

Saturday Night

THEY were just sitting there. Two old men, just sitting there in front of the pool hall. Two rumpled and unshaven old men, sitting in front of the pool hall, watching the Saturday night crowd move by. Music came from within the joint, and with it came the clicking of balls on the tables and the smell of stale beer. Laughter came, too, and cigarette smoke made a blue haze in the window behind their heads.

And the Saturday night crowd moved on by them, eddying around their outstretched legs, moving on by them on its way to everywhere.

Small boys ran by, their hands and faces sticky from candy, their once-combed hair masses of cowlicks and errant curls, their clean Saturday-night clothes smeared with chocolate ice cream or blood from a battered nose.

Young couples floated past, soaking up whatever it is that makes a summer Saturday night such a wonderfully special time, their eyes blind to the world around them, their feet leading them nowhere in particular, for what is anywhere when you hold her hand on a summer Saturday night?

Men would walk into the pool hall for a short one, and their wives would congregate in bunches along the sidewalk, keeping a respectful distance between themselves and the pool hall, and talking about materials and Mildred Hanson's new baby, her fourth, you know, and what a lovely night it was.

And they just sat there, two disheveled old men in their greasy overalls, with the world all around them. They never spoke to each other, but occasionally they would chorus a greeting to some passerby. A listless greeting, little more

than a grunt, or was it a groan?

And you found yourself watching these two old men, just sitting there in front of the pool hall on Saturday night. You watched them even though the little town was alive with people, and there were other things happening, exciting things, things that can happen only on a summer Saturday night. But you would watch them as they sat there. You would notice their wrinkled, bristly faces and their colorless eyes, the yellowed teeth they used to squirt the brown tobacco juice, the gnarled hands twisted together like dead vines on the laps of the grey coveralls, the sagging socks, and the incredible whiteness of the legs where the coveralls didn't come all the way down to the tops of the socks. And your eyes would fix themselves on the grim mouths that were like scars, straight sharp scars on their faces. And you would wonder if those scars had ever torn themselves open in laughter. You would wonder if these two old men in front of the pool hall had ever been with the little boys as they ran by, grimy with the happiness of youth. And you would wonder if they had ever strolled by with soft hands in theirs, and if they wanted to be alone then. You would ask yourself why they weren't inside, laughing with the others and talking about the hog prices.

And you might look away to forget them, but then you would look again, and they would still be there, two old men sitting in front of the pool hall, two formless husks of humanity, divorced from the world that knew Saturday night. Four bleary, colorless eyes looking into the world apart from them. And you would feel sorry for them at first; then you were wondering if you would ever be sitting in front of the pool hall on a Saturday night. Just sitting there in front of the pool hall on a summer Saturday night.

—*Bob Boston, Sc. Soph.*