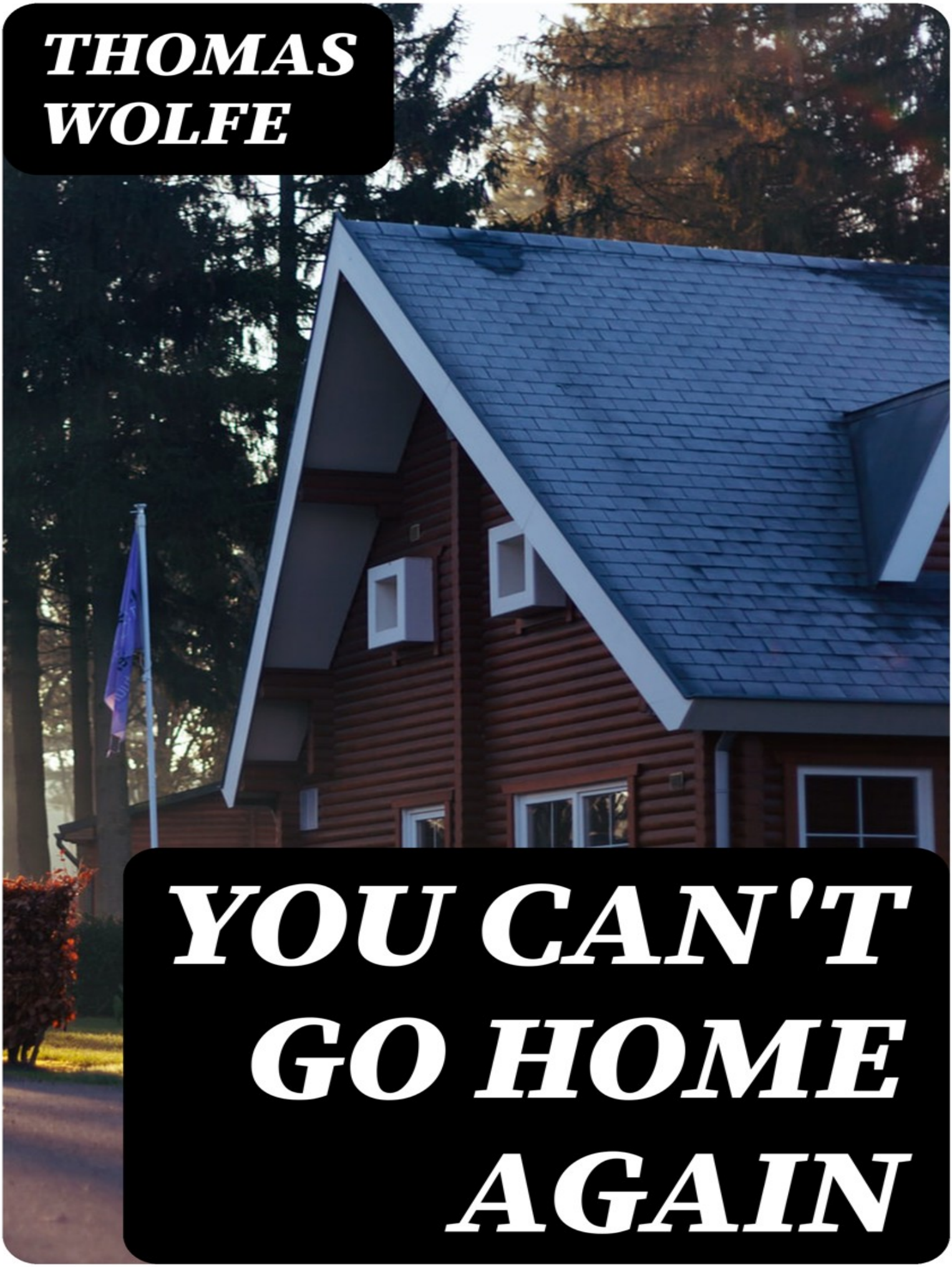
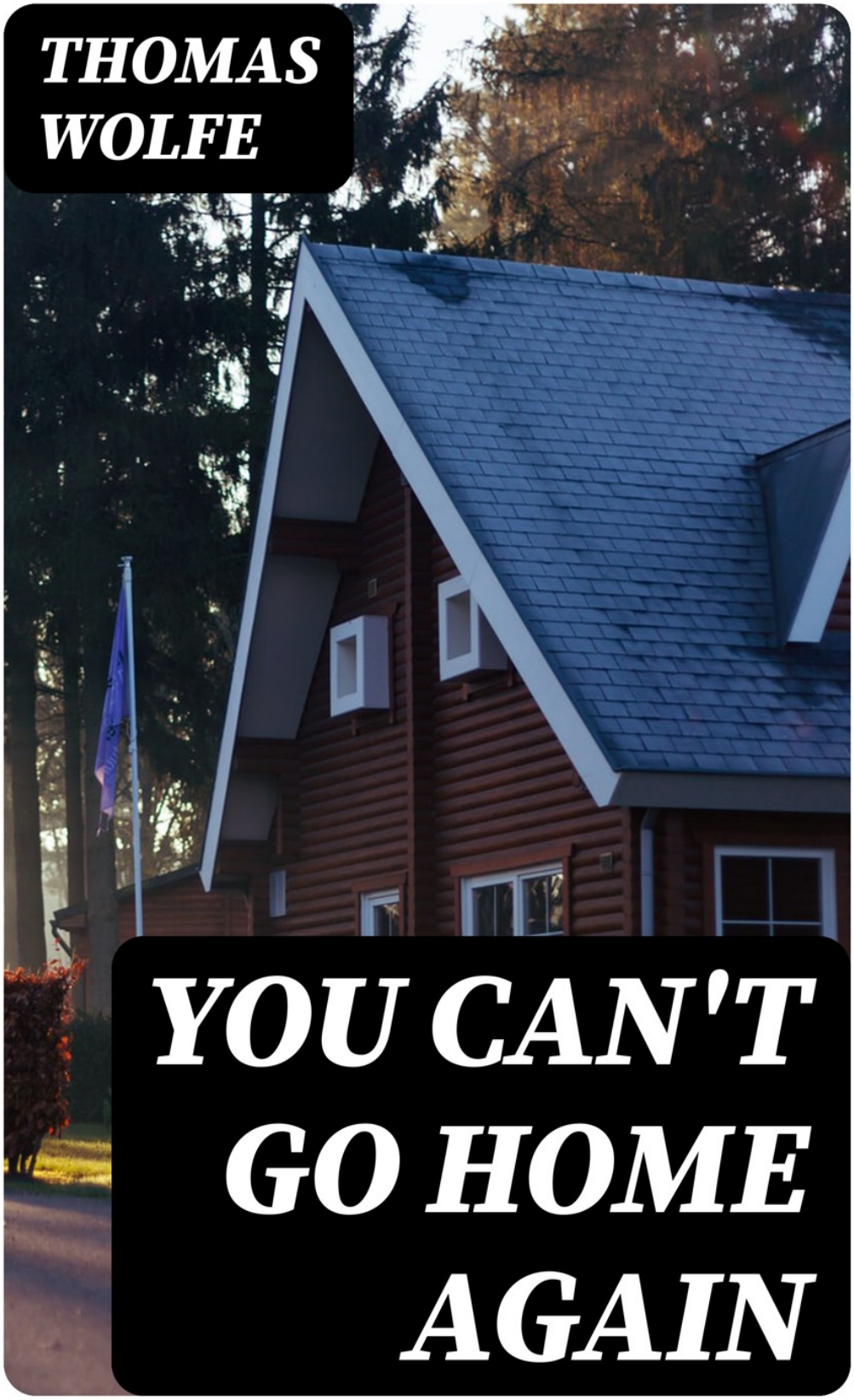

THOMAS WOLFE
YOU CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN


THOMAS WOLFE
YOU CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN

Thomas Wolfe

You Can't Go Home Again

EAN 8596547004226

DigiCat, 2022
Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

Table of Contents

There came to him an image of man's whole life upon the earth. It seemed to him that all man's life was like a tiny spurt of flame that blazed out briefly in an illimitable and terrifying darkness, and that all man's grandeur, tragic dignity, his heroic glory, came from the brevity and smallness of this flame. He knew his life was little and would be extinguished, and that only darkness was immense and everlasting. And he knew that he would die with defiance on his lips, and that the shout of his denial would ring with the last pulsing of his heart into the maw of all-engulfing night.

Book i
The Native’s Return

Table of Contents

1. The Drunken Beggar on Horseback

Table of Contents

It was the hour of twilight on a soft spring day towards the end of April in the year of Our Lord 1929, and George Webber leaned his elbows on the sill of his back window and looked out at what he could see of New York. His eye took in the towering mass of the new hospital at the end of the block, its upper floors set back in terraces, the soaring walls salmon coloured in the evening light. This side of the hospital, and directly opposite, was the lower structure of the annexe, where the nurses and the waitresses lived. In the rest of the block half a dozen old brick houses, squeezed together in a solid row, leaned wearily against each other and showed their backsides to him.

The air was strangely quiet. All the noises of the city were muted here into a distant hum, so unceasing that it seemed to belong to silence. Suddenly, through the open windows at the front of the house came the raucous splutter of a truck starting up at the loading platform of the warehouse across the street. The heavy motor warmed up with a full-throated roar, then there was a grinding clash of gears, and George felt the old house tremble under him as the truck swung out into the street and thundered off. The noise receded, grew fainter, then faded into the general hum, and all was quiet as before.

As George leaned looking out of his back window a nameless happiness welled within, him and he shouted over to the waitresses in the hospital annexe, who were ironing out as usual their two pairs of drawers and their flimsy little dresses. He heard, as from a great distance, the faint shouts of children playing in the streets, and, near at hand, the low voices of the people in the houses. He watched the cool, steep shadows, and saw how the evening light was moving

in the little squares of yards, each of which had in it something intimate, familiar, and revealing — a patch of earth in which a pretty woman had been setting out flowers, working earnestly for hours and wearing a big straw hat and canvas gloves; a little plot of new-sown grass, solemnly watered every evening by a man with a square red face and a bald head; a little shed or playhouse or workshop for some business man's spare-time hobby; or a gay-painted table, some easy lounging chairs, and a huge bright-striped garden parasol to cover it, and a good-looking girl who had been sitting there all afternoon reading, with a coat thrown over her shoulders and a tall drink at her side.

Through some enchantment of the quiet and the westering light and the smell of April in the air, it seemed to George that he knew these people all around him. He loved this old house on Twelfth Street, its red brick walls, its rooms of noble height and spaciousness, its old dark woods and floors that creaked; and in the magic of the moment it seemed to be enriched and given a profound and lonely dignity by all the human beings it had sheltered in its ninety years. The house became like a living presence. Every object seemed to have an animate vitality of its own — walls, rooms, chairs, tables, even a half-wet bath towel hanging from the shower ring above the tub, a coat thrown down upon a chair, and his papers, manuscripts, and books scattered about the room in wild confusion.

The simple joy he felt at being once more a part of such familiar things also contained an element of strangeness and unreality. With a sharp stab of wonder he reminded himself, as he had done a hundred times in the last few weeks, that he had really come home again — home to America, home to Manhattan's swarming rock, and home again to love; and his happiness was faintly edged with guilt when he remembered that less than a year before he had gone abroad in anger and despair, seeking to escape what now he had returned to.

In his bitter resolution of that spring a year ago, he had wanted most of all to get away from the woman he loved. Esther Jack was much older than he, married and living with her husband and grown daughter. But she had given George her love, and given it so deeply, so exclusively, that he had come to feel himself caught as in a trap. It was from that that he had wanted to escape — that and the shameful memory of their savage quarrels, and a growing madness in himself which had increased in violence as she had tried to hold him. So he had finally left her and fled to Europe. He had gone away to forget her, only to find that he could not; he had done nothing but think of her all the time. The memory of her rosy, jolly face, her essential goodness, her sure and certain talent, and all the hours that they had spent together returned to torture him with new desire and longing for her.

Thus, fleeing from a love that still pursued him, he had become a wanderer in strange countries. He had travelled through England, France, and Germany, had seen countless new sights and people, and — cursing, whoring, drinking, brawling his way across the continent — had had his head bashed in, some teeth knocked out, and his nose broken in a beer-hall fight. And then, in the solitude of convalescence in a Munich hospital, lying in bed upon his back with his ruined face turned upwards towards the ceiling, he had had nothing else to do but think. There, at last, he had learned a little sense. There his madness had gone out of him, and for the first time in many years he had felt at peace within himself.

For he had learned some of the things that every man must find out for himself, and he had found out about them as one has to find out — through error and through trial, through fantasy and illusion, through falsehood and his own damn foolishness, through being mistaken and wrong and an idiot and egotistical and aspiring and hopeful and believing and confused. As he lay there in the hospital he

had gone back over his life, and, bit by bit, had extracted from it some of the hard lessons of experience. Each thing he learned was so simple and obvious, once he grasped it, that he wondered why he had not always known it. All together, they wove into a kind of leading thread, trailing backwards through his past, and out into the future. And he thought that now, perhaps, he could begin to shape his life to mastery, for he felt a sense of new direction deep within him, but whither it would take him he could not say.

And what had he learned? A philosopher would not think it much, perhaps, yet in a simple human way it was a good deal. Just by living, by making the thousand little daily choices that his whole complex of heredity, environment, conscious thought, and deep emotion had driven him to make, and by taking the consequences, he had learned that he could not eat his cake and have it, too. He had learned that-in spite of his strange body, so much off scale that it had often made him think himself a creature set apart, he was still the son and brother of all men living. He had learned that he could not devour the earth, that he must know and accept his limitations. He realised that much of his torment of the years past had been self-inflicted, and an inevitable part of growing up. And, most important of all for one who had taken so long to grow up, he thought be had learned not to be the slave of his emotions.

Most of the trouble he had brought upon himself, he saw, had come from leaping down the throat of things. Very well, he would look before he leaped hereafter. The trick was to get his reason and his emotions pulling together in double harness, instead of letting them fly off in opposite directions, tearing him apart between them. He would try to give his head command and see what happened: then if head said, “Leap!”— he’d leap with all his heart.

And that was where Esther came in, for he had really not meant to come back to her. His head had told him it was better to let their affair end as it had ended. But no sooner

had he arrived in New York than his heart told him to call her up — and he had done it. Then they had met again, and after that things followed their own course.

So here he was, back with Esther — the one thing he had once been sure would never happen. Yes, and very happy to be back. That was the queerest part of it. It seemed, perversely, that he ought to be unhappy to be doing what his reason had told him not to do. But he was not. And that was why, as he leaned there musing on his window-sill while the last light faded and the April night came on, a subtle worm was gnawing at his conscience and he wondered darkly at how great a lag there was between his thinking and his actions.

He was twenty-eight years old now, and wise enough to know that there are sometimes reasons of which the reason knows nothing, and that the emotional pattern of one’s life, formed and set by years of living, is not to be discarded quite as easily as one may throw away a battered hat or worn-out shoe. Well, he was not the first man to be caught on the horns of this dilemma. Had not even the philosophers themselves been similarly caught? Yes — and then written sage words about it:

“A foolish consistency,” Emerson had said, “is the hobgoblin of little minds.”

And great Goethe, accepting the inevitable truth that human growth does not proceed in a straight line to its goal, had compared the development and progress of mankind to the reelings of a drunken beggar on horseback.

What was important, perhaps, was not that the beggar was drunk and reeling, but that he was mounted on his horse, and, however unsteadily, was going somewhere.

This thought was comforting to George, and he pondered it for some time, yet it did not altogether remove the edge of guilt that faintly tinged his contentment. There was still a possible flaw in the argument: His inconsistency in coming

back-to Esther — was it wise or foolish? . . . Must the beggar on horseback for ever reel?

Esther awoke as quick and sudden as a bird. She lay upon her back and stared up at the ceiling straight and wide. This was her body and her flesh, she was alive and ready in a moment.

She thought at once of George. Their reunion had been a joyous rediscovery of love, and all things were made new again. They had taken up the broken fragments of their life and joined them together with all the intensity and beauty that they had known in the best days before he went away. The madness that bad nearly wrecked them both had now gone out of him entirely. He was' still full of his, unpredictable moods and fancies, but she had not seen a trace of the old black fury that used to make him lash about and beat his knuckles bloody against the wall. Since he returned he had seemed quieter, surer, in better control of himself, and in everything he did he acted as if he wanted to show her that he loved her. She had never known such perfect happiness. Life was good.

Outside, on Park Avenue, the people had begun to move along the pavements once more, the streets of the city began to fill and thicken. Upon the table by her bed the little dock ticked eagerly its pulse of time as if it hurried forward for ever like a child towards some imagined joy, and a clock struck slowly in the house with a measured, solemn chime. The morning sun steeped each object in her room with casual light, and in her heart she said, "It is now."

Nora brought coffee and hot rolls, and Esther read the paper. She read the gossip of the theatre, and she read the names of the cast that had been engaged for the new German play that the Community Guild was going to do in the autumn, and she read that "Miss Esther Jack has been engaged to design the show". She laughed because they called her "Miss", and because she could see the horrified look on *his* face when he read it, and because she

remembered his expression when the little tailor thought she was his wife, and because it gave her so much pleasure to see her name in the paper —“Miss Esther Jack, whose work has won her recognition as one of the foremost modern designers.”

She was feeling gay and happy and pleased with herself, so she put the paper in her bag, together with some other clippings she had saved, and took them with her when she went down-town to Twelfth Street for her daily visit to George. She handed them to him, and sat opposite to watch his face as he read them. She remembered all the things they had written about her work:

“ . . . subtle, searching, and hushed, with a wry and rueful humour of its own . . . ”

“ . . . made these old eyes shine by its deft, sure touch of whimsey as nothing else in this prodigal season of dramatic husks has done . . . ”

“ . . . the gay insouciance of her unmannered settings, touched with those qualities which we have come to expect in all her ardent services to that sometimes too ungrateful jade, the drama . . . ”

“ . . . the excellent fooling that is implicit in these droll sets, elvishly sly, mocking, and, need we add or make apology for adding, expert? . . . ”

She could hardly keep from laughing at the scornful twist of his mouth and the mocking tone of his comment as he bit off the phrases.

“‘Elvishly sly!’ Now isn’t that too God-damned delightful!” he said with mincing precision. “‘Made these old eyes shine!’ Why, the quaint little bastard! . . . ‘That sometimes too ungrateful jade!’ Oh, deary me, now! . . . ‘And need we add —!’ I am swooning, sweetheart: pass the garlic!”

He threw the papers on the floor with an air of disgust and turned to her with a look of mock sternness that crinkled the corners of his eyes.

“Well,” he said, “do I get fed, or must I starve here while you wallow in this bilge?”

She could control herself no longer and shrieked with glee. “I didn’t do it!” she gasped. “I didn’t write it! I can’t help it if they write like that! Isn’t it awful?”

“Yes, and you hate it, don’t you?” he said. “You lap it up! You arc sitting there licking your lips over it now, gloating on it, and on my hunger! Don’t you know, woman, that I haven’t had a bite to eat all day? Do I get fed, or not? Will you put your deft whimsey in a steak?”

“Yes,” she said. “Would you like a steak?”

“Will you make these old eyes shine with a chop and a delicate dressing of young onions?”

“Yes,” she said. “Yes.”

He came over and put his arms about her, his eyes searching hers in a look of love and hunger. “Will you make me one of your causes that is subtle, searching, and hushed?”

“Yes,” she said. “Whatever you like, I will make it for you.”

“Why will you make it for me?” he asked.

It was like a ritual that both of them knew, and they fastened upon each word and answer because they were so eager to hear it from each other.

“Because I love you. Because I want to feed you and to love you.”

“Will it be good?” he said.

“It will be so good that there will be no words to tell its goodness,” she said. “It will be good because I am so good and beautiful, and because I can do everything better than any other woman you will ever know, and because I love you with all my heart and soul, and want to be a part of you.”

“Will this great love get into the food you cook for me?”

“It will be in every morsel that you eat. It will feed your hunger as you’ve never been fed before. It will be like a

living miracle, and will make you better and richer as long as you live. You will never forget it. It will be a glory and a triumph."

"Then this will be such food as no one ever ate before," he said. "Yes," she said.-"It will be."

And it was so. There was never anything like it in the world before. April had come back again.

So now they were together. But things were not quite the same between them as they had once been. Even on the surface they were different. No longer now for them was there a single tenement and dwelling place. From the first day of his return he had flatly refused to go back to the house on Waverly Place which the two of them had previously shared for work and love and living. Instead, he had taken these two large rooms on Twelfth Street, which occupied the whole second floor of the house and could be made into one enormous room by opening the sliding doors between them. There was also a tiny kitchen, just big enough to turn around in. The whole arrangement suited George perfectly because it gave him both space and privacy. Here Esther could come and go as she liked; here they could be alone together whenever they wished; here they could feed at the heart of love.

The most important thing about it, however, was that this was his place, not *theirs*, and that fact reestablished their relations on a different level. Henceforth he was determined not to let his life and love be one. She had her world of the theatre and of her rich friends which he did not want to belong to, and he had his world of writing which he would have to manage alone. He would keep love a thing apart, and safeguard to himself the mastery of his life, his separate soul, his own integrity.

Would she accept this compromise? Would she take his love, but leave him free to live his life and do his work? That was the way he told her it must be, and she said yes, she understood. But could she do it? Was it in a woman's nature

to be content with all that a man could give her, and not for ever want what was not his to give? Already there were little portents that made him begin to doubt it.

One morning when she came to see him and was telling him with spirit and great good humour about a little comedy she had witnessed in the street, suddenly she stopped short in the middle of it, a cloud passed over her face, her eyes became troubled, and she turned to him and said:

“You do love me, don’t you, George?”

“Yes,” he said. “Of course. You know I do.”

“Will you never leave me again?” she asked, a little breathless. “Will you go on loving me for ever?”

Her abrupt change of mood and her easy assumption that he or any human being could honestly pledge himself to anyone or anything for ever struck him as ludicrous, and he laughed.

She made an impatient gesture with her hand. “Don’t laugh, George,” she said. “I need to know. Tell me. Will you go on loving me for ever?”

Her seriousness, and the impossibility of giving her an answer annoyed him now, and he rose from his chair, stared down blankly at her for a moment, and then began pacing back and forth across the room. He paused once or twice and turned to her as if to speak, but, finding it hard to say what he wanted to say, he resumed his nervous pacing.

Esther followed him with her eyes; their expression betraying her mixed feelings, in which amusement and exasperation were giving way to alarm.

“What have I done now?” she thought. “God, was there ever anybody like him! You never can tell what he’ll do! All I did was ask him a simple question and he acts like this! Still, it’s better than the way he used to act. He used to blow up and call me vile names. Now he just stews in his own juice and I can’t tell what he’s thinking. Look at him — pacing like a wild animal in a cage, like a temperamental and introspective monkey!”

As a matter of fact, in moments of excitement George did look rather like a monkey. Barrel-chested, with broad, heavy shoulders, he walked with a slight stoop, letting his arms swing loosely, and they were so long that they dangled almost to the knees, the big hands and spatulate fingers curving deeply in like paws. His head, set down solidly upon a short neck, was carried somewhat forward with a thrusting movement, so that his whole figure had a prowling and half-crouching posture. He looked even shorter than he was, for, although he was an inch or two above the middle height, around five feet nine or ten, his legs were not quite proportionate to the upper part of his body. Moreover, his features were small — somewhat pug-nosed, the eyes set very deep in beneath heavy brows, the forehead rather low, the hair beginning not far above the brows. And when he was agitated or interested in something, he had the trick of peering upward with a kind of packed attentiveness, and this, together with his general posture, the head thrust forward, the body prowling downwards, gave him a distinctly simian appearance. It was easy to see why some of his friends called him Monk.

Esther watched him a minute or two, feeling disappointed and hurt that he had not answered her. He stopped by the front window and stood looking out, and she went over to him and quietly put her arm through his. She saw the vein swell in his temple, and knew there was no use in speaking.

Outside, the little Jewish tailors were coming from the office of their union next door and were standing in the street. They were pale, dirty, and greasy, and very much alive. They shouted and gesticulated at one another, they stroked each other gently on the cheek in mounting fury, saying tenderly in a throttled voice: “Nah! Nah! Nah!” Then, still smiling in their rage, they began to slap each other gently in the face with itching finger-tips. At length they screamed and dealt each other stinging slaps. Others

cursed and shouted, some laughed, and a few said nothing, but stood darkly, sombrely apart, feeding upon their entrails.

Then the young Irish cops charged in among them. There was something bought and corrupt about their look. They had brutal and brainless faces, full of pride. Their jaws were loose and coarse, they chewed gum constantly as they shoved and thrust their way along, and they kept saying:

“Break it up, now! Break it up! All right! Keep movin’!”

The motors roared by like projectiles, and people were passing along the pavement. There were the faces George and Esther had never seen before, and there were the faces they had always seen, everywhere: always different, they never changed; they welled up from the sourceless springs of life with unending fecundity, with limitless variety, with incessant movement, and with the monotony of everlasting repetition. There were the three girl-friends who pass along the streets of life for ever. One had a cruel and sensual face, she wore glasses, and her mouth was hard and vulgar. Another had the great nose and the little bony features of a rat. The face of the third was full and loose, jeering with fat rouged lips and oily volutes of the nostrils. And when they laughed, there was no warmth or joy in the sound: high, shrill, ugly, and hysterical, their laughter only asked the earth to notice them.

In the street the children played. They were dark and strong and violent, aping talk and toughness from their elders. They leaped on one another and hurled the weakest to the pavement. The policemen herded the noisy little tailors along before them, and they went away. The sky was blue and young and vital, there were no clouds in it; the trees were budding into leaf; the sunlight fell into the street, upon all the people there, with an innocent and fearless life.

Esther glanced at George and saw his face grow twisted as he looked. He wanted to say to her that we are all savage, foolish, violent, and mistaken; that, full of our fear

and confusion, we walk in ignorance upon the living and beautiful earth, breathing young, vital air and bathing in the light of morning, seeing it not because of the murder in our hearts.

But he did not say these things. Wearily he turned away from the window.

“There’s for ever,” he said. “There’s your for ever.”

2. Fame’s First Wooing

Table of Contents

In spite of the colourings of guilt that often tinged his brighter moods, George was happier than he had ever been. There can be no doubt about that. He exulted in the fact. The old madness had gone out of him, and for long stretches at a time he was now buoyed up by the glorious belief — not by any means a new one with him, though it was much stronger now than it had ever been before — that he was at last in triumphant control of his destiny. From his early childhood, when he was living like an orphan with his Joyner relatives back in Libya Hill, he had dreamed that one day he would go to New York and there find love and fame and fortune. For several years New York had been the place that he called home, and love was his already; and now he felt, with the assurance of deep conviction, that the time for fame and fortune was at hand.

Anyone is happy who confidently awaits the fulfilment of his highest dreams, and in that way George Was happy. And, like most of us when things are going well, he took the credit wholly to himself. It was not chance or luck or any blind confluence of events that had produced the change in his spirits: his contentment and sense of mastery were the reward of his own singular and peculiar merit, and no more than his just due. Nevertheless fortune had played a central part in his transformation. A most incredible thing had happened.

He had been back in New York only a few days when Lulu Scudder, the literary agent, telephoned him in great excitement. The publishing house of James Rodney & Co. was interested in his manuscript, and Foxhall Edwards, the distinguished editor of this great house, wanted to talk to him about it. Of course, you couldn’t tell about these things,

but it was always a good idea to strike while the iron was hot. Could he go over right away to see Edwards?

As he made his way uptown George told himself that it was silly to be excited, that probably nothing would come of it. Hadn't one publisher already turned the book down, saying that it was no novel? That publisher had even written —— and the words of his rejection had seared themselves in. George's brain —"The novel form is not adapted to such talents, as you have." And it was still the same manuscript. Not a line of it had been changed, not a word cut, in spite of hints from Esther and Miss Scudder that it was too long for any publisher to handle. He had stubbornly refused to alter it, insisting that it would have to be printed as it was or not at all. And he had left the manuscript with Miss Scudder and gone away to Europe, convinced that her efforts to find a publisher would prove futile.

All the time he was abroad it had nauseated him to think of his manuscript, of the years of work and sleepless nights, he had put into it, and of the high hopes that bad sustained him through it; and he had tried, not to think of it, convinced now that it was no good, that he himself was no good, and that all his hot ambitions and his dreams of fame were the vapourings of a shoddy aesthete without talent. In this, he told himself, he was just like most of the other piddling instructors at the School for Utility Cultures, from which he had fled, and to which he would return to resume his classes in English composition when his leave of absence expired. They talked for ever about the great books they were writing, or were going to write, because, like him, they needed so desperately to find some avenue of escape from the dreary round of teaching, reading themes, grading papers, and trying to strike a spark in minds that had no flint in them. He had stayed in Europe almost nine months, and no word had come from Miss Scudder, so he had felt confirmed in all his darkest forebodings.

But now she said the Rodney people were interested. Well, they had taken their time about it. And what did “interested” mean? Very likely they would tell him they had detected in the book some slight traces of a talent which, with careful nursing, could be schooled to produce, in time, a publishable book. He had heard that publishers sometimes had a weather eye for this sort of thing and that they would often string an aspiring author along for years, giving him just the necessary degree, of encouragement to keep him from abandoning hope altogether and to make him think that they had faith in his great future if only he would go on writing book after rejected book until he “found himself”. Well, he’d show them that he was not their fool! Not by so much as a flicker of an eyelash would he betray his disappointment, and he would commit himself to nothing!

If the traffic policeman on the corner noticed a strange young man in front of the office of James Rodney & Co. that morning, he would never have guessed at the core of firm resolution with which this young man had tried to steel himself for the interview that lay before him. If the policeman saw him at all, he probably observed him with misgiving, wondering whether he ought not to intervene to prevent the commission of a felony, or at any rate whether he ought not to speak to the young man and hold him in conversation until the ambulance could arrive and take him to Bellevue for observation.

For, as the young man approached the building at a rapid, loping stride, a stern scowl upon his face and his lips set in a grim line, he had hardly crossed the street and set his foot upon the kerb before the publisher’s building when his step faltered, he stopped and looked about him as if not knowing what to do, and then, in evident confusion, forced himself to go on. ‘But now his movements were uncertain; as if his legs obeyed his will with great reluctance. He lunged ahead, then stopped, then lunged again and made for the door, only to halt again in a paroxysm of indecision

as he came up to it. He stood there facing the door for a moment, clenching and unclenching his hands, then looked about him quickly, suspiciously, as though he expected to find somebody watching him. At last, with a slight shudder of resolution, he thrust his hands deep into his pockets, turned deliberately, and walked on past the door.

And now he moved slowly, the line of his mouth set grimmer than before, and his head was carried stiffly forward from the shoulders as if he were trying to hold himself to the course he had decided upon by focusing on some distant object straight before him. But all the while, as he went along before the entrance and the show windows filled with books which flanked it on both sides, he peered sharply out of the corner of his eye like a spy who had to find out what was going on inside the building without letting the passers-by observe his interest. He walked to the end of the block and turned about and then came back, and again as he passed in front of the publishing house he kept his face fixed straight ahead and looked stealthily out of the corner of his eye. For fifteen or twenty minutes he repeated this strange manoeuvred, and each time as he approached the door he-would hesitate and half turn as if about to enter, and then abruptly go on as before.

Finally, as he came abreast of the entrance for perhaps the fiftieth time, he quickened his stride and seized the door-knob — but at once, as though it had given him an electric shock, he snatched his hand away and backed off, and stood on the kerb looking up at the house of James Rodney & Co. For several minutes more he stood there, shifting uneasily on his feet and watching all the upper windows as for a sign. Then, suddenly, his jaw muscles tightened, he stuck out his under lip in desperate resolve, and he bolted across the pavement, hurled himself against the door, and disappeared inside.

An hour later, if the policeman was still on duty at the corner, he was no doubt as puzzled and mystified as before

by the young man’s behaviour as he emerged from the building. He came out slowly, walking mechanically, a dazed look on his face, and in one of his hands, which dangled loosely at his sides, he held a crumpled slip of yellow paper. He emerged from the office of James Rodney & Co. like a man walking in a trance. With the slow and thoughtless movements of an automaton, he turned his steps uptown, and, still with the rapt and dazed look upon his face, he headed north and disappeared into the crowd..

It was, late afternoon and the shadows were slanting swiftly eastwards when George Webber came to his senses somewhere in the wilds of the upper Bronx. How he got there he never knew. All he could remember was that suddenly he felt hungry and stopped and looked about him and realized where he was. His dazed look gave way to one of amazement and incredulity, and his mouth began W stretch in a broad grin. In his hand he still held the rectangular slip of crisp yellow paper, and slowly he smoothed out the wrinkles and examined it carefully.

It was a cheque for five hundred dollars. His book bad been accepted, and this was an advance against his royalties.

So he was happier than he had ever been in all his life. Fame, at last, was knocking at his door and wooing him with her sweet blandishments, and he lived in a kind of glorious delirium. The next weeks and months were filled with the excitement of the impending event. The book would not be published till the autumn, but meanwhile there was much work to do. Foxhall Edwards had made some suggestions for cutting and revising the manuscript, and, although George at first objected, he surprised himself in the end by agreeing with Edwards, and he undertook to do what Edwards wanted.

George had called his novel, *Home to Our Mountains*, and in it he had packed everything he knew about his home town in Old Catawba and the people there. He had distilled

every line of it out of his own experience of life. And, now that the issue was decided, he sometimes trembled when he thought that it would be only a matter of months before the whole world knew what he had written. He loathed the thought of giving pain to anyone, and that he might do so had never occurred to him till now. But now it was out of his hands, and he began to feel uneasy. Of course it was fiction, but it was made as all honest fiction must be, from the stuff of human life. Some people might recognize themselves, and be offended, and then what would he do? Would he have to go around in smoked glasses and false whiskers? He comforted himself with the hope that his characterisations were not so true as, in another mood, he liked to think they, were, and he thought that perhaps no one would notice anything.

Rodney's Magazine, too, had become interested in the young author and was going to publish a story, a chapter from the book, in their next number. This news added immensely to his excitement. He was eager to see his name in print, and in the happy interval of expectancy he felt like a kind of universal Don Juan, for he literally loved everybody — his fellow instructors at the school, his drab students, the little shopkeepers in all the stores, even the nameless hordes that thronged the streets. Rodney's, of course, was the greatest and the finest publishing house in all the world, and Foxhall Edwards was the greatest editor and the finest man that ever was. George had liked him instinctively from the first, and now, like an old and intimate friend, he was calling him Fox. George knew that Fox believed in him, and the editor's faith and confidence, coming as it had come, at a time when George had given up all hope, restored his self-respect and charged him with energy for new work.

Already his next novel was begun and was beginning to take shape within him. He would soon have to get it out of him. He dreaded the prospect of buckling down in earnest to write it, for he knew the agony of it. It was like demoniacal

possession, driving him with an alien force much greater than his own. While the fury of creation was upon him, it meant sixty cigarettes a day, twenty cups of coffee, meals snatched anyhow and anywhere and at whatever time of day or night he happened to remember he was hungry. It meant sleeplessness, and miles of walking to bring on the physical fatigue without which he could not sleep, then nightmares, nerves, and exhaustion in the morning. As he said to Fox:

"There are better ways to write a book, but this, God help me, is mine, and you'll have to learn to put up with it."

When *Rodney's Magazine* came out with the story, George fully expected convulsions of the earth, falling meteors, suspension of traffic in the streets, and a general strike. But nothing happened. A few of his friends mentioned it, but that was all. For several days he felt let down, but then his common sense reassured him that people couldn't really tell much about a new author from a short piece in a magazine. The book would show them who he was and what he could do. It would be different then. He could afford to wait a little longer for the fame which he was certain would soon be his.

It was not until later, after the first excitement had worn off and George had become accustomed to the novelty of being an author whose book was actually going to be published, that he began to learn a little about the unknown world of publishing and the people who inhabit it — and not till then did he begin to understand and appreciate the teal quality of Fox Edwards. And it was through Otto Hauser — so much like Fox in his essential integrity, so sharply contrasted to him in other respects — that George got his first real insight into the character of his editor.

Hausa Was a reader at Rodney's, and probably the best publisher's reader in America. He might have been a publisher's editor — a rare and good one — had he been driven forward by ambition, enthusiasm, daring, tenacious

resolution, and that eagerness to seek and find the best which a great editor must have. But Hauser was content to spend his days reading ridiculous manuscripts written by ridiculous people on all sorts of ridiculous subjects “The Breast Stroke,” “Rock Gardens for Everybody,” “The Life and Times of Lydia Pinkham,” “The New Age of Plenty”— and once in a while something that had the fire of passion, the spark of genius, the glow of truth.

Otto Hauser lived in a tiny apartment near First Avenue, and he invited George to drop in one evening. George went, and they spent the evening talking. After that he returned again and again because he liked Otto, and also because he was puzzled by the contradictions of his qualities, especially by something aloof, impersonal, and withdrawing in his nature which seemed so out of place beside the clear and positive elements in his character.

Otto did all the housekeeping himself. He had tried having cleaning women in from time to time, but eventually he had dispensed entirely with their services. ‘They were not clean and tidy enough to suit him, and their casual and haphazard disarrangements of objects that had been placed exactly where he wanted them annoyed his order-loving soul. He hated clutter. He had only a few books — a shelf or two — most of them the latest publications of the house of Rodney, and a few volumes sent him by other publishers. Usually he gave his books away as soon as he finished reading them because he hated clutter, and books made clutter. Sometimes he wondered if he didn’t hate books, too. Certainly he didn’t like to have many of them around: the sight of them irritated him.

George found him a curious enigma. Otto Hauser was possessed of remarkable gifts, yet he was almost wholly lacking in those qualities which cause a man to “get on” in the world. In fact, he didn’t want to “get on”. He had a horror of “getting on”, of going any further than he bad already gone. He wanted to be a publisher’s reader, and

nothing more. At James Rodney & Co. he did the work they put into his hands. He did punctiliously what he was required to do. He gave his word, when he was asked to give it, with the complete integrity of his quiet soul, the unerring rightness of his judgment, the utter finality of his Germanic spirit. But beyond that he would not go.

When one of the editors at Rodney's, of whom there were several besides Foxhall Edwards, asked Hauser for his opinion, the ensuing conversation would go something like this:

"You have read the manuscript?"

"Yes," said Hauser, "I have read it."

"What did you think of it?"

"I thought it was without merit."

"Then you do not recommend its publication?"

"No, I do not think it is worth publishing."

Or:

"Did you read that manuscript?"

"Yes," Hauser would say. "I read it."

"Well, what did you think of it? (Confound it, can't the fellow say what he thinks without having to be asked all the timer)"

"I think it is a work of genius."

Incredulously: "You *do!*"

"I do, yes. To my mind there is no question about it."

"But look here, Hauser —" excitedly —"if what you say is true, this boy — the fellow who wrote it — why, he's just a kid — no one ever heard of him before — comes from somewhere out West — Nebraska, Iowa, one of those places — never been anywhere, apparently — if what you say is true, we've made a discovery!"

"I suppose you have. Yes. The book is a work of genius."

"But —(Damn it all, what's wrong with the man anyway? Here he makes a discovery like this — an astounding statement of this sort — and shows no more enthusiasm