

Riding home

THE "L" from Evanston is late at La Salle Street Station so you pound your saddle shoes across the cracked marble floor to the train gates. The sign for the 3:55 p. m. to Blue Island is still illuminated. You scamper down the runway and grab the rail on the last coach. You're safe.

The train lurches into motion and begins to pick its way out of the yards. The doors of the coaches are open to the warm breeze and you make your way to the next car. You drop into a yellow cane seat, pull the green shade to half mast, and poke your finger into the soot that is growing anew from the smoke drifting back. It's going to dirty the elbow of your pink sweater. But you don't care. It is the kind of first warm day in May that musical comedy songs are written about and the 3:55 is a lazy, peaceable train—a world suspended between the shoppers and the office workers. Your burden of books is laid aside and the conductor's punch has snipped another square off your 48-ride ticket. The Board of Trade slides behind and the procession you've been seeing twice a day for nearly four years begins.

Your fellow riders are full-blooded American commut-

ers. They aren't conscious of railroading going on around them. They read or sleep or simply daydream. They may nod their heads at a long freight that sucks the air beside them or peer curiously into a streamliner paused for a moment on the main line, but mostly they are just riding home. You know some of them. There's the mustached man in the second seat, for instance; he uncorked a concertina one evening before Christmas and the coach rolled along with lights ablaze, leaking carols at each stop.

The brakeman calls "*Eng-glewood!*" and you sit up straight. You glimpse the sleek *20th Century Limited* before the train moves and you feel the *rickety-rackety* across the Pennsylvania Railroad tracks. Normal Park . . . Hamilton Park . . . Auburn Park . . . Gresham . . . off the main line west . . . *Brainerd!* You descend the steps which you scrambled up so frantically 20 minutes and 12 miles ago. The small brown station with the pot-belly stove is quiet. High-school kids are in giggly knots around the drugstore. The streets are lined with trees bursting with pale green tenderness. Mr. Malone is digging around his daffodils. — R.E.