

"Hello," Jordan said. "I've come to see your father, Timothy. Is he home?"

The boy shook his head. With a feeling which he was ashamed to recognize as relief, Jordan stepped across the sill into the front hall and the door closed behind him.

## HOME COMING



WILLIAM MAXWELL

IT WAS NEARLY DARK, and Jordan Smith, walking along with his eyes on the ground, came to a stretch of sidewalk where the snow had not been scraped off but was packed hard and icy. He looked up and, a trifle surprised, saw that he had come to the Farrels'. There were lights in the downstairs windows and the house was just as he had remembered it. Yet there was something wrong, something that made him stand doubtfully at the edge of the walk that had not been tended to.

He had come back to Watertown to spend Christmas with his family—with his father and mother, and his two brothers, who were both younger than he was and not quite grown. But they were not entirely the reason for his wanting to come home. Before he went away, he used to be with Tom and Ann Farrel a great deal of the time. So much, in fact, that it used to annoy his mother, and she would ask him occasionally why he didn't pack his things and go move in with the Farrels. And there was nothing that he could say; no way that he could explain to his mother that Farrel and Ann had somehow filled out his life for him and balanced it. They were the first friends that he had ever had. And the best, really. For that reason it would not do for him to go back to New York without seeing Farrel. He had never even meant to do that. But he had hoped to run into Farrel somewhere about town, coming or going. He had hoped that he wouldn't have to face Farrel in his own house now that Ann was not here. Now that Ann was dead, Jordan said to himself as he turned in and made his way up to the porch. He rang the bell twice. After a time the door opened slowly and a rather small boy looked out at him.

"Pretty soon."

"How soon is that?"

"I don't know." The boy seemed to be waiting stolidly until Jordan had proved himself friend or enemy.

"I expect you don't remember me. It's been three years since I left Watertown. You weren't so very old then."

Jordan had not meant to stay, but he found himself taking off his overcoat and his muffler and laying them across the newel post. The last time he had come here, Ann had met him at the door and her face had lighted up with pleasure. "It's Jordan," she had said. Even now, after three years, he could hear her voice and her pleasure at the sight of him. "Here's Jordan, Tom. He's come to say goodbye."

The front hall and the living room were both strangely still. Forgetting that he was not alone, Jordan listened a moment until the oil furnace rumbling away to itself in the basement reassured him.

"I can't stay," he said aloud to Timothy. On the hall tree was an old battered gray hat of Farrel's. Jordan started to hang his new brown one beside it, and then he changed his mind. With the hat still in his hand, he followed Timothy into the living room. There was a Christmas tree in the front window, with red balls and silver balls and tinsel and tin foil in strips hanging from it, and strand upon strand of colored lights that were not lighted. Under the tree Timothy's presents were still laid out, two days after Christmas, in the boxes they had come in: a cowboy hat, a toy revolver, a necktie and handkerchiefs, a giant flashlight, a book on scouting.

"Santa Claus must have been here," Jordan said. Timothy did not consider, apparently, that this remark called for any answer. He waited a moment and then announced, "You're Jordan."

"That's right—Jordan Smith. But I didn't think you'd remember me."

He looked at the boy hopefully, but Timothy's face remained grave and a little pale, just as before. Jordan went over to the square, heavy, comfortable chair which was Farrel's favorite and sat down in it, and Timothy settled himself on the sofa opposite. For lack of anything better to do, Jordan took his hat and began to spin it, so that the hat went around wildly on his finger.

"You've grown, Timothy. You must have grown at least five or six inches since I saw you last."

Timothy crossed one foot over the other in embarrassment, and dug at the sofa with his heels.

"If this keeps up, we'll have to put weights in your pockets," Jordan said, and his eyes wandered past Timothy to the china greyhounds, one on either side of the mantel. "They're Staffordshire," Ann used to tell him proudly. "And if anything happened to them, I wouldn't want to go on living." Well, Jordan thought to himself—well, there they are. Nothing has happened to them. And the hat spun off the end of his finger and landed on the rug at his feet.

"Now look what I've done!" he exclaimed as he picked the hat up and placed it on Timothy's head. The hat came down well over Timothy's ears, and under the brim of it Timothy's eyes looked out at him without any eyebrows. This time Timothy was amused.

"It's too big for me," he said, smiling, and placed the hat on the sofa beside him.

"Now that it's dark outside," Jordan suggested, "why don't we light the tree?"

"Can't," Timothy said.

"Won't it light?"

Timothy shook his head.

"Get me the screwdriver, then."

A change came over Timothy. For the first time his face took on life and interest. "What do you want the screwdriver for?" he asked.

"Get me one," Jordan said confidently, "and I'll show you." As soon as Timothy was out of the room, Jordan got up and

went over to the fireplace. The greyhounds needed dusting, but there was nothing the matter with them. Not a crack or a chip anywhere. Jordan put them down again carefully and turned, hearing a slight disturbance outside. The *Evening Herald* struck the side of the house. It was a sound that he had never heard anywhere but in Watertown. He remembered it so perfectly that he couldn't believe that he had been away. Except for Ann, he said to himself as he made his way around the Christmas tree to the front window—except for her, everything was exactly the same. He had come home. He was here in this house that he had thought so much about. And, strangely, it was no satisfaction to him whatever.

Outside, the snow had begun again. Watching the paper boy wheel his bicycle down the icy walk, Jordan wondered why he had not stayed in New York over the holidays; why it was that he had wanted so much to come home. For weeks he had been restless, uneasy, and unable to keep from thinking of home. At night he could not sleep for walking up and down these streets, meeting people that he had known, and talking to them earnestly in his mind. Now that he was here, he didn't feel the way he had expected to feel. People were awfully nice, of course, and they were pleased to see him, but it was no kind of a homecoming. Not without Farrel and Ann. Wherever he went he found himself mentioning her, without meaning to especially. And it shocked him to see that people did not care about her any more. They had grown used to her not being here. Some of them—one or two, at least—complained to him about Farrel. They liked Farrel, they said. You couldn't help liking Tom Farrel. They still enjoyed having a drink with him every now and then. And there was no question but that Ann's death was a terrible loss to him. But if she had lived, the doctor said, she would never have been well, probably. And it was a year and a half since she had been rushed to the hospital in the middle of the night, to be operated on. Tom ought to begin now to get over it. He was nursing his grief, people said.

Jordan broke off a strip of tinsel from the Christmas tree, for no particular reason, and started with it for the kitchen. At the door of the dining room he met Timothy with the screwdriver. There was a woman with him also—a tired, tall woman with gray hair

that was parted in the middle, and an uncompromising look about the corners of her mouth. Jordan nodded to her.

"I'm Mrs. Ives," the woman said. "What do you want with the screwdriver?"

"I want to fix the tree," Jordan explained, realizing suddenly why it was that Farrel had taken her for a housekeeper. If Farrel had got a younger woman and a more sympathetic one, there would have been talk. "Timothy says the lights don't work, and if we have a screwdriver we can tell which one is burnt out."

"Oh," the woman said. "In that case, I guess it's all right. You come to see Mr. Farrel, didn't you?"

"Yes." Jordan could see that she was trying to make up her mind whether or not she ought to ask who he was; whether it would be polite.

"Will Mr. Farrel be home soon?" he asked.

"Sometimes he comes right home from the office, and sometimes he doesn't." She answered Jordan's question patiently, as if it had already been asked a great many times. As if it were a foolish question, and one that nobody knew the answer to. "Mostly he doesn't come home till later."

"I see." Jordan turned to Timothy, who was tugging at his sleeve. Together they dragged a straight chair across the room from the desk to the Christmas tree. Jordan balanced himself on the chair and unscrewed the first bulb. Then he looked around for the housekeeper. She was not there any longer. She had gone back to the kitchen. "I may not be able to wait," he said, and handed the little red bulb to Timothy, who was standing below him. When Jordan applied the screwdriver to the socket, nothing happened. The lights did not go on. "It wasn't that one," he said. Timothy handed the light back to him.

"No, sir," Jordan said, looking down at him thoughtfully. "It certainly wasn't."

Nor was it the second bulb, or the third, or the fourth. All of the lights on the first strand were good, apparently. As Jordan started on the second strand, he asked in what he hoped was a casual way, "Do you like Mrs. Ives?"

"She's all right," Timothy said. And he looked down then, as if Jordan had made a mistake and would after a second realize it.

They did not speak for a time, but Jordan went on handing the bulbs to Timothy and testing the sockets with his screwdriver. When Timothy had no bulb to hold, he untwisted the wires with his hands. Quite suddenly, when Jordan came to the third bulb from the end, the whole tree blazed into light.

"It was that one!" he exclaimed, and took the new yellow bulb which Timothy held up to him. There was a moment when the lights went off again, but Jordan screwed the yellow bulb into the socket; then the lights came on and stayed on.

"How's that?" he asked.

"Fine," Timothy said, with the lights shining red and blue on his face.

Jordan stepped down from the chair and surveyed the tree from top to bottom. He could go now. There was no reason for him to stay any longer.

"When you grow up, Timothy," he said, "we'll go into the business." Then he picked his hat up from the arm of the sofa where Timothy had been sitting. "O.K.?"

"O.K.," Timothy said.

"Don't forget, then."

Jordan went out into the front hall and took his scarf from the newel post. He listened for the whir and rumble of the furnace, but this time it was not enough. Now that the Christmas tree was lighted, the house was even more unnaturally quiet. Up and down the street, in other houses, people would be sitting down to dinner, but Mrs. Ives had not yet turned the dining-room light on, and the dining-room table was not even set. It seemed wrong to go away and leave a child alone here, in this soundless house. Timothy was standing in the living room, watching him, and did not appear to be upset. But when he left, Jordan thought—what would happen to Timothy *then*?

He wound the scarf round his throat and held it in place with his chin until he had worked himself into his overcoat. When he had finished and was drawing on his gloves, he said brightly, "Smith and Farrel, Fixers of Plain and Fancy Christmas Trees."

Timothy was looking right at him, but there was no telling whether the boy had heard what he said. It seemed rather as if he hadn't. "Do you have to go?" Timothy said.

"I'm afraid I do." Jordan was about to make up a long, elaborate, and convincing excuse, but there were footsteps outside on the porch, and both of them turned in time to see the door thrown open. A man stood in the doorway, with snow on his shoulders and the evening paper clasped tightly under one arm.

"Jordan," he said, "for Christ's sake!"

"Sure," Jordan said, nodding.

"But I've been looking for you all over town!"

Jordan braced himself as the man caught at him slowly with his eyes, and with his voice, and with his two hands.

"And I've been right here," Jordan said helplessly, "all the time."

## ONLY THE DEAD KNOW BROOKLYN

THOMAS WOLFE



**D**ERE'S NO GUY LIVIN' DAT KNOWS BROOKLYN T'ROO AN' T'ROO, BECAUSE IT'D TAKE A GUY A LIFETIME JUST TO FIND HIS WAY AROUND DUH GODDAM TOWN.

SO LIKE I SAY, I'M WAITIN' FOR MY TRAIN T' COME WHEN I SEES DIS BIG GUY STANDIN' DEH—DIS IS DUH FOIST I EVERH SEE OF HIM. WELL, HE'S LOOKIN' WILD, Y'KNOW, AN' I CAN SEE DAT HE'S HAD PLENTY, BUT STILL HE'S HOLDIN' IT; HE TALKS GOOD AN' IS WALKIN' STRAIGHT ENOUGH. SO DEN, DIS BIG GUY STEPS UP TO A LITTLE GUY DAT'S STANDIN' DEH, AN' SAYS, "HOW D'YUH GET T' EIGHTEEN' AVENUE AN' SIXTY-SEVENT' STREET?" HE SAYS.

"JESUS! YUH GOT ME, CHIEF," DUH LITTLE GUY SAYS TO HIM. "I AIN'T BEEN HEAH LONG MYSELF. WHERE IS DUH PLACE?" HE SAYS. "OUT IN DUH FLATBUSH SECTION SOMEWHERE?"

"NAH," DUH BIG GUY SAYS. "IT'S OUT IN BENSENHOIST. BUT I WAS NEVERH DEH BEFOEH. HOW D'YUH GET DEH?"

"JESUS," DUH LITTLE GUY SAYS, SCRATCHIN' HIS HEAD, Y'KNOW—YUH COULD SEE DUH LITTLE GUY DIDN'T KNOW HIS WAY ABOUT—"YUH GOT ME, CHIEF. I NEVER HOID OF IT. DO ANY OF YOUSE GUYS KNOW WHERE IT IS?" HE SAYS TO ME.

"SURE," I SAYS. "IT'S OUT IN BENSENHOIST. YUH TAKE DUH FOURT' AVENUE EXPRESS, GET OFF AT FIFTY-NINT' STREET, CHANGE TO A SEA BEACH LOCAL DEH, GET OFF AT EIGHTEEN' AVENUE AN' SIXTY-TOID, AN' DEN WALK DOWN FOEH BLOCKS. DAT'S ALL YUH GOT TO DO," I SAYS.

"G'WAN!" SOME WISE GUY DAT I NEVERH SEEN BEFOEH PIPES UP. "WHATCHA TALKIN' ABOUT?" HE SAYS—OH, HE WAS WISE, Y'KNOW. "DUH GUY IS CRAZY! I TELL YUH WHAT YUH DO," HE SAYS TO DUH BIG GUY. "YUH CHANGE TO DUH WEST END LINE AT TOITY-SIXT';" HE TELLS HIM. "GET OFF AT NOO Utrecht AN' SIXTEEN' AVENUE," HE SAYS. "WALK TWO