Who is the bright young Defender of Democracy with Liberty and Justice for All, Saviour of the National Government from Communism and All the Other Isms, and Maintenance Man for the American Way of Life from my generation in whom we place such complacent hope for the future of this country?

His name is, let us say, Peter (the Rock upon which we build our Heritage) Smith or Smythe or Schmidt or Smithson or Smithsky or Smithberg or Smithchev or Smithiardi or Smithsan or Smithereen. He is the bright young American we all know and love; he "comes on" like a one-man revue with snappy phrases, gay opinionations, gregarious grins, and all manner of highly amusing repartee. He is the bright young individual with talent enough to do nearly anything he "sets his mind to." He is America's Hope. In his chaste charcoal flannels and his button-down collars, he will be America's politician, scientist, professor or business magnate. He will also be America's fighting man, a fact he faces with grim pessimism. "I can see it all now," he mutters. "You work four years for a degree, spending all that money, and bingo . . . beep-beep . . . the Russians drop the World's Fair in atomic bombs on us, and it's the end of the world."

And so, he sees it all now, brooding picturesquely behind a can of Budweiser beer and a well-packed pipe. If one extends a small invitation, one is also treated to dissertations from him on other important topics such as . . . eyebrow pencil (How Much a Girl Should Wear) . . . bridge (Which System Is the Winning One) . . . nuclear weapons' testing ("What-the-hell? They're gonna blow up the whole world anyway.") . . . literature ("Say, I read Penrod when I was a kid. You'd like it—it has lots of big words in it.") . . . art (upon being exposed to a sample of highly abstract contemporary art, "Well, I suppose they're on the inside, and we're just outside looking in.") Note the sarcastic tone of voice and the snobbish, universal "we.") . . . making a living ("Science is where the money is—these days.") . . . religion ("I don't like to discuss it; it's a touchy subject. That's just something every man has to figure out for himself.") He has it "all figured out." He is, after all, the bright young American we all know and love. He is the hope for the future. He likes bridge, beer, Bach, and broads, in that order. "A deck of cards, a case of 'Bud,' and those beside me singing in the wilderness." In many ways our bright young man is a closed door, a clod; his mind is hostile to Big Words, Modern Art, Religion, Politics, Literature, and Philosophy. What does one discuss with this fellow? Bridge, beer, Bach, and broads. That indicates a fairly shallow individual no matter how you evaluate it.

"But . . . ," one protests, "this is America's bright young man
we are discussing. Surely your Peter is not the right example. What about his occupation, his profession? We were discussing the potential statesmen, businessmen, scientists—the thinking men of this country. Surely your young man does not fit into any of these categories."

But I am discussing the right young man. Our Peter is a future scientist, a theoretical physicist, he thinks. Peter’s calibre of intelligence definitely places him in that “likely young man” spot. And, when occasionally we are confronted with a flash of his inner brilliance, his intellectual potential, and his marvelous sensitivity which is as yet undulled by oppression and negligence, we begin to have some realization of the paradoxes in this young man’s personality and character. He is a veritable bundle of contradictions. He will reveal his mind and its capabilities reluctantly and rarely, preferring to assume the popular guise of the inverted snob, the anti-intellectual. He will ridicule tenderness, an abstract idea, profundity. And yet he roars like a wounded lion when, for fear of his ridicule, a confidence is withheld. In all seriousness he will submit that he is no clod and will become quite indignant that his sensitivity has been questioned. The same incongruity exists in his attitudes toward life’s work. He expresses a dynamic interest in mathematics and physics, yet maintains that he is in his field for “the money.” He is uncertain as to his goals; therefore he accomplishes little in the way of independent, intellectual activity. One finds in his dreams conflicting half-formed plans which illustrate the immaturity of his aims; he plans to roam around Europe for a year at the same time he plans to go on to graduate school. Meanwhile, he saves money for neither and remains indefinite about both. He is the “poor fish” (pronounced “feesh”) and the big “greenbean” to which he is always referring. In a sense, he is the poorest fish of them all because he is wasting his own time and the country’s most valuable commodity: the capable mind.

Peter is a bright young man much like the other bright young men we all know and love; he is one of a group who should be nearly prepared to assume the responsibilities of running a country but who are preparing to meet the demands of manhood with the half-formed ideals of boyhood.

The Last Hour

Anita Glaze

The clock on the bare, scrubbed wall of the waiting room read six o’clock. One hour to go, he thought—only one small hour until that door would open and Commander Millis would give him, Cadet Larry Allan Williams, his final instructions and best wishes. The wear of the past month gave evidence in his tensely drawn face, haggard expression, clouded blue eyes, and the bones jutting sharply out of his tall, lean frame.