
SHERWOOD ANDERSON
WINESBURG, OHIO

Sherwood Anderson

Winesburg, Ohio

Collected Tales of Small-Town Life in Ohio

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Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

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I must have been no more than fifteen or sixteen years old when I first chanced upon Winesburg, Ohio. Gripped by these stories and sketches of Sherwood Anderson's small-town "grotesques," I felt that he was opening for me new depths of experience, touching upon half-buried truths which nothing in my young life had prepared me for. A New York City boy who never saw the crops grow or spent time in the small towns that lay sprinkled across America, I found myself overwhelmed by the scenes of wasted life, wasted love—was this the "real" America?—that Anderson sketched in Winesburg. In those days only one other book seemed to offer so powerful a revelation, and that was Thomas Hardy's Jude the Obscure.

Several years later, as I was about to go overseas as a soldier, I spent my last weekend pass on a somewhat quixotic journey to Clyde, Ohio, the town upon which Winesburg was partly modeled. Clyde looked, I suppose, not very different from most other American towns, and the few of its residents I tried to engage in talk about Anderson seemed quite uninterested. This indifference would not have surprised him; it certainly should not surprise anyone who reads his book.

Once freed from the army, I started to write literary criticism, and in 1951 I published a critical biography of Anderson. It came shortly after Lionel Trilling's influential essay attacking Anderson, an attack from which Anderson's reputation would never quite recover. Trilling charged Anderson with indulging a vaporous sentimentalism, a kind of vague emotional meandering in stories that lacked social

or spiritual solidity. There was a certain cogency in Trilling's attack, at least with regard to Anderson's inferior work, most of which he wrote after Winesburg, Ohio. In my book I tried, somewhat awkwardly, to bring together the kinds of judgment Trilling had made with my still keen affection for the best of Anderson's writings. By then, I had read writers more complex, perhaps more distinguished than Anderson, but his muted stories kept a firm place in my memories, and the book I wrote might be seen as a gesture of thanks for the light—a glow of darkness, you might say—that he had brought to me.

Decades passed. I no longer read Anderson, perhaps fearing I might have to surrender an admiration of youth. (There are some writers one should never return to.) But now, in the fullness of age, when asked to say a few introductory words about Anderson and his work, I have again fallen under the spell of Winesburg, Ohio, again responded to the half-spoken desires, the flickers of longing that spot its pages. Naturally, I now have some changes of response: a few of the stories no longer haunt me as once they did, but the long story "Godliness," which years ago I considered a failure, I now see as a quaintly effective account of the way religious fanaticism and material acquisitiveness can become intertwined in American experience.

Sherwood Anderson was born in Ohio in 1876. His childhood and youth in Clyde, a town with perhaps three thousand souls, were scarred by bouts of poverty, but he also knew some of the pleasures of pre-industrial American society. The country was then experiencing what he would later call "a sudden and almost universal turning of men from the old handicrafts towards our modern life of machines." There were still people in Clyde who remembered the frontier, and like America itself, the town lived by a mixture of diluted Calvinism and a strong belief in "progress," Young Sherwood, known as "Jobby"—the boy

always ready to work—showed the kind of entrepreneurial spirit that Clyde respected: folks expected him to become a "go-getter," And for a time he did. Moving to Chicago in his early twenties, he worked in an advertising agency where he proved adept at turning out copy. "I create nothing, I boost, I boost," he said about himself, even as, on the side, he was trying to write short stories.

In 1904 Anderson married and three years later moved to Elyria, a town forty miles west of Cleveland, where he established a firm that sold paint. "I was going to be a rich man… . Next year a bigger house; and after that, presumably, a country estate." Later he would say about his years in Elyria, "I was a good deal of a Babbitt, but never completely one." Something drove him to write, perhaps one of those shapeless hungers—a need for self-expression? a wish to find a more authentic kind of experience?— that would become a recurrent motif in his fiction.

And then, in 1912, occurred the great turning point in Anderson's life. Plainly put, he suffered a nervous breakdown, though in his memoirs he would elevate this into a moment of liberation in which he abandoned the sterility of commerce and turned to the rewards of literature. Nor was this, I believe, merely a deception on Anderson's part, since the breakdown painful as it surely was, did help precipitate a basic change in his life. At the age of 36, he left behind his business and moved to Chicago, becoming one of the rebellious writers and cultural bohemians in the group that has since come to be called the "Chicago Renaissance." Anderson soon adopted the posture of a free, liberated spirit, and like many writers of the time, he presented himself as a sardonic critic of American provincialism and materialism. It was in the freedom of the city, in its readiness to put up with deviant styles of life, that Anderson found the strength to settle accounts with—but also to release his affection for—the world of small-town America. The dream of an unconditional personal freedom,

that hazy American version of utopia, would remain central throughout Anderson's life and work. It was an inspiration; it was a delusion.

In 1916 and 1917 Anderson published two novels mostly written in Elyria, Windy McPherson's Son and Marching Men, both by now largely forgotten. They show patches of talent but also a crudity of thought and unsteadiness of language. No one reading these novels was likely to suppose that its author could soon produce anything as remarkable as Winesburg, Ohio. Occasionally there occurs in a writer's career a sudden, almost mysterious leap of talent, beyond explanation, perhaps beyond any need for explanation.

In 1915-16 Anderson had begun to write and in 1919 he published the stories that comprise Winesburg, Ohio, stories that form, in sum, a sort of loosely- strung episodic novel. The book was an immediate critical success, and soon Anderson was being ranked as a significant literary figure. In 1921 the distinguished literary magazine The Dial awarded him its first annual literary prize of $2,000, the significance of which is perhaps best understood if one also knows that the second recipient was T. S. Eliot. But Anderson's moment of glory was brief, no more than a decade, and sadly, the remaining years until his death in 1940 were marked by a sharp decline in his literary standing. Somehow, except for an occasional story like the haunting "Death in the Woods," he was unable to repeat or surpass his early success. Still, about Winesburg, Ohio and a small number of stories like "The Egg" and "The Man Who Became a Woman" there has rarely been any critical doubt.

No sooner did Winesburg, Ohio make its appearance than a number of critical labels were fixed on it: the revolt against the village, the espousal of sexual freedom, the deepening of American realism. Such tags may once have had their point, but by now they seem dated and stale. The revolt against the village (about which Anderson was always ambivalent) has faded into history. The espousal of sexual

freedom would soon be exceeded in boldness by other writers. And as for the effort to place Winesburg, Ohio in a tradition of American realism, that now seems dubious. Only rarely is the object of Anderson's stories social verisimilitude, or the "phoographing" of familiar appearances, in the sense, say, that one might use to describe a novel by Theodore Dreiser or Sinclair Lewis. Only occasionally, and then with a very light touch, does Anderson try to fill out the social arrangements of his imaginary town—although the fact that his stories are set in a mid-American place like Winesburg does constitute an important formative condition. You might even say, with only slight overstatement, that what Anderson is doing in Winesburg, Ohio could be described as "antirealistic," fictions notable less for precise locale and social detail than for a highly personal, even strange vision of American life. Narrow, intense, almost claustrophobic, the result is a book about extreme states of being, the collapse of men and women who have lost their psychic bearings and now hover, at best tolerated, at the edge of the little community in which they live. It would be a gross mistake, though not one likely to occur by now, if we were to take Winesburg, Ohio as a social photograph of "the typical small town" (whatever that might be.) Anderson evokes a depressed landscape in which lost souls wander about; they make their flitting appearances mostly in the darkness of night, these stumps and shades of humanity. This vision has its truth, and at its best it is a terrible if narrow truth—but it is itself also grotesque, with the tone of the authorial voice and the mode of composition forming muted signals of the book's content. Figures like Dr. Parcival, Kate Swift, and Wash Williams are not, nor are they meant to be, "fully- rounded" characters such as we can expect in realistic fiction; they are the shards of life, glimpsed for a moment, the debris of suffering and defeat. In each story one of them emerges, shyly or with a false assertiveness, trying to reach out to

companionship and love, driven almost mad by the search for human connection. In the economy of Winesburg these grotesques matter less in their own right than as agents or symptoms of that "indefinable hunger" for meaning which is Anderson's preoccupation.

Brushing against one another, passing one another in the streets or the fields, they see bodies and hear voices, but it does not really matter—they are disconnected, psychically lost. Is this due to the particular circumstances of small-town America as Anderson saw it at the turn of the century? Or does he feel that he is sketching an inescapable human condition which makes all of us bear the burden of loneliness? Alice Hindman in the story "Adventure" turns her face to the wall and tries "to force herself to face the fact that many people must live and die alone, even in Winesburg." Or especially in Winesburg? Such impressions have been put in more general terms in Anderson's only successful novel, Poor White:

All men lead their lives behind a wall of misunderstanding they have themselves built, and most men die in silence and unnoticed behind the walls. Now and then a man, cut off from his fellows by the peculiarities of his nature, becomes absorbed in doing something that is personal, useful and beautiful. Word of his activities is carried over the walls.

These "walls" of misunderstanding are only seldom due to physical deformities (Wing Biddlebaum in "Hands") or oppressive social arrangements (Kate Swift in "The Teacher.") Misunderstanding, loneliness, the inability to articulate, are all seen by Anderson as virtually a root condition, something deeply set in our natures. Nor are these people, the grotesques, simply to be pitied and dismissed; at some point in their lives they have known desire, have dreamt of ambition, have hoped for friendship. In all of them there was once something sweet, "like the twisted little apples that grow in the orchards in Winesburg."

Now, broken and adrift, they clutch at some rigid notion or idea, a "truth" which turns out to bear the stamp of monomania, leaving them helplessly sputtering, desperate to speak out but unable to. Winesburg, Ohio registers the losses inescapable to life, and it does so with a deep fraternal sadness, a sympathy casting a mild glow over the entire book. "Words," as the American writer Paula Fox has said, "are nets through which all truth escapes." Yet what do we have but words?

They want, these Winesburg grotesques*, to unpack their hearts, to release emotions buried and festering. Wash Williams tries to explain his eccentricity but hardly can; Louise Bentley "tried to talk but could say nothing"; Enoch Robinson retreats to a fantasy world, inventing "his own people to whom he could really talk and to whom he explained the things he had been unable to explain to living people."

In his own somber way, Anderson has here touched upon one of the great themes of American literature, especially Midwestern literature, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: the struggle for speech as it entails a search for the self. Perhaps the central Winesburg story, tracing the basic movements of the book, is "Paper Pills," in which the old Doctor Reefy sits "in his empty office close by a window that was covered with cobwebs," writes down some thoughts on slips of paper ("pyramids of truth," he calls them) and then stuffs them into his pockets where they "become round hard balls" soon to be discarded. What Dr. Reefy's "truths" may be we never know; Anderson simply persuades us that to this lonely old man they are utterly precious and thereby incommunicable, forming a kind of blurred moral signature.

After a time the attentive reader will notice in these stories a recurrent pattern of theme and incident: the grotesques, gathering up a little courage, venture out into the streets of Winesburg, often in the dark, there to

establish some initiatory relationship with George Willard, the young reporter who hasn't yet lived long enough to become a grotesque. Hesitantly, fearfully, or with a sputtering incoherent rage, they approach him, pleading that he listen to their stories in the hope that perhaps they can find some sort of renewal in his youthful voice. Upon this sensitive and fragile boy they pour out their desires and frustrations. Dr. Parcival hopes that George Willard "will write the book I may never get written," and for Enoch Robinson, the boy represents "the youthful sadness, young man's sadness, the sadness of a growing boy in a village at the year's end [which may open] the lips of the old man."

What the grotesques really need is each other, but their estrangement is so extreme they cannot establish direct ties —they can only hope for connection through George Willard. The burden this places on the boy is more than he can bear. He listens to them attentively, he is sympathetic to their complaints, but finally he is too absorbed in his own dreams. The grotesques turn to him because he seems "different"— younger, more open, not yet hardened— but it is precisely this "difference" that keeps him from responding as warmly as they want. It is hardly the boy's fault; it is simply in the nature of things. For George Willard, the grotesques form a moment in his education; for the grotesques, their encounters with George Willard come to seem like a stamp of hopelessness.

The prose Anderson employs in telling these stories may seem at first glance to be simple: short sentences, a sparse vocabulary, uncomplicated syntax. In actuality, Anderson developed an artful style in which, following Mark Twain and preceding Ernest Hemingway, he tried to use American speech as the base of a tensed rhythmic prose that has an economy and a shapeliness seldom found in ordinary speech or even oral narration. What Anderson employs here is a stylized version of the American language, sometimes rising to quite formal rhetorical patterns and sometimes

sinking to a self-conscious mannerism. But at its best, Anderson's prose style in Winesburg, Ohio is a supple instrument, yielding that "low fine music" which he admired so much in the stories of Turgenev.

One of the worst fates that can befall a writer is that of self-imitation: the effort later in life, often desperate, to recapture the tones and themes of youthful beginnings. Something of the sort happened with Anderson's later writings. Most critics and readers grew impatient with the work he did after, say, 1927 or 1928; they felt he was constantly repeating his gestures of emotional "groping"—what he had called in Winesburg, Ohio the "indefinable hunger" that prods and torments people. It became the critical fashion to see Anderson's "gropings" as a sign of delayed adolescence, a failure to develop as a writer. Once he wrote a chilling reply to those who dismissed him in this way: "I don't think it matters much, all this calling a man a muddler, a groper, etc… . The very man who throws such words as these knows in his heart that he is also facing a wall." This remark seems to me both dignified and strong, yet it must be admitted that there was some justice in the negative responses to his later work. For what characterized it was not so much "groping" as the imitation of "groping," the self-caricature of a writer who feels driven back upon an earlier self that is, alas, no longer available.

But Winesburg, Ohio remains a vital work, fresh and authentic. Most of its stories are composed in a minor key, a tone of subdued pathos—pathos marking both the nature and limit of Anderson's talent. (He spoke of himself as a "minor writer.") In a few stories, however, he was able to reach beyond pathos and to strike a tragic note. The single best story in Winesburg, Ohio is, I think, "The Untold Lie," in which the urgency of choice becomes an outer sign of a tragic element in the human condition. And in Anderson's single greatest story, "The Egg," which appeared a few years after Winesburg, Ohio, he succeeded in bringing

together a surface of farce with an undertone of tragedy. "The Egg" is an American masterpiece.

Anderson's influence upon later American writers, especially those who wrote short stories, has been enormous. Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner both praised him as a writer who brought a new tremor of feeling, a new sense of introspectiveness to the American short story. As Faulkner put it, Anderson's "was the fumbling for exactitude, the exact word and phrase within the limited scope of a vocabulary controlled and even repressed by what was in him almost a fetish of simplicity … to seek always to penetrate to thought's uttermost end." And in many younger writers who may not even be aware of the Anderson influence, you can see touches of his approach, echoes of his voice.

Writing about the Elizabethan playwright John Ford, the poet Algernon Swinburne once said: "If he touches you once he takes you, and what he takes he keeps hold of; his work becomes part of your thought and parcel of your spiritual furniture forever." So it is, for me and many others, with Sherwood Anderson.

Chapter 2
THE BOOK OF THE GROTESQUE

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To the memory of my mother,

EMMA SMITH ANDERSON,

whose keen observations on the life about her first awoke in me the hunger to see beneath the surface of lives, this book is dedicated.

THE WRITER, an old man with a white mustache, had some difficulty in getting into bed. The windows of the house in which he lived were high and he wanted to look at the trees when he awoke in the morning. A carpenter came to fix the bed so that it would be on a level with the window.

Quite a fuss was made about the matter. The carpenter, who had been a soldier in the Civil War, came into the writer's room and sat down to talk of building a platform for the purpose of raising the bed. The writer had cigars lying about and the carpenter smoked.

For a time the two men talked of the raising of the bed and then they talked of other things. The soldier got on the subject of the war. The writer, in fact, led him to that subject. The carpenter had once been a prisoner in Andersonville prison and had lost a brother. The brother had died of starvation, and whenever the carpenter got upon that subject he cried. He, like the old writer, had a white mustache, and when he cried he puckered up his lips and the mustache bobbed up and down. The weeping old man

with the cigar in his mouth was ludicrous. The plan the writer had for the raising of his bed was forgotten and later the carpenter did it in his own way and the writer, who was past sixty, had to help himself with a chair when he went to bed at night.

In his bed the writer rolled over on his side and lay quite still. For years he had been beset with notions concerning his heart. He was a hard smoker and his heart fluttered. The idea had got into his mind that he would some time die unexpectedly and always when he got into bed he thought of that. It did not alarm him. The effect in fact was quite a special thing and not easily explained. It made him more alive, there in bed, than at any other time. Perfectly still he lay and his body was old and not of much use any more, but something inside him was altogether young. He was like a pregnant woman, only that the thing inside him was not a baby but a youth. No, it wasn't a youth, it was a woman, young, and wearing a coat of mail like a knight. It is absurd, you see, to try to tell what was inside the old writer as he lay on his high bed and listened to the fluttering of his heart. The thing to get at is what the writer, or the young thing within the writer, was thinking about.

The old writer, like all of the people in the world, had got, during his long fife, a great many notions in his head. He had once been quite handsome and a number of women had been in love with him. And then, of course, he had known people, many people, known them in a peculiarly intimate way that was different from the way in which you and I know people. At least that is what the writer thought and the thought pleased him. Why quarrel with an old man concerning his thoughts?

In the bed the writer had a dream that was not a dream. As he grew somewhat sleepy but was still conscious, figures began to appear before his eyes. He imagined the young indescribable thing within himself was driving a long procession of figures before his eyes.

You see the interest in all this lies in the figures that went before the eyes of the writer. They were all grotesques. All of the men and women the writer had ever known had become grotesques.

The grotesques were not all horrible. Some were amusing, some almost beautiful, and one, a woman all drawn out of shape, hurt the old man by her grotesqueness. When she passed he made a noise like a small dog whimpering. Had you come into the room you might have supposed the old man had unpleasant dreams or perhaps indigestion.

For an hour the procession of grotesques passed before the eyes of the old man, and then, although it was a painful thing to do, he crept out of bed and began to write. Some one of the grotesques had made a deep impression on his mind and he wanted to describe it.

At his desk the writer worked for an hour. In the end he wrote a book which he called "The Book of the Grotesque." It was never published, but I saw it once and it made an indelible impression on my mind. The book had one central thought that is very strange and has always remained with me. By remembering it I have been able to understand many people and things that I was never able to understand before. The thought was involved but a simple statement of it would be something like this:

That in the beginning when the world was young there were a great many thoughts but no such thing as a truth. Man made the truths himself and each truth was a composite of a great many vague thoughts. All about in the world were the truths and they were all beautiful.

The old man had listed hundreds of the truths in his book. I will not try to tell you of all of them. There was the truth of virginity and the truth of passion, the truth of wealth and of poverty, of thrift and of profligacy, of carelessness and abandon. Hundreds and hundreds were the truths and they were all beautiful.

And then the people came along. Each as he appeared snatched up one of the truths and some who were quite strong snatched up a dozen of them.

It was the truths that made the people grotesques. The old man had quite an elaborate theory concerning the matter. It was his notion that the moment one of the people took one of the truths to himself, called it his truth, and tried to live his life by it, he became a grotesque and the truth he embraced became a falsehood.

You can see for yourself how the old man, who had spent all of his life writing and was filled with words, would write hundreds of pages concerning this matter. The subject would become so big in his mind that he himself would be in danger of becoming a grotesque. He didn't, I suppose, for the same reason that he never published the book. It was the young thing inside him that saved the old man.

Concerning the old carpenter who fixed the bed for the writer, I only mentioned him because he, like many of what are called very common people, became the nearest thing to what is understandable and lovable of all the grotesques in the writer's book.

Chapter 3
HANDS, Concerning Wing Biddlebaum

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UPON THE HALF decayed veranda of a small frame house that stood near the edge of a ravine near the town of Winesburg, Ohio, a fat little old man walked nervously up and down. Across a long field that had been seeded for clover but that had produced only a dense crop of yellow mustard weeds, he could see the public highway along which went a wagon filled with berry pickers returning from the fields. The berry pickers, youths and maidens, laughed and shouted boisterously. A boy clad in a blue shirt leaped from the wagon and attempted to drag after him one of the maidens, who screamed and protested shrilly. The feet of the boy in the road kicked up a cloud of dust that floated across the face of the departing sun. Over the long field came a thin girlish voice. "Oh, you Wing Biddlebaum, comb your hair, it's falling into your eyes," commanded the voice to the man, who was bald and whose nervous little hands fiddled about the bare white forehead as though arranging a mass of tangled locks.

Wing Biddlebaum, forever frightened and beset by a ghostly band of doubts, did not think of himself as in any way a part of the life of the town where he had lived for twenty years. Among all the people of Winesburg but one had come close to him. With George Willard, son of Tom Willard, the proprietor of the New Willard House, he had formed something like a friendship. George Willard was the reporter on the Winesburg Eagle and sometimes in the evenings he walked out along the highway to Wing Biddlebaum's house. Now as the old man walked up and down on the veranda, his hands moving nervously about, he

was hoping that George Willard would come and spend the evening with him. After the wagon containing the berry pickers had passed, he went across the field through the tall mustard weeds and climbing a rail fence peered anxiously along the road to the town. For a moment he stood thus, rubbing his hands together and looking up and down the road, and then, fear overcoming him, ran back to walk again upon the porch on his own house.

In the presence of George Willard, Wing Biddlebaum, who for twenty years had been the town mystery, lost something of his timidity, and his shadowy personality, submerged in a sea of doubts, came forth to look at the world. With the young reporter at his side, he ventured in the light of day into Main Street or strode up and down on the rickety front porch of his own house, talking excitedly.

The voice that had been low and trembling became shrill and loud. The bent figure straightened. With a kind of wriggle, like a fish returned to the brook by the fisherman, Biddlebaum the silent began to talk, striving to put into words the ideas that had been accumulated by his mind during long years of silence.

Wing Biddlebaum talked much with his hands. The slender expressive fingers, forever active, forever striving to conceal themselves in his pockets or behind his back, came forth and became the piston rods of his machinery of expression.

The story of Wing Biddlebaum is a story of hands. Their restless activity, like unto the beating of the wings of an imprisoned bird, had given him his name. Some obscure poet of the town had thought of it. The hands alarmed their owner. He wanted to keep them hidden away and looked with amazement at the quiet inexpressive hands of other men who worked beside him in the fields, or passed, driving sleepy teams on country roads.

When he talked to George Willard, Wing Biddlebaum closed his fists and beat with them upon a table or on the

walls of his house. The action made him more comfortable. If the desire to talk came to him when the two were walking in the fields, he sought out a stump or the top board of a fence and with his hands pounding busily talked with renewed ease.

The story of Wing Biddlebaum's hands is worth a book in itself. Sympathetically set forth it would tap many strange, beautiful qualities in obscure men. It is a job for a poet. In Winesburg the hands had attracted attention merely because of their activity. With them Wing Biddlebaum had picked as high as a hundred and forty quarts of strawberries in a day. They became his distinguishing feature, the source of his fame. Also they made more grotesque an already grotesque and elusive individuality. Winesburg was proud of the hands of Wing Biddlebaum in the same spirit in which it was proud of Banker White's new stone house and Wesley Moyer's bay stallion, Tony Tip, that had won the two-fifteen trot at the fall races in Cleveland.

As for George Willard, he had many times wanted to ask about the hands. At times an almost overwhelming curiosity had taken hold of him. He felt that there must be a reason for their strange activity and their inclination to keep hidden away and only a growing respect for Wing Biddlebaum kept him from blurting out the questions that were often in his mind.

Once he had been on the point of asking. The two were walking in the fields on a summer afternoon and had stopped to sit upon a grassy bank. All afternoon Wing Biddlebaum had talked as one inspired. By a fence he had stopped and beating like a giant woodpecker upon the top board had shouted at George Willard, condemning his tendency to be too much influenced by the people about him, "You are destroying yourself," he cried. "You have the inclination to be alone and to dream and you are afraid of dreams. You want to be like others in town here. You hear them talk and you try to imitate them."

On the grassy bank Wing Biddlebaum had tried again to drive his point home. His voice became soft and reminiscent, and with a sigh of contentment he launched into a long rambling talk, speaking as one lost in a dream.

Out of the dream Wing Biddlebaum made a picture for George Willard. In the picture men lived again in a kind of pastoral golden age. Across a green open country came clean-limbed young men, some afoot, some mounted upon horses. In crowds the young men came to gather about the feet of an old man who sat beneath a tree in a tiny garden and who talked to them.

Wing Biddlebaum became wholly inspired. For once he forgot the hands. Slowly they stole forth and lay upon George Willard's shoulders. Something new and bold came into the voice that talked. "You must try to forget all you have learned," said the old man. "You must begin to dream. From this time on you must shut your ears to the roaring of the voices."

Pausing in his speech, Wing Biddlebaum looked long and earnestly at George Willard. His eyes glowed. Again he raised the hands to caress the boy and then a look of horror swept over his face.

With a convulsive movement of his body, Wing Biddlebaum sprang to his feet and thrust his hands deep into his trousers pockets. Tears came to his eyes. "I must be getting along home. I can talk no more with you," he said nervously.

Without looking back, the old man had hurried down the hillside and across a meadow, leaving George Willard perplexed and frightened upon the grassy slope. With a shiver of dread the boy arose and went along the road toward town. "I'll not ask him about his hands," he thought, touched by the memory of the terror he had seen in the man's eyes. "There's something wrong, but I don't want to know what it is. His hands have something to do with his fear of me and of everyone."

And George Willard was right. Let us look briefly into the story of the hands. Perhaps our talking of them will arouse the poet who will tell the hidden wonder story of the influence for which the hands were but fluttering pennants of promise.

In his youth Wing Biddlebaum had been a school teacher in a town in Pennsylvania. He was not then known as Wing Biddlebaum, but went by the less euphonic name of Adolph Myers. As Adolph Myers he was much loved by the boys of his school.

Adolph Myers was meant by nature to be a teacher of youth. He was one of those rare, little-understood men who rule by a power so gentle that it passes as a lovable weakness. In their feeling for the boys under their charge such men are not unlike the finer sort of women in their love of men. And yet that is but crudely stated. It needs the poet there. With the boys of his school, Adolph Myers had walked in the evening or had sat talking until dusk upon the schoolhouse steps lost in a kind of dream. Here and there went his hands, caressing the shoulders of the boys, playing about the tousled heads. As he talked his voice became soft and musical. There was a caress in that also. In a way the voice and the hands, the stroking of the shoulders and the touching of the hair were a part of the schoolmaster's effort to carry a dream into the young minds. By the caress that was in his fingers he expressed himself. He was one of those men in whom the force that creates life is diffused, not centralized. Under the caress of his hands doubt and disbelief went out of the minds of the boys and they began also to dream.

And then the tragedy. A half-witted boy of the school became enamored of the young master. In his bed at night he imagined unspeakable things and in the morning went forth to tell his dreams as facts. Strange, hideous accusations fell from his loose-hung lips. Through the Pennsylvania town went a shiver. Hidden, shadowy doubts