

said darkly. His friend paid no attention.

"Only two-fifty." George sounded disappointed. "Got any more, kid?"

"Give him his money back," Philip repeated, with clenched teeth.

"Look," George said softly, "I paid for half this thing and if I can get part of my money back, why not?"

"Because that's not what we agreed, that's why," Philip squared his shoulders and spread his feet apart. "And besides," he sneered, "no pal of mine is gonna take money from a baby."

Without a word, George pocketed the money. He adjusted the telescope to the boy's height. "Come here, kid."

Nathan covered one eye with the palm of his hand and peered through the lens. His mouth fell open. "Gee," he said. "I see a sailor on the ship." He pulled the barrel to one side. "He's talkin' to someone. Gee!"

Philip doubled his fist, pulled back, and landed it squarely on his friend's jaw, knocking him to his knees. George sprang to his feet and pounced on Philip, jabbing at his chin and pulling him to the ground. The two rolled back and forth in the dust, grunting. Blood trickled down Philip's mouth, discoloring his shirt. He wiped his mouth with the back of his dusty hand, then left without a word.

THINKING OF all this now, George felt a twinge of conscience. He looked up at the stars. "I didn't bring the book," he said. "I'll bring it tomorrow."

"Did you give the kid his money back?" Philip asked.

"Nope. I told you before that I rented the telescope."

They climbed the hill to their clubhouse. Over the crest of the hill, the lights of the city and the harbor shone like a gigantic fairyland. Suddenly, George stopped, pulled Philip's coat sleeve, and pointed. Against the lighted background were silhouetted the thin legs of the tripod, the fat belly of the telescope, and a small wiry figure.

On tiptoes they walked to where the boy was scanning the sky. He moved the barrel, tightened the knobs, and remained in this position for a short time before moving to another angle.

Philip touched him lightly on the shoulder. "How did you get in?"

The boy jumped, letting out a little scream. He took a deep breath when

he recognized them. "Hi. Oh, I stuck a stick in the window and pulled the hook out. Then I crawled through."

"Your folks will worry about you. You better go on home now,"

Philip said.

"Mrs. Boyd never worries about me," the boy said. "When Dad's gone, she just sits in the den and watches TV. Could I look through it some more and pay you tomorrow, huh?"

George cleared his throat and shifted his weight from one foot to another. "Naw, not tonight. My aunt wants me back in an hour. Besides, what do you want to see that's so special?"

Nathan hesitated. His face, with the lights from the city reflected upon it, seemed to shrink into the darkness. Only his eyes shone like dark coals. "I want to see Danny," he said quietly, his voice strained.

"Who's Danny?" George asked.

"I mean, I want to find Danny. My dad said he went to heaven and my dad knows everything. Could I look some more and pay you tomorrow? Please?"

George squatted down, his legs apart, resting on his heels.

"Was Danny a pal of yours?"

Nathan stared into George's face.

"He was my best—my only—friend.

He lived next door. Sometimes I'd sleep at his house. Sometimes he'd sleep at my house. His dad played on the Angels. Did ya ever hear of the Angels?"

"Who hasn't?"

"Ya know what Danny did for me?"

He asked his dad to get all the Angels to autograph my baseball." His voice rose higher. "Do you want it? Just let me look through the telescope and I'll bring it here tomorrow. Okay?"

It seemed a long time before George spoke and when he did, his voice was gruff. "The telescope belongs to Philip, too. If he says it's okay, then it's okay by me."

"No need to ask me," Philip said.

"You should know without asking."

"Did ya hear that, Nathan? Now you go on home. We'll see you tomorrow. And don't bring nothin'. No money—no baseball. Nothin'. Ya hear?"

Nathan smiled, shaking his head unbelievably. "Gee," he said.

"Wait till my dad gets home and I tell him I got two . . ." He held up two fingers. "Two friends now!"

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