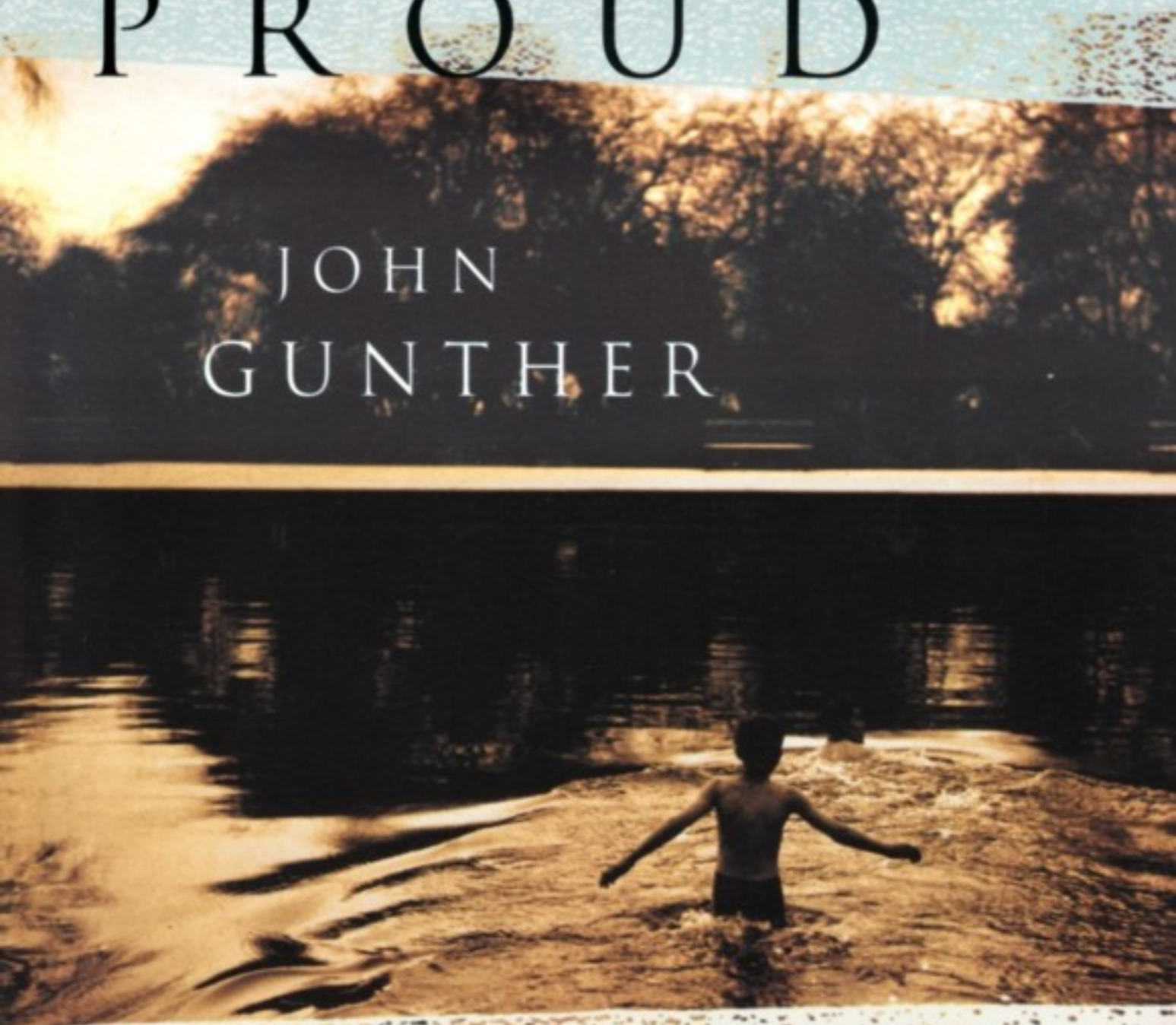


DEATH *B E N O T* PROUD

JOHN
GUNTHER



Death Be Not Proud



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*Johnny came home for the Christmas holiday in 1945, and he looked fit and fine. He was lengthening out physically and otherwise, as children do all of a sudden, responding as it were to the release of some hidden inner spring. We saw a lot of each other, and just before getting on the train to return to school in January, he exclaimed, "Pop, that was the best ten days I ever had!" He didn't often confess personal emotions so freely, and I was pleased. Then in March, 1946, he came down again for the long spring holiday. Frances and I took him to several Broadway shows, including *Show Boat* and *Antigone*—he liked *Antigone* best; he went to lectures on atomic physics; Frances took him to the public dinner given by the City of New York to Winston Churchill—it was the first, and last, time he ever wore a dinner jacket, borrowed from his uncle; he won the critical game in a chess match against another school (he was captain now of the Deerfield chess team); he monkeyed with his chemicals and read the manuscript of the early chapters of *Inside U.S.A.* which was just then getting under way. I thought he*

seemed tired, but I did not take this seriously, believing it to be the normal reaction from a regime as vigorous as that of Deerfield, together with the strains of adolescence. He had his usual check with Traeger, our family physician, who pronounced him perfectly all right. Also he had a check with an eye doctor. This was important. Johnny had suffered some eye strain the summer before and was taking exercises to strengthen his visual acuity. The eye doctor found nothing wrong; in fact, the eyes had improved to a considerable degree. The day after the examination by Traeger, Johnny complained suddenly of a slight stiff neck. If this had happened before Traeger saw him, I would have been more concerned, but since he had just been given a clean bill of health, we did not take anything so minor as a stiff neck seriously. Indeed, it disappeared after a day, and Johnny went back to school, sighing a little that the holiday was over but happy and full of energy and anticipation.

Deerfield had an infantile paralysis case that spring, and, as is the custom of the school with its strict standards, all parents were notified at once. Then in the third week of April I had a wire from the school doctor, Johnson, saying that Johnny was in the infirmary but, though he had a stiff neck, there was no indication of polio and we were not to worry. Nothing at all alarming was indicated. Boys get stiff necks and Charley horses all the time. In fact, Dr. Johnson said, he was informing us of Johnny's complaint only because, knowing of the polio scare and hearing that he was in the infirmary, we might think that he did have polio, which he didn't. I called Johnny up, and we talked briefly. He was lonely and fretful at missing a week of class work, but otherwise nothing seemed to be amiss. He was going into the nearby town the

next day to have a basal metabolism test, and Dr. Johnson asked me to find out from Traeger when he had last had a basal, and what it was. I reported all this to Frances, and thought little more of it. Later we found that Johnny might not have gone to the infirmary at all, since he would never admit it when he was ill and never complained, except that one of his classmates, observing his stiff neck, insisted on his seeing the doctor. Then, wisely, Dr. Johnson held him for observation. Had this not happened, he might have died then and there.

At about three in the afternoon on Thursday, April 25, the telephone rang in our New York apartment. Just at that moment I had finished the California chapters of my book, and I had intended calling Johnny that night to tell him.

Without hesitation or warning Dr. Johnson said, "We've had a doctor in from Springfield to see your son—Dr. Hahn, a neurologist. Here he is."

Dr. Hahn said, "I think your child has a brain tumor."

I was too stunned to make sense. "But that's very serious, isn't it?" I exclaimed.

Dr. Hahn said, "I should say it *is* serious!" He went on, in a voice so emphatic that it was almost strident, "His disks are completely choked."

"His what?"

"Ask any doctor in the world what that means—choked disks!" he shouted.

He proceeded to describe other symptoms, and implored me with the utmost urgency to get in touch at once with Dr. Tracy Putnam, the best man for this kind of thing anywhere within range; in fact, even before talking to me, he and John-

"A HEARTBREAKING TALE,
BEAUTIFULLY WRITTEN."

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Johnny Gunther was only seventeen years old when he died of a brain tumor. During the months of his illness, everyone near him was unforgettably impressed by his level-headed courage, his wit and quiet friendliness, and, above all, his unfaltering patience through times of despair. This deeply moving book is a father's memoir of a brave, intelligent, and spirited boy.

"IF COURAGE IS THE ANTIDOTE TO PAIN AND GRIEF, THE DISEASE AND THE CURE ARE BOTH IN THIS BOOK. . . A STORY OF GREAT UNSELFISHNESS AND GREAT HEROISM." —NEW YORK TIMES



JOHN GUNTHER (1901–1970) was one of the best known and most admired journalists of his day. The author of the immensely popular *Inside* books—a series of profiles of major world powers, beginning with *Inside Europe*, published in 1936—he was born on the north side of Chicago and died on May 29, 1970.

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