

"Reading," says he.

"Right," says I, returning my eyes to the page and trying to find my place again.

"What are you reading?" This is invariably his next ploy. I could tell him it was the collected works of Genghis Khan, and he wouldn't even flinch. He doesn't actually care what I'm reading, you see. He just wants me to stop reading it.

So I tell him, "I'm reading Adolf Hitler's only novel, called *Nobody Understands Me*. It's a knockout."

"Far out," he says. "Sounds great. What do you want to do?"

"I'm already doing something. I'm reading this book."

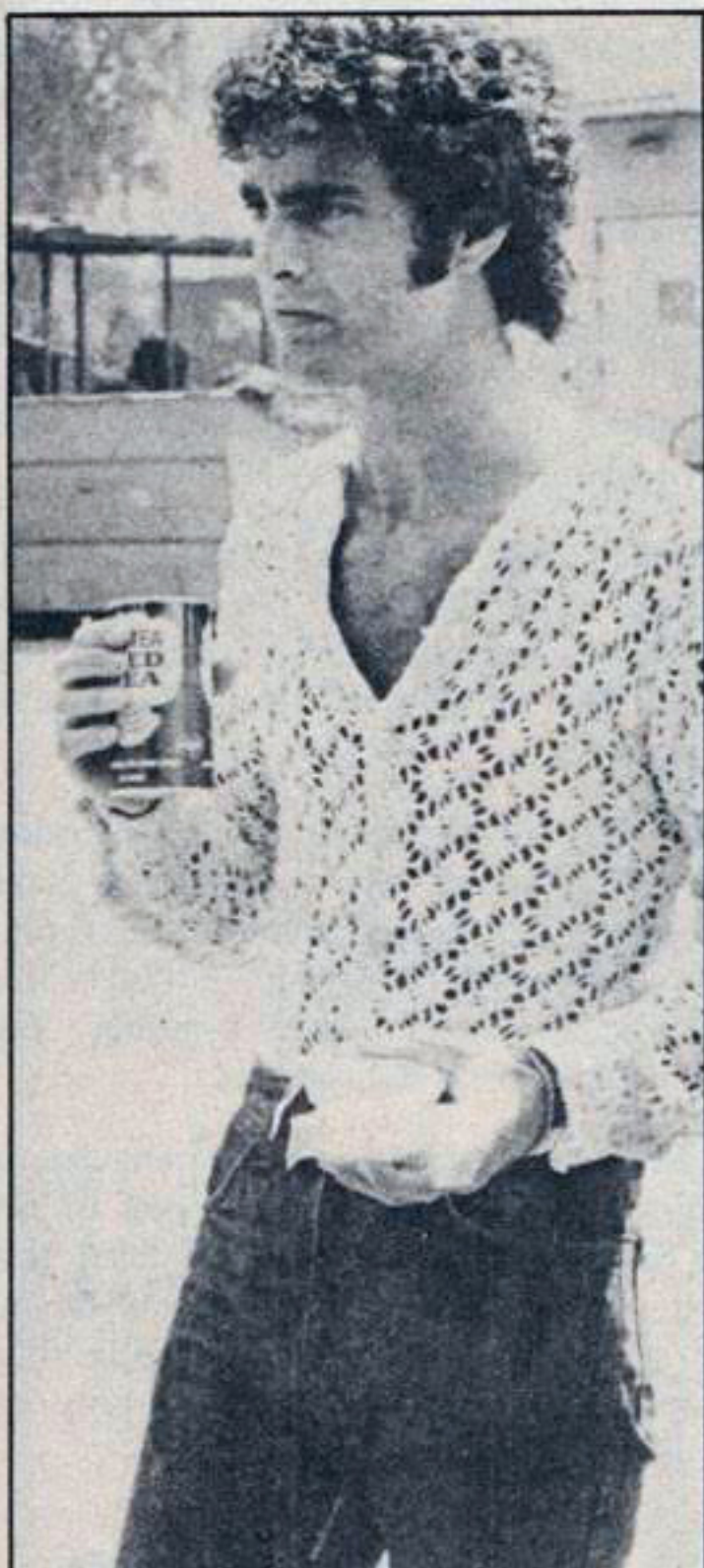
He leans over and slugs me on the shoulder, just hard enough to remind me that he's there. "But what do you want to do together?" he asks. "You know. You and me together. David and Sam. Us. I and thou. We. Just us two guys. Old buddies. Roomies. Fellow inhabitants of this swell house. The twin ----"

"Stop!" I usually shrill at this point. "What were you doing before you came in here? Do it some more."

And I try to get back to the book, but by now all the letters are swarming



YOU'VE KNOWN David a long time now—almost as long as I have—and his career has taken a turn! Will you forget him now? Turn to page 74 and decide!



I LIKE to read so much, I even enjoy reading ordinary soda labels!

around like ants at a political convention, and besides that the look in David's eyes makes me feel guilty, so we go and do something fascinating.

Like looking for four-leaf clovers out in the weeds we call our lawn (there aren't any) or throwing rocks into the swimming pool to watch the ripples or writing funny sayings backwards on the inside of the windows so they read the right way from outside. David, by the way, can write better backwards than he can forward.

OPEN A BOOK

I've tried everything, but there's no escaping. He can hear me open a book clear across the house, and it brings him faster than a red flag is supposed to bring a bull, faster than a long-haired guy brings a policeman.

I tried for a while restricting my reading to late at night, when I was in bed in my little house out back, but there's only so many nights I can make it on four hours' sleep before my tongue gets all thick and funny, and I see four of everything

and I find myself
dropping
off . . .

at times when I should be wide awake, like when I'm driving the freeway. And so I had to abandon that plan, and now it's been a week since I've read anything except the

same stupid paragraph over and over again, trying to get my mind back to where it was when I was interrupted the last time.

But every time I get to the end of the paragraph, David comes into the room and says "What are you doing?" and it all starts all over again.

What can I do? David is in a phase when he thinks a book is something to prop up a corner of his bed with, so how can I explain to him the joys of losing yourself in the wilderness of somebody else's imagination?

But . . . I know I'll get my revenge. David's been a reader before, and I know he'll be one again, probably soon. And I have a plan. I've scattered a number of fascinating books around the house—*The Last Unicorn*, *The Bead Game*, *Dune* and a bunch of others.

Sooner or later, David will pick one up, and when he's read the first five pages, he'll be hooked. He'll find himself in a nice cozy corner and curl up, ready for a great imaginary adventure. . . .

And he'll be in for a big surprise. Because twenty pages in—due to my skill with a razor blade and some glue—he's going to find himself reading *Silas Marner*.

And if he can get through *Silas Marner*, he's a better man than I am.

Sam