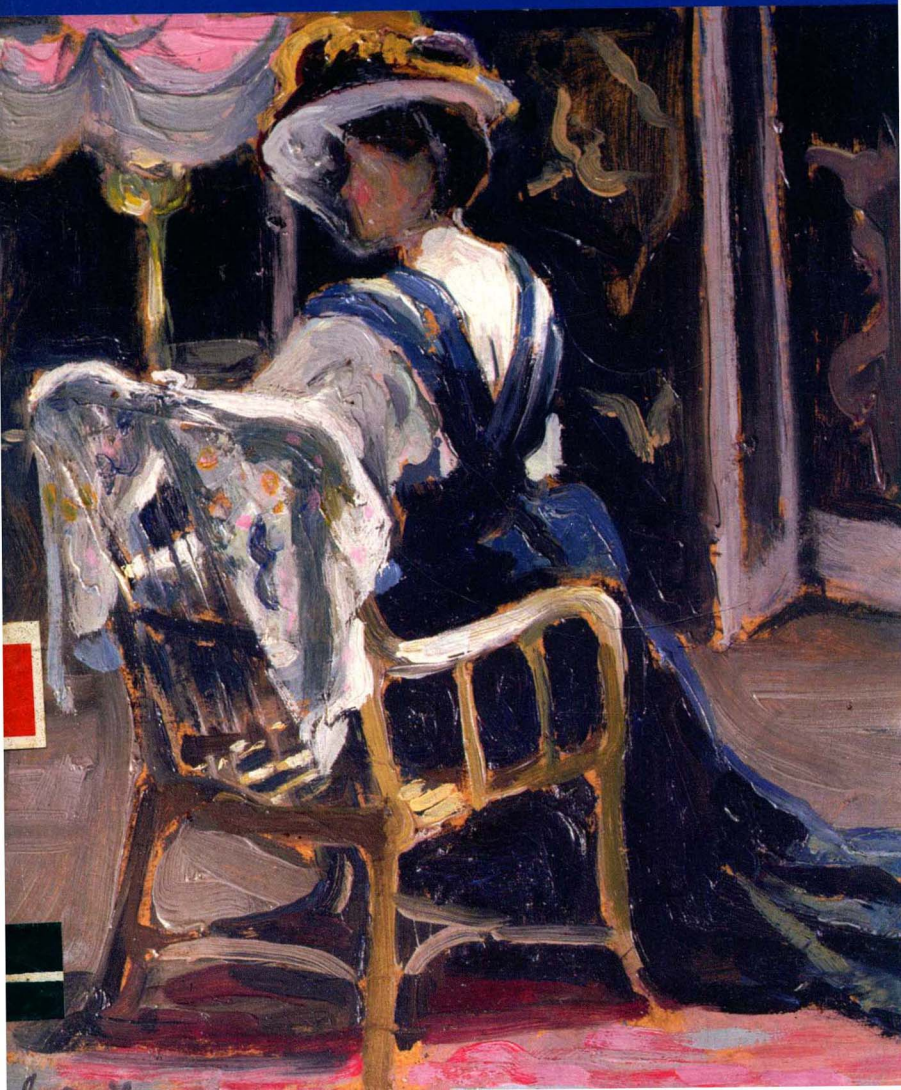


WORDSWORTH CLASSICS

# *The Forsyte Saga*

JOHN GALSWORTHY



# THE FORSYTE SAGA

*The Man of Property,  
In Chancery and To Let*

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John Galsworthy

WORDSWORTH CLASSICS

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## THE MAN OF PROPERTY

*'... You will answer  
The slaves are ours ...'*

MERCHANT OF VENICE

## PART ONE

### CHAPTER ONE

#### *'At Home' at Old Jolyon's*

THOSE PRIVILEGED to be present at a family festival of the Forsytes have seen that charming and instructive sight – an upper middle-class family in full plumage. But whosoever of these favoured persons has possessed the gift of psychological analysis (a talent without monetary value and properly ignored by the Forsytes), has witnessed a spectacle, not only delightful in itself, but illustrative of an obscure human problem. In plainer words, he has gleaned from a gathering of this family – no branch of which had a liking for the other, between no three members of whom existed anything worthy of the name of sympathy – evidence of that mysterious concrete tenacity which renders a family so formidable a unit of society, so clear a reproduction of society in miniature. He has been admitted to a vision of the dim roads of social progress, has understood something of patriarchal life, of the swarmings of savage hordes, of the rise and fall of nations. He is like one who, having watched a tree grow from its planting – a paragon of tenacity, insulation, and success, amidst the deaths of a hundred other plants less fibrous, sappy, and persistent – one day will see it flourishing with bland, full foliage, in an almost repugnant prosperity, at the summit of its efflorescence.

On June 15, 1886, about four of the afternoon, the observer who chanced to be present at the house of old Jolyon Forsyte in Stanhope Gate, might have seen the highest efflorescence of the Forsytes.

This was the occasion of an 'at home' to celebrate the engagement of Miss June Forsyte, old Jolyon's granddaughter, to Mr Philip Bosinney. In the bravery of light gloves, buff waistcoats, feathers, and frocks, the family were present – even Aunt Ann, who now but seldom left the corner of her brother Timothy's green drawing-room, where, under the aegis of a plume of dyed pampas grass in a light blue vase, she sat all day reading and knitting, surrounded by the effigies of three generations of Forsytes. Even Aunt Ann was there; her inflexible back and the dignity of her calm old face personifying the rigid possessiveness of the family idea.

When a Forsyte was engaged, married, or born, the Forsytes were present; when a Forsyte died – but no Forsyte had as yet died; they did

not die; death being contrary to their principles, they took precautions against it, the instinctive precautions of highly vitalised persons who resent encroachments on their property.

About the Forsytes mingling that day with the crowd of other guests, there was a more than ordinarily groomed look, an alert, inquisitive assurance, a brilliant respectability, as though they were attired in defiance of something. The habitual sniff on the face of Soames Forsyte had spread through their ranks; they were on their guard.

The subconscious offensiveness of their attitude has constituted old Jolyon's 'at home' the psychological moment of the family history, made it the prelude of their drama.

The Forsytes were resentful of something, not individually, but as a family; this resentment expressed itself in an added perfection of raiment, an exuberance of family cordiality, an exaggeration of family importance, and – the sniff. Danger – so indispensable in bringing out the fundamental quality of any society, group, or individual – was what the Forsytes scented; the premonition of danger put a burnish on their armour. For the first time, as a family, they appeared to have an instinct of being in contact with some strange and unsafe thing.

Over against the piano a man of bulk and stature was wearing two waistcoats on his wide chest, two waistcoats and a ruby pin, instead of the single satin waistcoat and diamond pin of more usual occasions, and his shaven, square, old face, the colour of pale leather, with pale eyes, had its most dignified look, above his satin stock. This was Swithin Forsyte. Close to the window, where he could get more than his fair share of fresh air, the other twin, James – the fat and the lean of it, old Jolyon called these brothers – like the bulky Swithin, over six feet in height, but very lean, as though destined from his birth to strike a balance and maintain an average, brooded over the scene with his permanent stoop; his grey eyes had an air of fixed absorption in some secret worry, broken at intervals by a rapid, shifting scrutiny of surrounding facts; his cheeks, thinned by two parallel folds, and a long, clean-shaven upper lip, were framed within Dundreary whiskers. In his hands he turned and turned a piece of china. Not far off, listening to a lady in brown, his only son Soames, pale and well-shaved, dark-haired, rather bald, had poked his chin up sideways, carrying his nose with that aforesaid appearance of 'sniff', as though despising an egg which he knew he could not digest. Behind him his cousin, the tall George, son of the fifth Forsyte, Roger, had a Quilpish look on his fleshy face, pondering one of his sardonic jests.

Something inherent to the occasion had affected them all.

Seated in a row close to one another were three ladies – Aunts Ann, Hester (the two Forsyte maids), and Juley (short for Julia), who not in

first youth had so far forgotten herself as to marry Septimus Small, a man of poor constitution. She had survived him for many years. With her elder and younger sister she lived now in the house of Timothy, her sixth and youngest brother, on the Bayswater Road. Each of these ladies held fans in their hands, and each with some touch of colour, some emphatic feather or brooch, testified to the solemnity of the opportunity.

In the centre of the room, under the chandelier, as became a host, stood the head of the family, old Jolyon himself. Eighty years of age, with his fine, white hair, his dome-like forehead, his little, dark grey eyes, and an immense white moustache, which drooped and spread below the level of his strong jaw, he had a patriarchal look, and in spite of lean cheeks and hollows at his temples, seemed master of perennial youth. He held himself extremely upright, and his shrewd, steady eyes had lost none of their clear shining. Thus he gave an impression of superiority to the doubts and dislikes of smaller men. Having had his own way for innumerable years, he had earned a prescriptive right to it. It would never have occurred to old Jolyon that it was necessary to wear a look of doubt or of defiance.

Between him and the four other brothers who were present, James, Swithin, Nicholas, and Roger, there was much difference, much similarity. In turn, each of these four brothers was very different from the other, yet they, too, were alike.

Through the varying features and expression of those five faces could be marked a certain steadfastness of chin, underlying surface distinctions, marking a racial stamp, too prehistoric to trace, too remote and permanent to discuss – the very hall-mark and guarantee of the family fortunes.

Among the younger generation, in the tall, bull-like George, in pallid strenuous Archibald, in young Nicholas with his sweet and tentative obstinacy, in the grave and foppishly determined Eustace, there was this same stamp – less meaningful perhaps, but unmistakable – a sign of something ineradicable in the family soul.

At one time or another during the afternoon, all these faces, so dissimilar and so alike, had worn an expression of distrust, the object of which was undoubtedly the man whose acquaintance they were thus assembled to make.

Philip Bosinney was known to be a young man without fortune, but Forsyte girls had become engaged to such before, and had actually married them. It was not altogether for this reason, therefore, that the minds of the Forsytes misgave them. They could not have explained the origin of a misgiving obscured by the mist of family gossip. A story was undoubtedly told that he had paid his duty call to Aunts Ann, Juley, and Hester, in a soft grey hat – a soft grey hat, not even a new one – a dusty

thing with a shapeless crown. 'So extraordinary, my dear – so odd!' Aunt Hester, passing through the little, dark hall (she was rather short sighted), had tried to 'shoo' it off a chair, taking it for a strange, disreputable cat – Tommy had such disgraceful friends! She was disturbed when it did not move.

Like an artist for ever seeking to discover the significant trifle which embodies the whole character of a scene, or place, or person, so those unconscious artists – the Forsytes – had fastened by intuition on this hat; it was their significant trifle, the detail in which was embedded the meaning of the whole matter; for each had asked himself: 'Come, now, should I have paid that visit in that hat?' and each had answered 'No!' and some, with more imagination than others, had added: 'It would never have come into my head!'

George, on hearing the story, grinned. The hat had obviously been worn as a practical joke! He himself was a connoisseur of such.

'Very haughty!' he said, 'the wild Buccaneer!'

And this *mot*, 'The Buccaneer', was bandied from mouth to mouth, till it became the favourite mode of alluding to Bosinney.

Her aunts reproached June afterwards about the hat.

'We don't think you ought to let him, dear!' they had said.

June had answered in her imperious brisk way, like the little embodiment of will she was:

'Oh! what does it matter? Phil never knows what he's got on!'

No one had credited an answer so outrageous. A man not know what he had on? No, no!

What indeed was this young man, who, in becoming engaged to June, old Jolyon's acknowledged heiress, had done so well for himself? He was an architect, not in itself a sufficient reason for wearing such a hat. None of the Forsytes happened to be architects, but one of them knew two architects who would never have worn such a hat upon a call of ceremony in the London season. Dangerous – ah, dangerous!

June, of course, had not seen this, but, though not yet nineteen, she was notorious. Had she not said to Mrs Soames – who was always so beautifully dressed – that feathers were vulgar? Mrs Soames had actually given up wearing feathers, so dreadfully downright was dear June!

These misgivings, this disapproval and perfectly genuine distrust, did not prevent the Forsytes from gathering to old Jolyon's invitation. An 'at home' at Stanhope Gate was a great rarity; none had been held for twelve years, not indeed since old Mrs Jolyon died.

Never had there been so full an assembly, for, mysteriously united in spite of all their differences, they had taken arms against a common peril. Like cattle when a dog comes into the field, they stood head to head and

shoulder to shoulder, prepared to run upon and trample the invader to death. They had come, too, no doubt, to get some notion of what sort of presents they would ultimately be expected to give; for though the question of wedding gifts was usually graduated in this way – ‘What are *you* givin’? Nicholas is givin’ spoons!’ – so very much depended on the bridegroom. If he were sleek, well-brushed, prosperous-looking, it was more necessary to give him nice things; he would expect them. In the end each gave exactly what was right and proper, by a species of family adjustment arrived at as prices are arrived at on the Stock Exchange – the exact niceties being regulated at Timothy’s commodious red-brick residence in Bayswater, overlooking the Park, where dwelt Aunts Ann, Juley, and Hester.

The uneasiness of the Forsyte family has been justified by the simple mention of the hat. How impossible and wrong would it have been for any family, with the regard for appearances which should ever characterise the great upper middle class, to feel otherwise than uneasy!

The author of the uneasiness stood talking to June by the further door; his curly hair had a rumpled appearance as though he found what was going on around him unusual. He had an air, too, of having a joke all to himself.

George, speaking aside to his brother Eustace, said:

‘Looks as if he might make a bolt of it – the dashing Buccaneer!’

This ‘very singular-looking man’, as Mrs Small afterwards called him, was of medium height and strong build, with a pale, brown face, a dust-coloured moustache, very prominent cheekbones, and hollow cheeks. His forehead sloped back towards the crown of his head, and bulged out in bumps over the eyes, like foreheads seen in the lion-house at the Zoo. He had sherry-coloured eyes, disconcertingly inattentive at times. Old Jolyon’s coachman, after driving June and Bosinney to the theatre, had remarked to the butler:

‘I dunno what to make of ’im. Looks to me for all the world like an ’alf-tame leopard.’

And every now and then a Forsyte would come up, sidle round, and take a look at him.

June stood in front, fending off this idle curiosity – a little bit of a thing, as somebody once said, ‘all hair and spirit’, with fearless blue eyes, a firm jaw, and a bright colour, whose face and body seemed too slender for her crown of red-gold hair.

A tall woman, with a beautiful figure, which some member of the family had once compared to a heathen goddess, stood looking at these two with a shadowy smile.

Her hands, gloved in French grey, were crossed one over the other,

her grave, charming face held to one side, and the eyes of all men near were fastened on it. Her figure swayed, so balanced that the very air seemed to set it moving. There was warmth, but little colour, in her cheeks; her large, dark eyes were soft. But it was at her lips – asking a question, giving an answer, with that shadowy smile – that men looked; they were sensitive lips, sensuous and sweet, and through them seemed to come warmth and perfume like the warmth and perfume of a flower.

The engaged couple thus scrutinised were unconscious of this passive goddess. It was Bosinney who first noticed her, and asked her name.

June took her lover up to the woman with the beautiful figure.

‘Irene is my greatest chum,’ she said: ‘Please be good friends, you two!’

At the little lady’s command they all three smiled; and while they were smiling, Soames Forsyte, silently appearing from behind the woman with the beautiful figure, who was his wife, said:

‘Ah! introduce me too!’

He was seldom, indeed, far from Irene’s side at public functions, and even when separated by the exigencies of social intercourse, could be seen following her about with his eyes, in which were strange expressions of watchfulness and longing.

At the window his father, James, was still scrutinizing the marks on the piece of china.

‘I wonder at Jolyon’s allowing this engagement,’ he said to Aunt Ann. ‘They tell me there’s no chance of their getting married for years. This young Bosinney’ (he made the word a dactyl in opposition to general usage of a short o) ‘has got nothing. When Winifred married Dartie, I made him bring every penny into settlement – lucky thing, too – they’d ha’ had nothing by this time!’

Aunt Ann looked up from her velvet chair. Grey curls banded her forehead, curls that, unchanged for decades, had extinguished in the family all sense of time. She made no reply, for she rarely spoke, husbanding her aged voice; but to James, uneasy of conscience, her look was as good as an answer.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘I couldn’t help Irene’s having no money. Soames was in such a hurry; he got quite thin dancing attendance on her.’

Putting the bowl pettishly down on the piano, he let his eyes wander to the group by the door.

‘It’s my opinion,’ he said unexpectedly, ‘that it’s just as well as it is.’

Aunt Ann did not ask him to explain this strange utterance. She knew what he was thinking. If Irene had no money she would not be so foolish as to do anything wrong; for they said – they said – she had been asking for a separate room; but, of course, Soames had not –

James interrupted her reverie:

But where, he asked, was Timothy? Hadn't he come with them? Through Aunt Ann's compressed lips a tender smile forced its way: No, he had not thought it wise, with so much of this diphtheria about; and he so liable to take things.

James answered: 'Well, *he* takes good care of himself. I can't afford to take the care of myself that he does.'

Nor was it easy to say which, of admiration, envy, or contempt, was dominant in that remark.

Timothy, indeed, was seldom seen. The baby of the family, a publisher by profession, he had some years before, when business was at full tide, scented out the stagnation which, indeed, had not yet come, but which ultimately, as all agreed, was bound to set in, and, selling his share in a firm engaged mainly in the production of religious books, had invested the quite conspicuous proceeds in three per cent Consols. By this act he had at once assumed an isolated position, no other Forsyte being content with less than four per cent for his money; and this isolation had slowly and surely undermined a spirit perhaps better than commonly endowed with caution. He had become almost a myth – a kind of incarnation of security haunting the background of the Forsyte universe. He had never committed the imprudence of marrying, or encumbering himself in any way with children.

James resumed, tapping the piece of china:

'This isn't real old Worcester. I s'pose Jolyon's told you something about the young man. From all *I* can learn, he's got no business, no income, and no connection worth speaking of; but then, I know nothing – nobody tells me anything.'

Aunt Ann shook her head. Over her square chinned, aquiline old face a trembling passed; the spidery fingers of her hands pressed against each other and interlaced, as though she were subtly recharging her will.

The eldest by some years of all the Forsytes, she held a peculiar position amongst them. Opportunists and egotists one and all though not, indeed, more so than their neighbours – they quailed before her incorruptible figure, and, when opportunities were too strong, what could they do but avoid her?

Twisting his long, thin legs, James went on:

'Jolyon, he will have his own way. He's got no children –' and stopped, recollecting the continued existence of old Jolyon's son, young Jolyon, June's father, who had made such a mess of it, and done for himself by deserting his wife and child and running away with that foreign govern-ess. 'Well,' he resumed hastily, 'if he likes to do these things, I s'pose he can afford to. Now, what's he going to give her? I s'pose he'll give her a thousand a year; he's got nobody else to leave his money to.'