



By Harriet Frank, Jr.

WHO NEEDS AMY HOFFER?

The way I look at it, I'd be a lot better off if my father weren't a self-made man. Take this last summer, for

instance. Some summer! I finally get out of this crummy high school I go to in Beverly Hills, and I figure I'm my own boy till September 13. I've got this friend, Herbie Grobecher, and we make plans. That's a laugh. The first day of vacation my father asks me to come downtown to this paper-box factory he owns and have a little talk with him. I don't mind eating lunch with my father, but what I could live without is "little talks." However, I have never got

away with saying "No" to him before, and I figure this is no time to begin.

I figure this is good policy, because I have my eye on a very nice model used car which I am thinking about purchasing, with some financial assistance from my father. I plan to bring it up sometime during this lunch, pointing out the advantages of my having a car. For instance, think of all the errands I can run for my mother. I can also take my own clothes to the cleaners. And a lot of other stuff which doubtless would come up if I owned a car.

Also, I wouldn't always be slopping around the house, getting in people's way. Take, for instance, going to the beach. It's a matter of keeping in shape. I think a man of my age should watch his health, so I'm willing to work out at the beach any time I get the chance. But there's a hitch. It takes one hour and ten minutes to get to the beach and back by bus. (My mother doesn't allow me to hitch rides. I'm only a mere five feet eleven and one half inches, but she thinks I'm a little baby or something.) All right. There's one hour and ten minutes of healthy living wasted every day because I don't have a car! I discussed this with my mother, who is very interested in my welfare most of the time. Her idea is that I'd better have a "little talk" with my father. I don't consider this a very helpful suggestion, because what I had in mind was that *she* should have a talk with my father.

The reason I wanted her to do the talking is that she gets along very good with my old man. They've been married for about six million years, and they still like each other personally. I mean, when they think I'm not paying any attention, they do a lot of laughing and hugging and stuff like that. For example, my father got my mother this fur coat last year, and she didn't even say she wanted one. My father just thought it was a good idea. That shows you how much influence she has over him. I'm not in this class. I have got to put on my good slacks and sport jacket and go downtown to the paper-box factory and have this man-to-man lunch.

One thing, my father likes his chow, so we went to a pretty good place, and I had steak and French fries, and pie à la mode. I'm not too hungry at noon. After lunch we walked to the square. "Marty," my father said, "you've got the whole summer before you."

"That's right, Pop," I said, "only, three months isn't forever. I mean, I've got a lot of stuff to cram into this summer."

"Oh," he said, "you've made some plans? What's on the agenda?"

"Well," I said, "I don't know if Herbie and I can get the whole schedule in, but we're sure going to try. Of course, a lot depends on circumstances, which I'll go into later. But here's the setup: first, about five weeks on the beach working out, getting into shape; then a short hop to Grand Canyon—I've never seen it, so I consider that it's going to be a very educational experience; then a month in Yellowstone, camping out—we plan to do some very serious fishing up there. I don't think a guy should loaf through his vacation." "Neither do I," said my father. I took a look at him because his voice sounded kind of funny. "Martin," he said, "there is one thing you have over-looked."

Usually my father calls me "Marty" or "Champ" or stuff like that. When I get the "Martin" treatment, I know I'm cooked.

"What's that, Dad?" I asked.

"Work," he said. "Good, hard, honest toil."

"But this is my vacation!"

"Vacation from what?"

From what. Get that! It only goes to show you how long my father's been out of school.

"I've had a very rough year," I said. "I had to take geometry and biology and Spanish and social studies, with the worst teachers in the public-school system. You can ask anybody. They worked the ears off us. I had homework in *every single subject*. I even had to cut down football practice. You may not know it, but I only saw one movie a week all last winter. One movie!"

"Son, you're breaking me up," said my father.

"I'm just trying to give you the picture," I said.

"I've got it," he said. "I see you goofing off throughout the entire summer, and I don't like it."

"Goofing off?" I protested. "I'm recuperating!"

"Marty," he said, "you're not a kid any more. I don't want to treat you like a kid. I don't like laying down the law or pulling rank on you, so I'm going to tell you how I feel about it and leave it up to you."

He sat down on a bench and patted the place beside him. Then he leaned back and closed his eyes. It's funny. When he takes off his glasses and closes his eyes he doesn't look so young any more. In fact, he looks kind of beat.

"Here's the way it is," he said. "We live in a good neighborhood in a good house. We eat well. We've got decent clothes. All in all, a high standard of living. But—and here's the big point—

it's something we can't take for granted. The world doesn't owe us a house in Beverly Hills and three squares a day. We have to work for it. Not shove anybody off the road for it, or lie for it, or gold-brick for it—just earn it. Does that make sense?"

"Sure," I said reluctantly, "only I wasn't figuring on starting a career this particular summer, is all."

"I wasn't thinking of it as a career," he said. "I'd call it pulling your own weight."

"This'll kill Herbie," I said heavily.

"Could be. However, I think you'll like yourself a lot more if you get off the dime.¹ It's a matter of separating the men from the boys, Champ."

So that's how I happened to go to work in the stockroom of the Glass Slipper Shoe Shop. It's something I don't discuss with anybody, but now that it's over I'll just remark that a dog never had it like I had it! The only good thing that came out of the job was the day I quit and went to put a down payment on my car. I mean, it's not mine yet, but the Saturday before school opened I went down and put myself in hock for the rest of my life, and then Herbie and I drove it out to the beach for one last blowout.

It was a great day. The ocean had these tremendous waves coming in, and Herbie was beating himself on the chest and hollering like crazy. Me, I just flopped down on that sand like I was middle-aged or something.

"Herbie," I said, "I'm shot. When

¹get off the dime, begin. [Slang]

I think of going back to the old school grind, I could just about pass out. It's so bad I'm not even going to try out for the squad."

"Working all summer," said Herbie, shaking his head. "That's murder."

"Yeah," I said, "and now I'm going to level with you. It's made me plenty bitter." I knotted up my fists and socked the sand. "I don't get it. My old man makes good dough. And he's not tight or anything like that. But all of a sudden he wants to make me into a slave, for my own good or something."

One thing about Herbie. He's plenty sympathetic. "It almost happened to me," he said. "It was one close call, believe me. But when my old man started in about me getting a job, I pulled an asthma attack and it scared him off. He sent me up to Big Bear for the whole summer."

"You're lucky. All you have to do is wheeze and you're in the clear."

"Well," said Herbie, "don't think about it any more. You'll blow your top."

Herbie was right. I should have put it out of my mind, but the more I thought about it, the more browned off I got. I know my old man put me through it so I'd have some character, but the way I look at it is I've got all the character I need right now. . . . Then school started and I really went crazy.

The very first day I drive to school I park my car in the lot across the street which is meant for student vehicles. Now this high school I go to is



full of kids whose fathers are movie producers and stuff like that, so we've got more than our share of convertibles and pretty jazzy cars. It just so happens that my car has a better motor in it than all of 'em put together, but that's because I did a special ring job on it myself. However, the minute I tool my car onto the lot I get a load of this foreign job lined up right alongside me.

This car was so foreign I'd never seen anything like it. In the first place, it was two miles long. Black. Very low-slung. With the motor in the rear! No kidding. The thing probably ran on champagne or something like that. There are six million kids lined up around it with their mouths hanging open. Frankly, I'm not too interested. However, Herbie came along and grabbed me and started hollering that we should see who it belongs to.

"It's got to be a jerk," I said. "A car like that is ridiculous."

"Ridiculous!" said Herbie. "That car is the most car I've ever seen in my entire life. I gotta see who it belongs to." And he's off and running.

That's a friend for you. The first day I bring my car to school he's knocked on his ear by a few flashy extras on a foreign make. Not that it cut any ice with me. It was just interesting to see where he stood, that's all. I got busy putting a tarp over my hood—one thing I don't want is scratches on my car—and pretty soon Herbie is back all out of breath.

"It belongs to a girl," he said. "I read the registration tag. Amy Hoffer. That's her name. Man! I gotta meet that

girl. I gotta get to her before the lines form."

"Herbie," I said, "don't rush into anything. She could be a dog."

"I'm willing to overlook it," Herbie said. "My old man gives me the horse laugh every time I mention a car. He's got to spend all his dough marrying off my sisters."

Herbie has these five sisters who give him quite a bit of trouble.

"Herbie," I said, "I'd like to give you some free advice. Do not mess around with Miss Amy Whosis."

"You've never even seen her," he squeaked.

I shook my head. "True," I said, "but I don't have to see her." I tapped my forehead. "I've got a mental picture right here." I put my arm around Herbie's shoulder. He's a good kid. "Herbie," I said, "you know what it is with your five sisters. You know how you're always having to take them to the dentist and how they never let you use the bathroom."

"Yeah," said Herbie, "but they're related."

"Okay. Suppose you get clubby with Miss Hoffer. She lets you ride around in her car. Fine. But what do you have to do for her?"

"Nothin'," said Herbie, smiling in a very cheerful way.

"Wrong," I said. "One hundred percent wrong. You will have to open car doors. You will have to carry her books around in school. You will be picking her up at the dentist's."

"It's possible," said Herbie, getting pale in the face.

"It's positive," I said.

"I'll ride with you in your car," he said.

I tell you, that Amy Hoffer business needed me so much I started parking my car across the street from the lot. Every time I got a load of that wagon of hers it drove me crazy. I mean, how come *her* parents weren't interested in developing her character, when mine think it's the most important thing in the world? I gave it a lot of thought, and I couldn't see where the justice was in a situation like that.

Then Herbie started in again. We were driving home from school one day, and my mind was on the twin exhaust pipes I was going to install on the car, when all of a sudden Herbie starts grinning like he'd lost his marbles.

"Boy," he said, "have I got news for you! Do you remember Amy Hoffer?"

"Yeah," I said, "but frankly, Herbie, I'm not too interested in talking about her."

"All you have to do is listen," said Herbie, "while I tell you what I found out about her: She is the only child of Theodore Hoffer of Hoffer, Benton, and Reid, who just happen to sell stock to every rich millionaire in town."

"That's peachy," I said, very sarcastic, but it went right over Herbie's head.

"She's got her own television set in her own room. She's got a hi-fi recorder. She's got a swimming pool ninety feet long. She's got a horse, and a soda bar right in her own house."

I started to say something, but Herbie held up his hand.

"Wait," he said. "Here's the A-bomb: She just happens to live right next door to you!"

"Nobody lives next door to me," I said. "That big barn has been for rent for two years."

"It's not for rent now, because it was rented this month to you-know-who. It's on her information card at school."

"What do you want me to do about it," I said, "froth at the mouth?"

Herbie looked sort of hurt. "Listen," he said, "I'm letting you in on a very good thing. This girl is getting the biggest rush since the gold strike. She's got six million kids around all the time."

"Herbie," I said, very patiently, "I appreciate your telling me, but it just happens that I'm a lone wolf. I've got a very moody temperament. You may not know this, but there are a lot of times when all I want to do is put on my bathrobe and lie around on my bed thinking. With the lights out. Right now I've got no time for Amy Hoffer. No time at all."

I could see by looking at him that Herbie didn't get it. "Listen, Mart," he said, "what do you *think* about?"

"My life," I said. "My future. I try to figure what it's all about."

"Oh," he said, kind of troubled. "You mean you would rather lie around in your bathrobe thinking than go swimming in a ninety-foot filtered swimming pool?"

"Yeah."

"How about riding on a privately owned horse?"

"Same thing."

That did it. "I guess you're a lone wolf, all right," he said.

"I may snap out of it," I said, "but right now I've got a lot of things to work out in my head." I didn't want to go into it any further because, frankly, some of the things I think about are pretty deep.

For instance, sometimes I get quite restless, like I was real hungry, only I'm not. I go downstairs and eat a couple of pieces of cake, but it doesn't touch it. It's something mental. Like I was very lonesome or sick or something. It's crazy, but I get the feeling I want to sit real close to somebody. A girl, maybe. A nice girl with a soft voice and a good figure. Somebody with a moody temperament like mine. I'm not saying I'm always like that. I think about my car payments and about the terrible, lousy summer I had and stuff like that, too, but mostly it's personal. It takes up a lot of my time, and I don't think my mother is too happy about it. She gets kind of nervous when she finds me lying on my bed and staring at the ceiling, but she doesn't make an issue of it.

Anyway, one thing was for sure: Until I got my problems worked out, I certainly didn't want to have Amy Hoffer in my hair.

Little did I know! All the time I was talking to Herbie and we were riding home, Fate was putting the finger on me. When I walked into my own living room, there was a girl and her mother sitting on our couch, having tea or something with my mother.

"Martin," my mother said, "I'd like you to come in and meet our new neighbors, Mrs. Hoffer and her daughter Amy."

I had to say "How do you do?" and shake hands, because if there's one thing my mother won't stand for, it's bad manners. But, believe me, it wasn't easy. It's not that she was a dog or anything like that, but I had these very mixed-up feelings regarding a girl who gets handed everything on a silver platter, while other people work their ears off.

Also, she made me nervous. She reminded me a lot of a deer I shot up in the Rockies last year when I went hunting with my father. Now that may sound crazy, but it's the honest truth. She had the same kind of scared eyes and the same jumpy way of acting. It upset me quite a bit because, frankly, I hadn't felt so good about shooting that deer in the first place. This girl was kind of skinny, and she kept scrounging down on the end of her spine like she wanted to get lost or something. Her mother, who had a very loud voice, did most of the talking.

"Amy has made simply hosts of friends since we arrived here," she said. "Of course, I encourage that. I find that adolescents left to themselves are inclined to be moody."

I took a look at her when she said that, and I could tell from the expression on her face that she thought being moody was something disgusting. Which shows you what *she* knows!

"We do want Amy to mingle," Mrs. Hoffer went on. "So we're having a

party for her on Saturday, and she's asking everyone she knows."

"She doesn't know me," I said very distinctly. I got a freezing look from my mother on that remark, but it just came out. I mean, *I'm* not a car or a swimming pool or a horse to be handed to some girl on a silver platter.

"Well, that's easily remedied," Mrs. Hoffer said. "You just come over next door on Saturday to the party."

"I'm sure Martin would love to come," my mother said. I knew from her tone of voice she wasn't asking me; she was telling me.

Amy Hoffer didn't say a word. She just kept sitting on the end of her spine and staring at the floor. Pretty soon her mother nudged her. "I'm sure Amy would be delighted to have you."

Then she opened her mouth, but you could hardly hear her. "He doesn't have to come if he doesn't want to," is what she said. She wasn't sore or anything. She just said it like it was a fact.

I knew I'd get chewed out unless I said something polite, so I said, "I don't mind," and let it go at that.

Then her mother got up and said they'd have to run along.

After they had gone, I had a long talk with my mother. That is, I listened and she did all the talking. She said that since I did a lot of lying around in my bathrobe thinking, it might be a good idea if I thought a little bit about other people. I knew right away she was talking about Amy Hoffer.

"To tell you the truth," I said to my mother, "Amy Hoffer makes me kind of sick at my stomach."

One thing about my mother is that she never looks shocked, no matter what you say to her.

"Why?" she asked in a calm voice. "I'll tell you why," I said. "She's nothing! A skinny, little kid, and she gets treated like she was a queen or something. She merely has her own television set," I said, "not to mention her own horse and swimming pool."

"Oh," said my mother, "are you jealous of her?"

Now that was a great big laugh. "Jealous?" I said. "Not me! I just don't see how come she rides a gravy train when other people have it quite a bit rougher, that's all."

"Like you?"

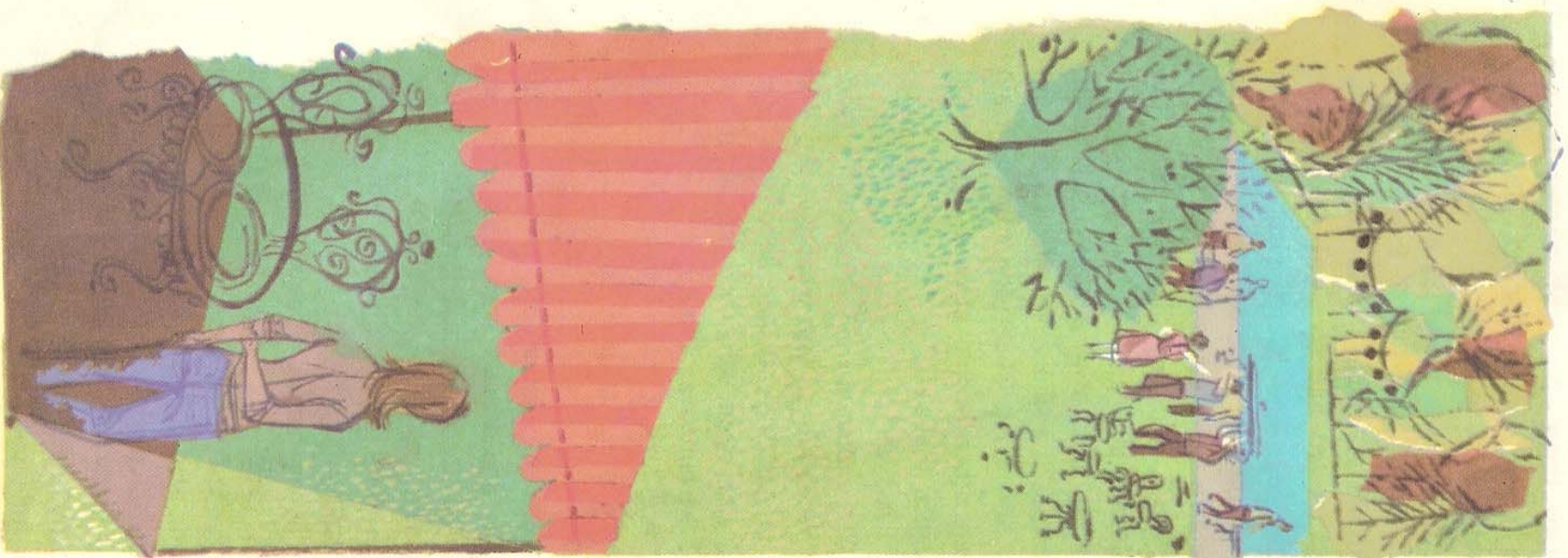
"I'd rather not get personal," I said.

"Well, I'll tell you what you do. You go to Amy's party and keep your eyes and ears open, and then tell me if you feel the same way about her."

"Why do I have to go?" I said. "She's going to have six million kids there."

Then my mother did a very peculiar thing. She leaned over and took my face in her hands and gave me a great big kiss. "Because," she said, "I think little Amy needs someone like you at her party."

The next thing I knew it was Saturday, and this great big wonderful party everybody was so steamed up about was going on. Just to show you how ridiculous it was, they started getting ready for it at nine o'clock in the morning. Living right next door, I got the full benefit. I was just beginning to do some serious sleeping when I hear



trucks pull up in the driveway. I look out and see these brawny guys hauling tables and chairs and some paper lanterns and stuff into the garden. They're fixing it up like some kind of amusement park or something. It's not enough that this girl has a swimming pool and a soda bar; she also has to have a dance floor put down on the lawn and a bandstand! That just about broke me up.

I also saw Mrs. Hoffer running around with her hair pinned up, doing a lot of shouting at the men. Then pretty soon Amy came out and stood on the porch and watched. She was wearing some old blue jeans and a shirt and a very sad expression. The minute her mother saw her, she began talking to her in a very excited way. I couldn't hear it all, but there was a lot of stuff about running around in old blue jeans where people could see her. Finally Amy went back into the house, and her mother started in all over again, acting like she was a top sergeant. Just watching her made me feel like I was going to be inducted or something, so I went back to bed and tried to forget the whole thing.

I was still in the sack about two o'clock in the afternoon when my mother came up and said that I'd better get going, because the party was in full swing. This was the understatement of all time. I took a look out the window and almost blew my top. The pool was jammed, a band was playing, and people were lined up at the soda bar five deep. It was New Year's Eve in broad daylight. My mother stood and looked

at it for a long time, and then she said, "That poor youngster."

Little did she know. The first thing that happened when I got next door was a parking attendant in a white coat asks me where I've left my car. "I walked," I said.

He looked at me like I'd broken the law. I could have explained about living next door, but I didn't because I didn't like his attitude.

There was a lot going on. I'll say that for it. I never saw so much shouting and swimming and dancing and eating and general hoo-ra in my life. I just stood there on the porch and watched it with my arms folded. Then, all of a sudden, I hear somebody yell my name and I turn around. There is Herbie.

Now Herbie Grobecher has been my buddy since I was an adolescent, and I've always thought he was a pretty good kid. One thing was for sure: I never expected to see him in the condition he was in at this moment.

He had two plates of ice cream and a bottle of soda on a tray. He had sandwiches sticking out of all his pockets. There was a large, silly grin on his face. "Boy," he said, "is this free-loading!"

"What's the matter? Don't they feed you at home?" I asked.

"Not like this. Why don't you wade in?"

"Because I think I ought to say hello to the girl who's giving the party before I start mooching. Have you seen her?"

"I haven't looked. Why should I?"
I could have answered that, but I

let it pass. All I knew was I didn't want to hang around with him while he stuffed his face, so I told him I'd see him and took off.

I ducked through a door and found myself in a large-sized living room with white furniture and lots of flowers standing around. For a minute I thought I was alone, and then I saw her. Amy Hoffer. She was wearing a very fancy-looking party dress which looked terrible on her, but which must have cost a mint of money. She was just sitting in a chair with her hands folded in her lap and a funny kind of look on her face. It was like that deer I shot up in the Rockies all over again. I mean, she looked like she was dying.

"Hi," I said.

"Hello," she said.

"Some party," I said.

She looked at the floor like she was praying it would crack open and swallow her up. "It's awful," she said. "It's probably the worst party in the whole world. My mother and father keep giving them, though, so they won't lose hope. You see, they're pretty worried about me."

"What's the matter?" I asked. "You sick or something?" It could be; she was pretty small and bony.

"No." She got sort of red in the face.

"I guess you can tell by looking at me that I'm not very pretty. It worries my parents so much that they want to be sure I'll have a lot of friends. They're afraid I'll get maladjusted if I don't."

I wasn't sure I understood the two-bit word, but I thought it meant losing your marbles. "I get it," I said. "That's

why they hand you a car and a horse and all that stuff on a silver platter."

She nodded, and then some tears came into her eyes.

"I don't know what to do," she said.

"They're so upset and everything that they don't realize it isn't working out right. A lot of kids come over here to look at the car and the swimming pool and the soda bar, but they're not interested in me. You can't blame them too much, though. I guess I'm afraid to talk to them."

"That's very rough," I said, "but it's nothing to break up over. Look, you're talking to me right this very minute, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am," she said, "but there's a reason." She looked out the window.

"If you don't mind my saying so, you have a sort of moody, sympathetic face."

How do you like that? She could take one look at me and understand my whole temperament. "That's true," I said. "It comes from thinking a lot."

"Do you mind if I ask you what you think about?" she said in a soft voice.

Now I could have handed her a lot of guff, but I could see she needed some help, so I leveled with her. "Well," I said, "this summer it's been mostly about developing character."

I figured she'd laugh her head off, but she got this interested look on her face, so I went on: "My parents are very steamed up about it. They were pretty anxious for me to get my character in shape during my vacation."

"Maybe you could tell me how," she said. "If it isn't too personal."

"I don't mind. My folks figured if I got a job and worked my ears off it would do me a lot of good." I shrugged. "I don't know. . . ."

The minute I said this, she got very excited. "But that's exactly what I'd like," she said. "To get a Saturday job and make friends for my own sake and accomplish something. I guess a lot of people think it's wonderful to have things handed to you, but it isn't, really. In fact, it makes you feel like a baby to always take things and never be able to give anything back that you've earned all by yourself." She looked at me. "I can see it's done you a lot of good."

"You can?"

"Yes. You're not a bit like the other boys. You're very manly and independent. Also, you have a very understanding nature. I could tell that the first time I saw you."

The minute she said that, a very peculiar thing happened to me. The whole summer flashed across my mind, like I was drowning and only had about two minutes to figure out my whole life. I saw myself sitting in the park with my father and being told I ought to get off the dime; then I saw myself in the Glass Slipper Shoe Shop, working my ears off and saving my dough to buy my own car; then I heard my mother telling me how I ought to think about people and be kind and stuff like that. And suddenly I got the picture.

I mean, I understood *the whole thing!* I saw that my parents weren't riding me just to keep me in line. They

really took a personal interest in me—in my turning out okay, so that I wouldn't ever have to sit around in a classy living room, like Amy Hoffer, and wish I was dead.

It shows you how stupid a guy can be. I mean, I didn't get into focus until Amy made me see it. A funny, skinny little kid like that had it all figured out. Well, I guess some people are just born with character and some have to sweat it out.

"Listen," I said, "if you're not too crazy about this party, maybe you'd like to come over next door and watch while I put twin pipes on my car."

The minute I said it, I got this sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach. A girl who drives around in a two-block-long car might not get the greatest kick in the world out of watching me install twin exhaust pipes.

"Yes, I'd like to very much," she said, looking at the floor.

"Maybe you could even stay for dinner. Unless we're having lamb chops. My mother only buys two apiece when we're having lamb chops, so there wouldn't be enough for you."

"If it isn't lamb chops, I'd like to stay to dinner," she said.

"Okay," I said. "I'd take you to a movie tonight, but frankly, I'm on a budget. I pay my own car bills."

"We don't have to go to the movies," she said. "We can talk about life."

She looked up at me and smiled. She didn't have a bad smile; in fact, it sort of lit up her face. I smiled back. Frankly, I felt great.

To tell the truth, I was more steamed

up than when I went with Herbie Grobecher to buy my used car. I don't know. I always figured if I got mixed up with a girl she would have a soft voice and a very good figure, but when I looked at Amy Hoffer I noticed something. A girl with character is more interesting personally than a girl without. Even if she isn't exactly gorgeous, she might gain weight or something. Who knows?



Talking it over

1. Often people try to find sufficient reason for their acts, beliefs, or desires by inventing acceptable explanations or excuses for them. Usually they themselves do not know what their *real* motives are. For example, suppose you want some new clothes but know you don't actually need them. You try to think of several reasons for buying the clothes: your boss might promote you from stock boy to salesman; you need a greater variety of clothes now that you're going steady; two of your friends have new winter wardrobes; new clothes would help you feel at ease in strange situations; and so on. Suddenly, the new clothes seem essential.

This kind of reasoning is called *rationalization*.

a. In what ways does Marty try to rationalize his desire to have a car of his own?

b. How does he rationalize his not wanting to work during vacation?

2. a. What important things does Marty's father wish to impress upon his son through his summer plans for Marty?

b. Name several ways in which Marty's mother shows she understands teen-agers.