home that he wanted her to start serving big solid lunches, so we could put some meat and muscle on Fletcher's skinny frame. Well, he was too stuck up to eat black-eyed peas, in case anybody wanted to know. And he just sort of played with the rest of his food. He wouldn't get fat that way. If somebody had to come live with us, why couldn't it be Scooter? I thought.

Dad said something to Fletcher, and Fletcher said, "No, thanks, sir," and Dad said, "Knock off that sir routine, Fletcher. Just call me Harry like everybody else does, hey?"

"I don't call you Harry," I said.

"You don't sir me either," Dad said. "Besides, Fletcher is my brother-in-law, and brother-in-laws call each other by their first names."

FLETCHER looked embarrassed and he took off his glasses and began polishing them on the tablecloth, his face a little flushed.

Mom put down her fork and looked exasperated or something. "Oh, Fletcher!" she said. "Not on the tablecloth!"

"Stow it," Dad snapped, and Mom stared at him with her mouth open. "Won't hurt the tablecloth, Bessie," Dad said.

"I forgot," Fletcher mumbled. She had to get on him about that a couple times before. His ears looked pretty red about it.

"I'm sorry; it's all right," Mom said, looking like she wanted to cry. "I didn't mean to be sharp with you, dear."

Well, everything was peachy around there if you like those strained silences, which I don't. Back when it was just the three of us it was nice at meals.

It used to be Dad asked me how were things at school, and Mom was always cheerful and laughing. Not any more, boy. Cripes, I'd just as soon have carried my lunch to school in a sirup bucket.

"Say, Fletcher," Dad said to his old buddy. "Do you like catfish?"

Fletcher brightened up some. "I like most kinds of fish."

"I noticed they got some dandies at the market," Dad said. "I'll have them send out a mess, and we'll have a bait of fried catfish with corn bread and buttermilk and green onions. How does it strike you?"

"That sounds pretty good," Fletcher kind of stammered.

"It's a deal," Dad said. "We feast tonight."

See how it was? I could of been the sponging kinfolks instead of Fletcher, the way Dad ignored me. They were real close friends, those two. Pals. They made me sick. "I hate buttermilk," I said.

Dad looked at me. "Who asked you, Joe?"

"Harry," Mom said in a strained voice, "for pity sakes . . ." She didn't finish it, just let it trail off, and went back to picking at her food. Boy, I hated the way it was with Mom (Continued on page 69)

ILLUSTRATED BY DAVID BERGER