

...the night was so blue...

"COME ON. IT'S UP HERE," Charlie said. He gave Peter a brisk tap on the back and started up the next flight. His heart was beating rapidly. He didn't dare look at the boy at his side. Only his duties as a host made it possible for him to speak naturally and maintain a surface equilibrium. "That's my room," he said, standing in the upper hall. "Your room's here and that's your bathroom down there. There's nobody else up here so you'll have it all to yourself."

His voice seemed to echo in the big, dark, suddenly silent house. He felt not just that they were alone, but that they were totally isolated from the world, existing only in each other. He pushed open the door he had indicated as Peter's and stood aside to let him pass.

Here again, on the threshold of the bedroom, he hoped that the boy might reveal himself in some way, but he let the opportunity pass and simply entered. Charlie followed and put his hand on his shoulder once more as they inspected the room. Then, shifting his hand to the base of Peter's neck, he retreated into comedy as he conducted an elaborate tour of the modest quarters, discoursing on the electric fan, the window, the bedside table and the

books upon it. Peter laughed easily, but although he was held now in what was very nearly an embrace, he remained quite contained within himself. Charlie was suddenly oppressed by the difficulties inherent in the simple situation. All he wanted was to know. If it wasn't going to work out, he would forget about it; but it would be too stupid to discover weeks from now that Peter had wanted it too, had been waiting only for an unequivocal move. At the same time, he couldn't imagine risking a rebuff. He had had no experience in seduction. There had been at least an easily detected complicity on those occasions when the advances hadn't been made by others. He had never considered himself a fairy or a pansy or any of the other words bandied about contemptuously by his contemporaries and himself. His sexual activities with other boys were a natural extension of the play he had been introduced to at school. He had always assumed that in due course there would be a girl and marriage and the usual developments of adult life; it simply hadn't happened yet. By sixteen, his had been widely proclaimed the second biggest cock in the school and he had not been cha-

**"I say, if it's love,
the Lord won't mind.
There's enough hate in
the world."**

HARLEM, 1940.

