

STEINBECK THE WINTER OF OUR DISCONTENT



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JOHN STEINBECK
**THE WINTER
OF OUR
DISCONTENT**



*This low-priced Bantam Book
has been completely reset in a type face
designed for easy reading, and was printed
from new plates. It contains the complete
text of the original hard-cover edition.
NOT ONE WORD HAS BEEN OMITTED.*



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THE WINTER OF OUR DISCONTENT

"The book has stunning merits: the ability to expose a basic problem of our time, the talent to write it with immediacy."

—Chicago Sun-Times

"Not since **East of Eden** has Steinbeck engaged a theme of such broad social significance . . . A highly readable novel which bristles with disturbing ideas."

—The New York Times

"A novel that is closer to the experience of most Americans than . . . **The Grapes of Wrath**. A tense, moving drama . . . Superb, devastating, a major Steinbeck performance!"

—San Francisco Chronicle

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JOHN STEINBECK was born in Salinas, California, in 1902. His first three books were financial failures, and he worked at various kinds of jobs to survive, including fruit picking. His first success was **Tortilla Flat** (1935), which was followed by **In Dubious Battle** and a number of shorter works, leading up to his great masterpiece, **The Grapes of Wrath**, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1940.

In 1962 Steinbeck became the sixth American to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. He is the author of **The Red Pony**, **The Short Reign of Pippin IV**, **Cannery Row**, **East of Eden**, **The Winter of Our Discontent**, **Travels with Charley**, and, most recently, **America and Americans**.

John Steinbeck died at his home in New York City in December, 1968.

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THE RED PONY
SWEET THURSDAY
TORTILLA FLAT
TRAVELS WITH CHARLEY
THE WAYWARD BUS
THE WINTER OF OUR DISCONTENT

*To Beth, my sister,
whose light burns clear*

Readers seeking to identify the fictional people and places here described would do better to inspect their own communities and search their own hearts, for this book is about a large part of America today.

PART ONE

Chapter I

WHEN the fair gold morning of April stirred Mary Hawley awake, she turned over to her husband and saw him, little fingers pulling a frog mouth at her.

"You're silly," she said. "Ethan, you've got your comical genius."

"Oh say, Miss Mousie, will you marry me?"

"Did you wake up silly?"

"The year's at the day. The day's at the morn."

"I guess you did. Do you remember it's Good Friday?"

He said hollowly, "The dirty Romans are forming up for Calvary."

"Don't be sacrilegious. Will Marullo let you close the store at eleven?"

"Darling chicken-flower—Marullo is a Catholic and a wop. He probably won't show up at all. I'll close at noon till the execution's over."

"That's Pilgrim talk. It's not nice."

"Nonsense, ladybug. That's from my mother's side. That's pirate talk. It *was* an execution, you know."

"They were not pirates. You said yourself, whalers, and you said they had letters of what-you-call-it from the Continental Congress."

"The ships they fired on thought they were pirates. And those Roman G.I.'s thought it was an execution."

"I've made you mad. I like you better silly."

"I am silly. Everybody knows that."

"You always mix me up. You've got every right to be proud—Pilgrim Fathers and whaling captains right in one family."

"Have they?"

"What do you mean?"

"Would my great^{*}ancestors be proud to know they produced a goddam grocery clerk in a goddam wop store in a town they used to own?"

"You are not. You're more like the manager, keep the books and bank the money and order the goods."

"Sure. And I sweep out and carry garbage and kowtow to Marullo, and if I was a goddam cat, I'd be catching Marullo's mice."

She put her arms around him. "Let's be silly," she said. "Please don't say swear words on Good Friday. I do love you."

"Okay," he said after a moment. "That's what they all say. Don't think that lets you lie jaybird naked with a married man."

"I was going to tell you about the children."

"They in jail?"

"Now you're silly again. Maybe it's better if they tell you."

"Now why don't you—"

"Margie Young-Hunt's going to read me again today."

"Like a book? Who's Margie Young-Hunt, what is she, that all our swains—"

"You know if I was jealous—I mean they say when a man pretends he don't notice a pretty girl—"

"Oh, that one. Girl? She's had two husbands."

"The second one died."

"I want my breakfast. Do you believe that stuff?"

"Well Margie saw about Brother in the cards. Someone near and dear, she said."

"Someone near and dear to me is going to get a kick in the pants if she doesn't haul freight—"

"I'm going—eggs?"

"I guess so. Why do they call it Good Friday? What's good about it?"

"Oh! You!" she said. "You always make jokes."

The coffee was made and the eggs in a bowl with

toast beside them when Ethan Allen Hawley slid into the dinette near the window.

"I feel good," he said. "Why do they call it Good Friday?"

"Spring," she said from the stove.

"Spring Friday?"

"Spring fever. Is that the children up?"

"Fat chance. Lazy little bastards. Let's get 'em up and whip 'em."

"You talk terrible when you're silly. Will you come home twelve to three?"

"Nope."

"Why not?"

"Women. Sneak 'em in. Maybe that Margie."

"Now Ethan, don't you talk like that. Margie's a good friend. She'd give you the shirt off her back."

"Yah? Where'd she get the shirt?"

"That's Pilgrim talk again."

"I bet you anything we're related. She's got pirate blood."

"Oh! You're just silly again. Here's your list." She tucked it in his breast pocket. "Seems like a lot. But it's Easter weekend, don't forget—and two dozen eggs, don't forget. You're going to be late."

"I know. Might miss a two-bit sale for Marullo. Why two dozen?"

"For dyeing. Allen and Mary Ellen asked specially. You better go."

"Okay, bugflower—but can't I just go up and beat the hell out of Allen and Mary Ellen?"

"You spoil them rotten, Eth. You know you do."

"Farewell, oh ship of state," he said, and slammed the screen door after him and went out into the green-gold morning.

He looked back at the fine old house, his father's house and his great-grandfather's, white-painted ship-lap with a fanlight over the front door, and Adam decorations and a widow's walk on the roof. It was deep-

set in the greening garden among lilacs a hundred years old, thick as your waist, and swelling with buds. The elms of Elm Street joined their tops and yellowed out in new-coming leaf. The sun had just cleared the bank building and flashed on the silvery gas tower, starting the kelp and salt smell from the old harbor.

Only one person in early Elm Street, Mr. Baker's red setter, the banker's dog, Red Baker, who moved with slow dignity, pausing occasionally to sniff the passenger list on the elm trunks.

"Good morning, sir. My name is Ethan Allen Hawley. I've met you in pissing."

Red Baker stopped and acknowledged the greeting, with a slow sway of his plumed tail.

Ethan said, "I was just looking at my house. They knew how to build in those days."

Red cocked his head and reached with a hind foot to kick casually at his ribs.

"And why not? They had the money. Whale oil from the seven seas, and spermaceti. Do you know what spermaceti is?"

Red gave a whining sigh.

"I see you don't. A light, lovely rose-smelling oil from the head cavity of the sperm whale. Read *Moby Dick*, dog. That's my advice to you."

The setter lifted his leg on the cast-iron hitching post at the gutter.

Turning to walk away, Ethan said over his shoulder, "And make a book report. You might teach my son. He can't even spell spermaceti, or—or anything."

Elm Street runs at an angle into High Street two blocks from the old Ethan Allen Hawley house. Halfway down the first block a delinquent gang of English sparrows were fighting on the new-coming lawn of the Elgar house, not playing but rolling and picking and eye-gouging with such ferocity and so noisily that they didn't see Ethan approach. He stopped to watch the battle.

"Birds in their little nests agree," he said. "So why

can't we? Now there's a bunch of horse crap for you. You kids can't get along even on a pretty morning. And you're the bastards Saint Francis was nice to. Screw!" He ran at them, kicking, and the sparrows rose with a whispered roar of wings, complaining bitterly in door-squeak voices. "Let me tell you this," Ethan said after them. "At noon the sun will darken and a blackness will fall on the earth and you will be afraid." He came back to the sidewalk and proceeded on his way.

The old Phillips house in the second block is a boarding house now. Joey Morphy, teller at the First National, came out of the front door. He picked his teeth and straightened his Tattersall waistcoat and said, "Hi," to Ethan. "I was just going to call on you, Mr. Hawley," he said.

"Why do they call it Good Friday?"

"It's from the Latin," said Joey. "Goodus, goodilius, goodum, meaning lousy."

Joey looked like a horse and he smiled like a horse, raising a long upper lip to show big square teeth. Joseph Patrick Morphy, Joey Morphy, Joey-boy—"the Morph"—a real popular guy for one only a few years at New Baytown. A joker who got off his gags veily-eyed like a poker player, but he whinnied at other people's jokes, whether or not he had heard them. A wise guy, the Morph, had the inside dope on everything—and everybody from Mafia to Mountbatten—but he gave it out with a rising inflection, almost like a question. That took the smart-aleck tone out of it, made his listener a party to it so that he could repeat it as his own. Joey was a fascinating monkey—a gambler but no one ever saw him lay down a bet, a good bookkeeper and a wonderful bank teller. Mr. Baker, First National president, trusted Joey so completely that he let the teller do most of the work. The Morph knew everyone intimately and never used a first name. Ethan was Mr. Hawley. Margie Young-Hunt was Mrs. Young-Hunt to Joey, even though it was whispered that he was laying her. He had no family, no connections, lived alone in

two rooms and private bath in the old Phillips house, ate most of his meals at the Foremaster Grill and Bar. His banking past was known to Mr. Baker and the bonding company and it was immaculate, but Joey-boy had a way of telling things that had happened to someone else in a way that made you suspect they had happened to Joey, and if that was so, he had really been around. Not taking credit made people like him even more. He kept his fingernails very clean, dressed well and sharply, and always had a clean shirt and a shoeshine.

The two men strolled together down Elm Street toward High.

"I've been meaning to ask you. You related to Admiral Hawley?"

"Don't you mean Admiral Halsey?" Ethan asked. "We've had lots of captains but I never heard of an admiral in the family."

"I heard your granddad was a whaling captain. Kind of connected up in my mind with the admiral, I guess."

"Town like this has got myths," said Ethan. "Like they say people on my dad's side did some pirating way back and my mother's family came over in the *Mayflower*."

"Ethan Allen," Joey said. "My God—you related to him too?"

"Might be. Must be," said Ethan. "What a day—ever see a prettier? What was it you wanted to see me about?"

"Oh, yes. I guess you're closing the store twelve to three. Would you make me a couple of sandwiches about half past eleven? I'll run in and get them. And a bottle of milk."

"Bank's not closing?"

"Bank is. I'm not. Little Joey'll be right in there, chained to the books. Big weekend like this—everybody and his dog cashing checks."

"I never thought of that," said Ethan.

"Oh, sure. Easter, Memorial Day, Fourth of July,

Labor Day—any long weekend. If I wanted to stick up a bank, I'd do it just before a long weekend. The stuff's right there all laid out, waiting."

"You ever get stuck up, Joey?"

"No. But I had a friend that did twice."

"What did he say about it?"

"Said he was scared. Just took orders. Laid down on the floor and let 'em have it. Said the money was better insured than he was."

"I'll bring you the sandwiches when I close up. I'll knock on the back door. What kind you want?"

"Don't bother, Mr. Hawley. I'll slip across the alley—one ham and one cheese on rye, lettuce and mayonnaise, and maybe one bottle of milk and a Coke for later."

"Got some nice salami—that's Marullo."

"No, thanks. How's the one-man Mafia holding up?"

"All right, I guess."

"Well, even if you don't like guineas, you got to admire a guy can build a pushcart into all the property he owns. He's pretty cute. People don't know how much he's got salted away. Maybe I shouldn't say that. Banker's not supposed to tell."

"You didn't tell."

They had come to the corner where Elm angles into High Street. Automatically they stopped and turned to look at the pink brick and plaster mess that was the old Bay Hotel, now being wrecked to make room for the new Woolworth's. The yellow-painted bulldozer and the big crane that swung the wrecking ball were silent like waiting predators in the early morning.

"I always wanted to do that," Joey said. "Must be a kick to swing that steel ball and see a wall go down."

"I saw enough go down in France," Ethan said.

"Yeah! Your name's on the monument down by the waterfront."

"Did they ever catch the robbers that stuck up your friend?" Ethan was sure the friend was Joey himself. Anyone would have been.

"Oh, sure. Caught 'em like mice. It's lucky robbers aren't smart. If Joey-boy wrote a book how to rob a bank, the cops would never catch anybody."

Ethan laughed. "How'd you go about it?"

"I got a pipeline, Mr. Hawley. I just read the papers. And I used to know a guy pretty well was a cop. You want the two-dollar lecture?"

"'Bout six bits' worth. I've got to open the store."

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Joey, "I am here this morning— No, look! How do they catch bank robbers? Number one—record, got caught before. Number two—get fighting over the profits and someone blows it. Number three—dames. Can't let dames alone, and that ties into number four—they got to spend that money. Watch new spenders and you got them."

"So what's your method, professor, sir?"

"Simple as socks. Everything opposite. Never rob a bank if you ever got caught or booked for anything. No confederates—do it alone and don't tell a soul, nobody. Forget dames. And don't spend it. Put it away, maybe for years. Then when you've got some excuse for having some money, bring it out a little at a time and invest. Don't spend."

"How about if the robber got recognized?"

"If he covers his face and don't talk, who's going to recognize him? You ever read descriptions by eyewitnesses? They're nuts. My cop friend says sometimes when they'd plant him in the line-up, he got picked out over and over again. People swore their eyes out he did whatever it was. That'll be six bits, please."

Ethan put his hand in his pocket. "I'll have to owe you."

"I'll take it out in sandwiches," said Joey.

The two crossed High Street and entered the alley that right-angled from the other side. Joey went in the back door of the First National Bank on his side of the alley, and Ethan unlocked the alley door of Marullo's Fruit and Fancy Groceries on his side. "Ham and cheese?" he called.