

saying. I was looking at the sun. It seemed strange to me now that it should be so bright. The ball game had ended shortly before six o'clock. Then there had been the ride in the cab, the time in the waiting and examination rooms, and the ride up in the elevator. I couldn't remember what had happened afterwards, but it couldn't all have happened so fast that it was now still Sunday afternoon. I thought of asking the man to my left what day it was, but he seemed absorbed in his card game. The boy to my right hadn't moved at all. He lay quietly staring up at the ceiling, and I didn't want to disturb him.

I moved my wrist slowly. It still hurt. That Danny Saunders was a smart one, and I hated him. I wondered what he was thinking now. Probably gloating and bragging about the ball game to his friends. That miserable Hasid!

An orderly came slowly up the aisle, pushing a metal table piled high with food trays. There was a stir in the ward as people sat up in their beds. I watched him hand out the trays and heard the clinking of silverware. The man on my left scooped up the cards and put them on the table between our beds.

'Chop-chop,' he said, smiling at me. 'Time for the old feed bag. They don't make it like in training camp, though. Nothing like eating in training camp. Work up a sweat, eat real careful on account of watching the weight, but eat real good. What's the menu, Doc?'

The orderly grinned at him. 'Be right with you, Killer.' He was still three beds away.

The boy in the bed to my right moved his head slightly and put his hands down on top of his blanket. He blinked his eyes and lay still, staring up at the ceiling.

The orderly stopped at the foot of his bed and took a tray from the table.

'How you doing, Billy?'

The boy's eyes sought out the direction from which the orderly's voice had come.

'Fine,' he said softly, very softly, and began to sit up.

The orderly came around to the side of the bed with a tray of food, but the boy kept staring in the direction from which the

orderly's voice had come. I looked at the boy and saw that he was blind.

'It's chicken, Billy,' the orderly said. 'Peas and carrots, potatoes, real hot vegetable soup, and applesauce.'

'Chicken?' the man to my left said. 'Who can do a ten-rounder on chicken?'

'You doing a ten-rounder tonight, Killer?' the orderly asked pleasantly.

'Chicken!' the man to my left said again, but he was smiling broadly.

'You all set, Billy?' the orderly asked.

'I'm fine,' the boy said. He fumbled about for the silverware, found the knife and fork, and commenced eating.

I saw the nurse come up the aisle and stop at my bed. 'Hello, young man. Are we still hungry?'

'Yes, ma'am.'

'That's good. Your father said to tell you this is a kosher hospital, and you are to eat everything.'

'Yes, ma'am. Thank you.'

'How does your head feel?'

'It feels fine, ma'am.'

'No pain?'

'No.'

'That's very good. We won't ask you to sit up, though. Not just yet. We'll raise the bed up a bit and you can lean back against the pillow.'

I saw her bend down. From the motions of her shoulders I could see she was turning something set into the foot of the bed. I felt the bed begin to rise.

'Is that comfortable?' she asked me.

'Yes, ma'am. Thank you very much.'

She went to the night table between my bed and the bed to my right and opened a drawer. 'Your father asked that we give you this.' She was holding a small, black skullcap in her hand.

'Thank you, ma'am.'

I took the skullcap and put it on.

'Enjoy your meal,' she said, smiling.

'Thank you very much,' I said. I had been concerned about eating. I wondered when my father had been to the hospital and why he wasn't here now.

'Mrs Carpenter, the man to my left said, 'how come chicken again?'

The nurse looked at him sternly. 'Mr Savo, please behave yourself.'

'Yes, *madam*,' the man said, feigning fright.

'Mr Savo, you are a poor example to your young neighbours.'

She turned quickly and went away.

'Tough as a ring post,' Mr Savo said, grinning at me. 'But a great heart.'

The orderly put the food tray on his bed, and he began eating ravenously. While chewing on a bone, he looked at me and winked his good eye. 'Good food. Not enough zip, but that's the kosher bit for you. Love to kid them along. Keeps them on their toes like a good fighter.'

'Mr Savo, sir?'

'Yeah, kid?'

'What day is today?'

He took the chicken bone out of his mouth. 'It's Monday.'

'Monday, June fifth?'

'That's right, kid.'

'I slept a long time,' I said quietly.

'You were out like a light, boy. Had us all in a sweat.' He put the chicken bone back in his mouth. 'Some clop that must've been,' he said, chewing on the bone.

I decided it would be polite to introduce myself. 'My name is Reuven Malter.'

His lips smiled at me from around the chicken bone in his mouth. 'Good to meet you, Reu - Reu - how's that again?'

'Reuven - Robert Malter.'

'Good to meet you, Bobby boy.' He took the chicken bone from his mouth, inspected it, then dropped it onto the tray. 'You always eat with a hat on?'

'Yes, sir.'

'What's that, part of your religion or something?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Always like kids that hold to their religion. Important thing, religion. Wouldn't mind some of it in the ring. Tough place, the ring. Tony Savo's my name.'

'Are you a professional prizefighter?'

'That's right, Bobby boy. I'm a prelim man. Could've been on top if that guy hadn't clopped me with that right the way he did.

Flattened me for a month. Manager lost faith. Lousy manager. Tough racket, the ring. Good food, eh? *damn navy*

'Yes, sir.'

'Not like in training camp, though. Nothing like eating in training camp.'

'Are you feeling better now?' I heard the blind boy ask me, and I turned to look at him. He had finished eating and was sitting looking in my direction. His eyes were wide open and a pale blue.

'I'm a lot better,' I told him. 'My head doesn't hurt.'

'We were all very worried about you.'

I didn't know what to say to that. I thought I would just nod and smile, but I knew he wouldn't see it. I didn't know what to say or do, so I kept silent.

'My name's Billy,' the blind boy said.

'How are you, Billy? I'm Robert Malter.'

'Hello, Robert. Did you hurt your eye very badly?'

'Pretty badly.'

'You want to be careful about your eyes, Robert.'

I didn't know what to say to that, either.

'Robert's a grown-up name, isn't it? How old are you?'

'Fifteen.'

'That's grown up.'

'Call me Bobby,' I said to him. 'I'm not really that grown up.'

'Bobby is a nice name. All right. I'll call you Bobby.'

I kept looking at him. He had such a beautiful face, a gentle face. His hands lay limply on the blanket, and his eyes stared at me vacantly. *vacant - my own or Madeline*

'What kind of hair do you have, Bobby? Can you tell me what you look like?'

'Sure. I have black hair and brown eyes, and a face like a million others you've seen - you've heard about. I'm about five foot

six, and I've got a bump on my head and a bandaged left eye.' He laughed with sudden delight. 'You're a nice person,' he said warmly. 'You're nice like Mr Savo.'

Mr Savo looked over at us. He had finished eating and was holding the deck of cards in his hands. 'That's what I kept telling my manager. I'm a nice guy, I kept telling him. Is it my fault I got clopped? But he lost faith. Lousy manager.'

Billy stared in the direction of his voice. 'You'll be all right again, Mr Savo,' he said earnestly. 'You'll be right back up there on top again.'

'Sure, Billy,' Tony Savo said, looking at him. 'Old Tony'll make it up there again.'

'Then I'll come to your training camp and watch you practice and we'll have that three-rounder you promised me.'

'Sure, Billy.'

'Mr Savo promised me a three-rounder after my operation,' Billy explained to me eagerly, still staring in the direction of Tony Savo's voice.

'That's great,' I said.

'It's a new kind of operation,' Billy said, turning his face in my direction. 'My father explained it to me. They found out how to do it in the war. It'll be wonderful doing a three-rounder with you, Mr Savo.'

'Sure, Billy. Sure.' He was sitting up in his bed, looking at the boy and ignoring the deck of cards he held in his hands.

'It'll be wonderful to be able to see again,' Billy said to me. 'I had an accident in the car once. My father was driving. It was a long time ago. It wasn't my father's fault, though.'

Mr Savo looked down at the deck of cards, then put it back on top of the night table.

I saw the orderly coming back up the aisle to collect the food trays. 'Did you enjoy the meal?' he asked Billy.

Billy turned his head in the direction of his voice. 'It was a fine meal.'

'How about you, Killer?'

'Chicken!' Tony Savo said. 'What can be good about chicken?' His voice was flat though now, and all the excitement was out of it.

'How come you left the bones this time?' the orderly asked, grinning.

'Who can do a ten-rounder on chicken?' Tony Savo said. But he didn't seem to have his heart anymore in what he was saying. I saw him lie back on his pillow and stare up at the ceiling of his left eye. Then he closed the eye and put his long hairy hands across his chest.

'We'll lower this for you,' the orderly said to me after he took my tray. He bent down at the foot of the bed, and I felt the head of the bed go flat.

Billy lay back on his pillow. I turned my head and saw him lying there, his eyes open and staring up, his palms under his head, his elbows jutting outward. Then I looked beyond his bed and saw a man hurrying up the aisle, and when he came into focus I saw it was my father.

I almost cried out, but I held back and waited for him to come up to my bed. I saw he was carrying a package wrapped in newspapers. He had on his dark gray, striped, double-breasted suit and his gray hat. He looked thin and worn, and his face was pale. His eyes seemed red behind his steel-rimmed spectacles, as though he hadn't slept in a long time. He came quickly around to the left side of the bed and looked down at me and tried to smile. But the smile didn't come through at all.

'The hospital telephoned me a little while ago,' he said, sounding a little out of breath. 'They told me you were awake.'

I started to sit up in the bed.

'No,' he said. 'Lie still. They told me you were not to sit up yet.'

I lay back and looked up at him. He sat down on the edge of the bed and put the package down next to him. He took off his hat and put it on top of the package. His sparse gray hair lay uncombed on his head. That was unusual for my father. I never remembered him leaving the house without first carefully combing his hair.

'You slept almost a full day,' he said, trying another smile. He had a soft voice, but it was a little husky now. 'How are you feeling, Reuven?'

'I feel fine now,' I said.

'They told me you had a slight concussion. Your head does not hurt?'

'No.'

'Mr Galanter called a few times today. He wanted to know how you were. I told him you were sleeping.'

'He's a wonderful man, Mr Galanter.'

'They told me you might sleep for a few days. They were surprised you woke so soon.'

'The ball hit me very hard.'

'Yes,' he said. 'I heard all about the ball game.'

He seemed very tense, and I wondered why he was still worried.

'The nurse didn't say anything to me about my eye,' I said. 'Is it all right?'

He looked at me queerly.

'Of course it is all right. Why should it not be all right? Dr

Snydman operated on it, and he is a very big man.'

'He operated on my eye?' It had never occurred to me that I had been through an operation. 'What was wrong? Why did he have to operate?'

My father caught the fear in my voice.

'You will be all right now,' he calmed me. 'There was a piece of glass in your eye and he had to get it out. Now you will be all right.'

'There was glass in my eye?'

My father nodded slowly. 'It was on the edge of the pupil.'

'And they took it out?'

'Dr Snydman took it out. They said he performed a miracle. But somehow my father did not look as though a miracle had been performed. He sat there, tense and upset.

'Is the eye all right now?' I asked him.

'Of course it is all right. Why should it not be all right?'

'It's not all right,' I said. 'I want you to tell me.'

'There is nothing to tell you. They told me it was all right.'

'Abba, please tell me what's the matter.'

He looked at me, and I heard him sigh. Then he began to cough, a deep, rasping cough that shook his frail body terribly. He took a handkerchief from his pocket and held it to his lips and coughed a long time. I lay tense in the bed, watching him. The coughing

stopped. I heard him sigh again, and then he smiled at me. It was his old smile, the warm smile that turned up the corners of his thin lips and lighted his face.

'Reuven, Reuven,' he said, smiling and shaking his head. 'I have never been good at hiding things from you, have I?'

I was quiet.

'I always wanted a bright boy for a son. And you are bright. I will tell you what they told me about the eye. The eye is all right. It is fine. In a few days they will remove the bandages and you will come home.'

'In a few days?'

'Yes.'

'So why are you so worried? That's wonderful!'

'Reuven, the eye has to heal.'

I saw a man walk up the aisle and come alongside Billy's bed.

He looked to be in his middle thirties. He had light blond hair,

and from his face I could tell immediately that he was Billy's

father. I saw him sit down on the edge of the bed, and I saw Billy

turn his face toward him and sit up. The father kissed the boy

gently on the forehead. They talked quietly.

I looked at my father. 'Of course the eye has to heal,' I said.

'It has a tiny cut on the edge of the pupil, and the cut has to

heal.'

I stared at him. 'The scar tissue,' I said slowly. 'The scar tissue

can grow over the pupil.' And I felt myself go sick with fear.

My father blinked, and his eyes were moist behind the steel-

rimmed spectacles.

'Dr Snydman informed me he had a case like yours last

year, and the eye healed. He is optimistic everything will be all

right.'

'But he's not sure.'

'No,' my father said. 'He is not sure.'

I looked at Billy and saw him and his father talking together

quietly and seriously. The father was caressing the boy's cheek.

I looked away and turned my head to the left. Mr Savo seemed to

be asleep.

'Reb Saunders called me twice today and once last night,' I

heard my father say softly.

'Reb Saunders?'

'Yes. He wanted to know how you were. He told me his son is very sorry over what happened.'

'I'll bet,' I said bitterly. *Reuven*

My father stared at me for a moment, then leaned forward a little on the bed. He began to say something, but his words broke into a rasping cough. He put the handkerchief in front of his mouth and coughed into it. He coughed a long time, and I lay still and watched him. When he stopped, he took off his spectacles and wiped his eyes. He put the spectacles back on and took a deep breath.

'I caught a cold,' he apologized. 'There was a draft in the classroom yesterday. I told the janitor, but he told me he could not find anything wrong. So I caught a cold. In June yet. Only your father catches colds in June.'

'You're not taking care of yourself, abba.'

'I am worried about my baseball player.' He smiled at me. 'I worry all the time you will get hit by a taxi or a trolley car, and you go and get hit by a baseball.'

'I hate that Danny Saunders for this. He's making you sick.'

'Danny Saunders is making me sick? How is he making me sick?' *Reuven*

'He deliberately aimed at me, abba. He hit me deliberately. Now you're getting sick worrying about me.'

My father looked at me in amazement. 'He hit you deliberately?'

'You should see how he hits. He almost killed Schwartzie. He said his team would kill us apikorsim.'

'Apikorsim?'

'They turned the game into a war.'

'I do not understand. On the telephone Reb Saunders said his son was sorry.'

'Sorry! I'll bet he's sorry! He's sorry he didn't kill me altogether!'

My father gazed at me intently, his eyes narrowing. I saw the look of amazement slowly leave his face.

'I do not like you to talk that way,' he said sternly.

'It's true, abba.'

'Did you ask him if it was deliberate?'

'No.'

'How can you say something like that if you are not sure? That is a terrible thing to say.' He was controlling his anger with difficulty.

'It seemed to be deliberate.'

'Things are always what they seem to be, Reuven? Since when?'

I was silent.

'I do not want to hear you say that again about Reb Saunders' son.'

'Yes, abba.'

'Now, I brought you this.' He undid the newspapers around the package, and I saw it was our portable radio. Just because you are in the hospital does not mean you should shut yourself off from the world. It is expected Rome will fall any day now. And there are rumors the invasion of Europe will be very soon. You should not forget there is a world outside.'

'I'll have to do my schoolwork, abba. I'll have to keep up with my classes.'

'No schoolwork, no books, and no newspapers. They told me you are not allowed to read.'

'I can't read at all?'

'No reading. So I brought you the radio. Very important things are happening, Reuven, and a radio is a blessing.'

He put the radio on the night table. A radio brought the world together, he said very often. Anything that brought the world together he called a blessing.

'Now, your schoolwork,' he said. 'I talked with your teachers. If you cannot prepare in time for your examinations, they will give them to you privately at the end of June or in September. So you do not have to worry.'

'If I'm out of the hospital in a few days, I'll be able to read soon.'

'We will see. We have to find out first about the scar tissue. I felt myself frightened again. Will it take long to find out?'

'A week or two.'

'I can't read for two weeks?'

'We will ask Doctor Snyderman when you leave the hospital. But no reading now.'

'Yes, abba.'

'Now I have to go,' my father said. He put his hat on, folded the newspaper and put it under his arm. He coughed again, briefly this time, and stood up. 'I have to prepare examinations, and I must finish an article. The journal gave me a deadline.' He looked down at me and smiled, a little nervously, I thought. He seemed so pale and thin.

'Please take care of yourself, abba. Don't get sick.'

'I will take care of myself. You will rest. And listen to the radio.'

'Yes, abba.'

He looked at me, and I saw him blink his eyes behind his steel-rimmed spectacles. 'You are not a baby anymore. I hope -' He broke off. I thought I saw his eyes begin to mist and his lips tremble for a moment.

Billy's father said something to the boy, and the boy laughed loudly. I saw my father glance at them briefly, then look back at me. Then I saw him turn his head and look at them again. He looked at them a long time. Then he turned back to me. I saw from his face that he knew Billy was blind.

'I brought you your tefillin and prayer book,' he said very quietly. His voice was husky, and it trembled. 'If they tell you it is all right, you should pray with your tefillin. But only if they tell you it is all right and will not be harmful to your head or your eye. He stopped for a moment to clear his throat. 'It is a bad cold, but I will be all right. If you cannot pray with your tefillin, pray anyway. Now I have to go.' He bent and kissed me on the forehead. As he came close to me, I saw his eyes were red and misty. 'My baseball player,' he said, trying to smile. 'Take care of yourself and rest. I will be back to see you tomorrow.' He turned and walked quickly away up the aisle, small and thin, but walking with a straight, strong step the way he always walked no matter how he felt. Then he was out of focus and I could no longer see him.

I lay on the pillow and closed my right eye. I found myself crying after a while, and I thought that might be bad for my eye,

and I forced myself to stop. I lay still and thought about my eyes. I had always taken them for granted, the way I took for granted all the rest of my body and also my mind. My father had told me many times that health was a gift, but I never really paid much attention to the fact that I was rarely sick or almost never had to go to a doctor. I thought of Billy and Tony Savo. I tried to imagine what my life might be like if I had only one good eye, but I couldn't. I had just never thought of my eyes before. I had never thought what it might be like to be blind. I felt the wild terror again, and I tried to control it. I lay there a long time, thinking about my eyes.

I heard a stir in the ward, opened my right eye, and saw that Billy's father had gone. Billy was lying on his pillow with his palms under his head and his elbows jutting outward. His eyes were open and staring at the ceiling. I saw nurses alongside some of the beds, and I realized that everyone was preparing for sleep. I turned my head to look at Mr Savo. He seemed to be asleep. My head was beginning to hurt a little, and my left wrist still felt sore. I lay very still. I saw the nurse come up to my bed and look down at me with a bright smile.

'Well, now,' she said. 'How are we feeling, young man?'

'My head hurts a little,' I told her.

'That's to be expected.' She smiled at me. 'We'll give you this pill now so you'll have a fine night's sleep.'

She went to the night table and filled a glass with water from a pitcher that stood on a little tray. She helped me raise my head, and I put the pill in my mouth and swallowed it down with some of the water.

'Thank you,' I said, lying back on the pillow.

'You're very welcome, young man. It's nice to meet polite young people. Good night, now.'

'Good night, ma'am. Thank you.'

She went away up the aisle.

I turned my head and looked at Billy. He lay very still with his eyes open. I watched him for a moment, then closed my eye. I wondered what it was like to be blind, completely blind. I couldn't imagine it, but I thought it must be something like the way I was feeling now with my eyes closed. But it's not the same,

I told myself: I know if I open my right eye I'll see. When you're blind it makes no difference whether you open your eyes or not. I couldn't imagine what it was like to know that no matter whether my eyes were opened or closed it made no difference, everything was still dark.

Asleep, I heard a shout and a noise that sounded like a cheer, and I woke immediately. There was a lot of movement in the ward, and loud voices. I wondered what was happening, there was so much noise and shouting going on and a radio was blaring. I began to sit up, then remembered that I was not yet permitted to sit and put my head back on the pillow. It was light outside, but I could not see the sun. I wondered what the noise was all about, and then I saw Mrs Carpenter walking sternly up the aisle. She was telling people to stop all the shouting and to remember that this was a hospital and not Madison Square Garden. I looked over at Billy. He was sitting straight up in his bed, and I could tell he was trying to make out what was going on. His face looked puzzled and a little frightened. I turned to look at Mr Savo, and I saw he was not in his bed.

The noise quieted a little, but the radio was still blaring. I couldn't make it out too clearly because every now and then someone would interrupt with a shout or a cheer. The announcer was talking about places called Caen and Carentan. He said something about a British airborne division seizing bridgeheads and two American airborne divisions stopping enemy troops from moving into the Cotentin Peninsula. I didn't recognize any of the names, and I wondered why everyone was so excited. There was war news all the time, but no one got this excited unless something very special was happening. I thought I could see Mr Savo sitting on one of the beds. Mrs Carpenter went over to him, and from the way she walked I thought she was angry. I saw Mr Savo get to his feet and come back up the aisle. The announcer was saying something about the Isle of Wight and the Normandy coast and Royal Air Force bombers attacking enemy coast-defence guns and United States Air Force bombers attacking shore

defences. I suddenly realized what was happening and felt my heart begin to beat quickly.

I saw Mr Savo come up to my bed. He was angry, and his long, thin face with the black eyepatch made him look like a pirate.

“Go back to your bed, Mr Savo,” he mimicked. “Go back to your bed this instant.” You’d think I was dying. This is no time to be in bed.’

‘Is it the invasion of Europe, Mr Savo?’ I asked him eagerly. I was feeling excited and a little tense, and I wished the people who were cheering would be quiet.

He looked down at me. ‘It’s D-day, Bobby boy. We’re clopping them good. And Tony Savo has to go back to his bed.’ Then he spotted the portable radio my father had brought me the night before. ‘Hey, Bobby boy, is that your radio?’

‘That’s right,’ I said excitedly. ‘I forgot all about it.’

‘Lucky, lucky us.’ He was smiling broadly and no longer looked like a pirate. ‘We’ll put it on the table between our beds and give it a listen, eh?’

‘I think Billy will want to hear it too, Mr Savo.’ I looked over at Billy.

Billy turned and stared in the direction of my voice. ‘Do you have a radio here, Bobby?’ He seemed very excited.

‘It’s right here, Billy. Right between our beds.’

‘My uncle is a pilot. He flies big planes that drop bombs. Can you turn it on?’

‘Sure, kid.’ Mr Savo turned on the radio, found the station with the same announcer who was coming over the other radio, then got into his bed and lay back on his pillow. The three of us lay in our beds and listened to the news of the invasion.

Mrs Carpenter came up the aisle. She was still a little angry over all the noise in the ward, but I could see she was also excited. She asked me how I was feeling.

‘I’m feeling fine, ma’am.’

‘That’s very good. Is that your radio?’

‘Yes, ma’am. My father brought it to me.’

‘How nice. You may sit up a little if you wish.’

‘Thank you.’ I was happy to hear that. ‘May I pray with my tefillin?’

‘Your phylacteries?’

‘Yes, ma’am.’

‘I don’t see why not. You’ll be careful of the bump on your head, now.’

‘Yes, ma’am. Thank you.’

She looked sternly at Mr Savo. ‘I see you’re behaving yourself, Mr Savo.’

Mr Savo looked at her out of his left eye and grunted. ‘You’d think I was dying.’

‘You are to remain in bed, Mr Savo.’

Mr Savo grunted again.

She went back up the aisle.

‘Tough as a ring post,’ Mr Savo said, grinning. ‘Turn it up a bit, Bobby boy. Can’t hear it too good.’

I leaned over and turned up the volume of the radio. It felt good to be able to move again.

I got the tefillin and prayer book out of the drawer of the night table and began to put on the tefillin. The head strap rubbed against the bump, and I winced. It was still sore. I finished adjusting the hand strap and opened the prayer book. I saw Mr Savo looking at me. Then I remembered that I wasn’t allowed to read, so I closed the prayer book. I prayed whatever I remembered by heart, trying not to listen to the announcer. I prayed for the safety of all the soldiers fighting on the beaches. When I finished praying, I took off the tefillin and put them and the prayer book back in the drawer.

‘You’re a real religious kid, there, Bobby boy,’ Mr Savo said to me.

I didn’t know what to say to that, so I looked at him and nodded and didn’t say anything.

‘You going to be a priest or something?’

‘I might,’ I said. ‘My father wants me to be a mathematician, though.’

‘You good at math?’

‘Yes. I get all A’s in math.’

‘But you want to be a priest, eh? A – rabbi, you call it.’

‘Sometimes I think I want to be a rabbi. I’m not sure.’

‘It’s a good thing to be, Bobby boy. Cockeyed world needs

people like that. I could've been a priest. Had a chance once. Made a wrong choice. ^{Wound up} clopping people instead. Lousy choice. Hey, listen to that!

The correspondent was saying excitedly that some German torpedo boats had attacked a Norwegian destroyer and that it looked like it was sinking. There were sailors jumping overboard and lifeboats being lowered. ^{8 P's 5 4 7}

'They got clopped,' Mr Savo said, looking grim. 'Poor bas— poor guys.'

The correspondent sounded very excited as he described the Norwegian destroyer sinking.

The rest of that morning I did nothing but listen to the radio and talk about the war with Mr Savo and Billy. I explained to Billy as best I could some of the things that were going on, and he kept telling me his uncle was the pilot of a big plane that dropped bombs. He asked me if I thought he was dropping them now to help with the invasion. I told him I was sure he was. ^{179 21}

Shortly after lunch, a boy came in from the other ward bouncing a ball. I saw he was about six years old, had a thin pale face and dark uncombed hair which he kept brushing away from his eyes with his left hand while he walked along bouncing the ball with his right. He wore light brown pyjamas and a dark brown robe.

'Poor kid,' said Mr Savo. 'Been in the ward across the hall most of his life. Stomach's got no juices or something.' He watched him come up the aisle. 'Crazy world. Cockeyed.'

The boy stood at the foot of Mr Savo's bed, looking very small and pale. 'Hey, Mr Tony. You want to catch with Mickey?'

Mr Savo told him this was no day to toss a ball around, there was an invasion going on. Mickey didn't know what an invasion was, and began to cry. 'You promised, Mr Tony. You said you would catch with little Mickey.'

Mr Savo looked uncomfortable. 'Okay, kid. Don't start bawling again. Just two catches. Okay?'

'Sure, Mr Tony,' Mickey said, his face glowing. He threw the ball to Mr Savo, who had to stretch his right hand high over his

head to catch it. He tossed it back lightly to the boy, who dropped it and went scrambling for it under the bed.

I saw Mrs Carpenter come rushing up the aisle, looking furious. 'Mr Savo, you are simply impossible!' she almost shouted.

Mr Savo sat in his bed, breathing very hard and not saying anything.

'You are going to make yourself seriously ill unless you stop this nonsense and rest!'

'Yes, ma'am,' Mr Savo said. His face was pale. He lay back on his pillow and closed his left eye.

Mrs Carpenter turned to the boy, who had found his ball and was looking expectantly at Mr Savo.

'Mickey, there will be no more catching with Mr Savo.'

'Aw, Mrs Carpenter—'

'Mickey!'

'Yes'm,' Mickey said, suddenly docile. 'Thanks for the catch, Mr Tony.'

Mr Savo lay on his pillow and didn't say anything. Mickey went back up the aisle, bouncing his ball.

Mrs Carpenter looked down at Mr Savo. 'Are you feeling all right?' she asked, sounding concerned.

'I'm a little pooped,' Mr Savo said, not opening his eye. ^{kn up}

'You should know better than to do something like that.'

'Sorry, ma'am.'

Mrs Carpenter went away.

'Tough as a ring post,' Mr Savo said. 'But a big heart.' He lay still with his eye closed, and after a while I saw he was asleep.

The announcer was talking about the supply problems involved in a large-scale invasion, when I saw Mr Galanter coming up the aisle. I turned the radio down a little. Mr Galanter came up to my bed. He was carrying a copy of the New York Times under his arm, and his face was flushed and excited.

'Come up to say hello, soldier. I'm between schools, so I've only got a few minutes. Couldn't've seen you otherwise today. How are we doing?'

'I'm a lot better, Mr Galanter.' I was happy and proud that he had come to see me. 'My head doesn't hurt at all, and the wrist is a lot less sore.'

'That's good news, trooper. Great news. This is some day, isn't it? One of the greatest days in history. Fantastic undertaking.'

'Yes, sir. I've been listening to it on the radio.'

'We can't begin to imagine what's going on, trooper. That's the incredible part. Probably have to land more than a hundred fifty thousand troops today and tomorrow, and thousands and thousands of tanks, artillery pieces, jeeps, bulldozers, everything and all on those beaches. It staggers the mind!'

'I told little Billy here that they were using the big bombing planes an awful lot. His uncle is a bomber pilot. He's probably flying his plane right now.'

Mr Galanter looked at Billy, who had turned his head in our direction, and I saw Mr Galanter notice immediately that he was blind.

'How are you, young feller?' Mr Galanter said, his voice sounding suddenly a lot less excited.

'My uncle flies a big plane that drops bombs,' Billy said. 'Are you a flier?'

I saw Mr Galanter's face go tight.

'Mr Galanter is my gym teacher in high school,' I told Billy.

'My uncle's been a pilot for a long time now. My father says they have to fly an awful lot before they can come home. Were you wounded or something, Mr Galanter, sir, that you're home now?'

I saw Mr Galanter stare at the boy. His mouth was open, and he ran his tongue over his lips. He looked uncomfortable.

'Couldn't make it as a soldier,' he said, looking at Billy. 'I've got a bad -' He stopped. 'Tried to make it but couldn't.'

'I'm sorry to hear that, sir.'

'Yeah,' Mr Galanter said.

I was feeling embarrassed. Mr Galanter's excitement had disappeared, and now he stood there, staring at Billy and looking defeated. I felt sorry for him, and I regretted having mentioned Billy's uncle.

'I wish your uncle all the luck in the world,' Mr Galanter said quietly to Billy.

'Thank you, sir,' Billy said.

Mr Galanter turned to me. 'They did quite a job getting that

piece of glass out of your eye, trooper.' He was trying to sound cheerful, but he wasn't succeeding too well. 'How soon will you be out?'

'My father said in a few days.'

'Well, that's great. You're a lucky boy. It could've been a lot worse.'

'Yes, sir.'

I wondered if he knew about the scar tissue and didn't want to talk to me about it. I decided not to mention it; he was looking a little sad and uneasy, and I didn't want to make him any more uncomfortable than he already was.

'Well, I got to go teach a class, trooper. Take care of yourself and get out of here soon.'

'Yes, sir. Thank you for everything and for coming to see me.'

'Anything for one of my troopers,' he said.

I watched him walk away slowly up the aisle.

'It's too bad he couldn't be a soldier,' Billy said. 'My father isn't a soldier, but that's because my mother was killed in the accident and there's no one else to take care of me and my little sister.'

I looked at him and didn't say anything.

'I think I'll sleep a little now,' Billy said. 'Would you turn off the radio?'

'Sure, Billy.'

I saw him put his palms under his head on the pillow and lie there, staring vacantly up at the ceiling.

I lay back and after a few minutes of thinking about Mr Galanter I fell asleep. I dreamed about my left eye and felt very frightened. I thought I could see sunlight through the closed lid of my right eye, and I dreamed about waking up in the hospital yesterday afternoon and the nurse moving the curtain away. Now something was blocking the sunlight. Then the sunlight was back again, and I could see it in my sleep through the lid of my right eye. Then it was gone again, and I felt myself getting a little angry at whoever was playing with the sunlight. I opened my eye and saw someone standing alongside my bed. Whoever it was stood silhouetted against the sunlight, and for a moment I couldn't make out the face. Then I sat up quickly.