

Nervousness

Dave Schweitzer

THERE he was in the room by himself. His thinning brown hair was disarrayed; his high forehead was streaked with jagged lines running almost from temple to temple and large beads of perspiration slid from his brow down his cheek and neck. The pupils of his crystal blue eyes were small and started at objects without registering any reaction. The whites of his eyeballs were pink from their bloodshot condition and the excessive flicking of his eyelids produced tears in the corner of each eye. Heavy, dark, wrinkled bags were visible under each eye and these wrinkles worked their way down to the corners of each nostril, thus forming a path that steered the streams of sweat down to his tightly closed lips. His unbuttoned collar and slackened tie knot revealed a prominent Adam's apple which was in constant motion from the man's forced swallows. His suit jacket was slung on the arm of a chair and his white shirt revealed a large circle of perspiration under each armpit. The back of his shirt exposed his flesh as it clung tightly to the sweat accumulated on his back; the front of his shirt was puffed out, hanging over and hiding his belt. His left sleeve was rolled up to the forearm and his right sleeve, unbuttoned at the wrist, stretched full length on his arm.

He did not seem to be able to control his vibrating, tense hands. He clasped them behind his back, tugged and pulled at his fingers, placed his hands in and out of his pockets, and wiped his forehead with a handkerchief. He paced the floor back and forth, keeping the exact meter of his steps each time he pivoted around and began again. Heavy breathing and deep sighs were the only sounds that broke the silence of the room except for the inhaling and exhaling of the cigarettes which he smoked one after another. He picked small bits of tobacco from his tongue, rattled the wrappings from the package of cigarettes, picked his teeth with the plain end of a match, and scrambled his hair some more. Finally he sat down, but he still did not relax. He rolled his cigarettes in the ash tray, tugged at his ear for a while, rubbed his nose with the back of his hand a number of times, pulled at his socks until the threads began to unwind, and squirmed in his seat every five or ten seconds. He tried to leaf through some magazines but his shaky fingers only ripped the pages. He started to scratch the back of his head, arm and chest. Then he paced the floor again. Abruptly the door opened. He jumped up and his eyes widened as he was told by a nurse, "It's a boy."