

The Home Front

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1928. A diva from another era dies alone in her Paris apartment. A week later, her various debt collectors find her dead. All her assets are liquidated. Three of those assets, a pair of frilly pink chairs and a faux fur coat, slowly work their way into the hands of Chase bank, who'd lent her far too much money when she was younger to jump-start her acting career. The Depression comes. Chase needs to sell as much as possible. At an auction, the chairs go to a young woman from Advance, Indiana, and her young husband buys her the coat as a gift. He dies when he goes off to fight in France as a volunteer. What is she left with? An empty house, decorated in frilly, pink things, and faux furs. She goes to work in a munitions plant when the war comes and her savings run out. Eventually, she adopts her nephew when her brother and sister-in-law are killed in a bombing raid on Casablanca. They're unhappy people, in a house fit for young lovers. She can't find anybody to take the furniture, and can't bring herself to wear the coat, so she puts them away in her mother's attic. Her mother dies. She's in the hospital from the dangers of handling material components of artillery shells. Her nephew, who never took to calling her his mother, comes home from training to sort out the estate, and the war ends. He could've been the pilot to drop the bomb on Nagasaki. In his resentment, he sells everything, and moves to California and settles down, where his wife never makes him think about his past, and neither do his affairs. The chairs and coat split at a garage sale, the coat traveling south to West Baden and the chairs moving to Lebanon. The coat came back when its new owner found an unopened love letter containing one thousand dollars in a hidden inside pocket, written by the volunteer husband to the wife he'd never be able to give a child, but the nephew was long gone. They left the coat to a local history museum, but those never do well, and it closed its doors, to nobody's notice. All the exhibits were put in booths in antique stores, like the chairs, who had gone from owner to owner, each of them discovering that pink frills pairs with nothing. Except, perhaps, for faux fur coats, which they had been reunited with, and will be forever because nobody wants pink frills or faux fur.

Not all stories are tragic. The new owner of the coat was

one of the first US-based saleswomen at Eli Lilly. When the local history museum closed, the couple running it had more time to enjoy their retirement. The nephew had three boys and two daughters, all of which grew up to be outstanding people without traumatic childhoods. Every single one of his affairs felt loved.