

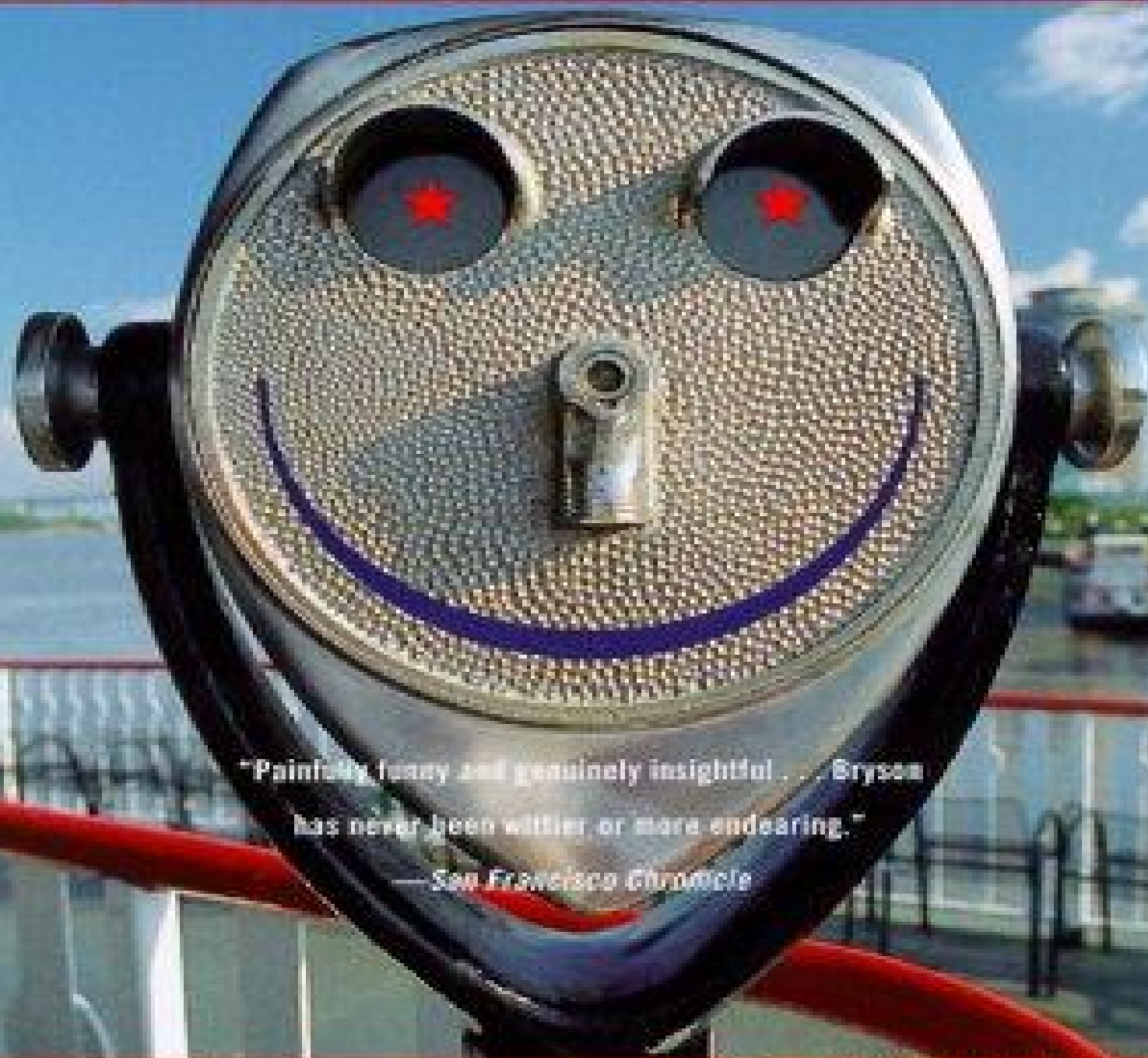
NATIONAL BESTSELLER

I'm a Stranger Here

Myself

NOTES ON RETURNING TO AMERICA

★ ★ ★ AFTER TWENTY YEARS AWAY



"Painfully funny and genuinely insightful . . . Bryson has never been wittier or more endearing."

—*San Francisco Chronicle*

Author of *A Walk in the Woods*

BILL BRYSON

Broadway Books
New York



I ' M A S T R A N G E R

H E R E M Y S E L F

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Bill Bryson

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*To
Cynthia,
David,
Felicity,
Catherine,
and Sam*

INTRODUCTION

In the late summer of 1996, an old journalist friend from London named Simon Kelner called me in New Hampshire, to where I had lately moved after living for twenty-some years in Britain. Simon had recently been made editor of *Night & Day* magazine, a supplement of the *Mail on Sunday* newspaper, and it was his idea that I should write a weekly column for him on America.

At various times over the years Simon had persuaded me to do all kinds of work that I didn't have time to do, but this was way out of the question.

"No," I said. "I can't. I'm sorry. It's just not possible. I've got too much on."

"So can you start next week?"

"Simon, you don't seem to understand. I can't do it."

"We thought we'd call it 'Notes from a Big Country.'"

"Simon, you'll have to call it 'Big Blank Space in the Magazine' because I cannot do it."

"Splendid, splendid," he said, but a trifle absently. I had the impression that he was doing something else at the same time—reviewing models for a swimsuit issue would be my guess. In any case, he kept covering up the phone and issuing important editor-type instructions to other people in the vicinity.

"So we'll send you a contract," he went on when he came back to me.

"No, Simon, don't do that. I can't write a weekly column for you. It's as simple as that. Are you taking this in? Tell me you are taking this in."

"Excellent. I'm absolutely delighted. We're all delighted. Well, must run."

"Simon, please listen to me. I can't take on a weekly column. Just not possible. Simon, are you hearing this? Simon? Hello? Simon, are you there? Hello? Bugger."

And that is how I became a newspaper columnist, a pursuit I followed for the next two years, from September 1996 to September 1998. The thing about a weekly column, I discovered, is that it comes up weekly. Now this