



SHARON LEDER

THE TWO FATHERS, 1955

"No. It's not true! Shooting up heroin? Josef and Spencer? Impossible!" The screams, Sara's mother's, came from the kitchen.

What's "heroin"? Sara wondered. A word she had never heard before. Is Spencer someone bad? Sara, eight years old, had just arrived home from Public School 16, her younger brother in hand. She settled her brother down on the rug in the living room, where drawn blinds kept the room dark in the afternoons. She turned the TV set on loud to *The Merry Mailman* and rushed into the kitchen. The aroma of stuffed cabbage filled the room. She saw her mother trembling, holding the phone, and she shut the swinging kitchen door behind her.

"Why should I believe you?" her mother shouted angrily into the receiver. The ladle her mother was holding in her hand dropped to the floor. She didn't bother to pick it up. "My husband's not an addict. Do you hear?" Slamming the receiver down, she collapsed into a chair. "No, he wouldn't do this to me."

Her mother looked more bewildered than ever before, even more upset than when Sara's father began working on Saturdays.

"Mommy, please," Sara begged, grabbing her mother's arm. "What's wrong? What trouble is Daddy in?"

"No trouble, sweetheart," her mother answered feebly, stroking her daughter's hair. "It's just this call gave me a bad headache. That's all." She stood up, walked to the stove, and turned off the flame under the cabbage.

The phone rang again. With her head in her hands, her mother said, "Let it ring, Sara. We won't answer it now."

"But it could be Daddy!" Sara cried and automatically picked up the phone.

"I must tell you, Helen," the frantic voice on the other end insisted. "If the police find Josef with marks on his arms, he's finished. They'll arrest