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NORMAN ROCKWELL

ROCKWELL—BEFORE, OR AFTER?

THE CONVICTION has long been growing in me that I should change my name. A drastic step. Inconvenient and complicated, too. But certainly nothing in comparison with the difficulty of sustaining, year after year, the burden of another's fame.

It would do quite as well, however, if Rockwell Kent would change his name. But I can hardly ask him to do that just to save me from embarrassment. Yet the fact that his first name and my last name are the same apparently causes so much confusion that I am constantly being given praise that belongs to him.

This peculiar situation constantly creates new kinds of embarrassment to dog my footsteps. First of all there is the natural one at having praise that is not mine bestowed on me. I used to try to avoid this by explaining with honesty and care just who I was and what I did. Immediately I found myself even more embarrassed by the disintegration of self confidence in the face before me. For it is not

comfortable to have the courage that has been summoned to meet a “famous” person so rudely dissipated.

But there is another sort of embarrassment that is worse as it touches one more nearly. It was something of a shock to have it added to my collection. Years ago I went out to the moving picture studios on Long Island. We were watching the most famous woman director of that day at work, feeling as you do in a studio—like one of the midges around a great and shining light—when we saw the assistant director whisper to her and both look pointedly at me. I began to feel the premonitory warmth that steals over one at the approach of praise or recognition. Suddenly everything was stopped: lights, stars, cameras, and extras. The director came with her retinue to be introduced.

“This is Mr. Norman Rockwell, who does those magazine covers.”

“Oh,” she said abruptly, “I thought it was Rockwell Kent,” and turned on her heel and left me!

On the other hand there are sometimes advantages to be drawn from this confusion of mixed or mistaken identities, provided one is not over-scrupulous, which I have unfortunately so far always been. Or perhaps I have been afraid of being found out. One Varnishing Day at the National Academy, an artist (mind you, there is even confusion within the ranks!) was introduced to me. He was very glad to meet me, which was gratifying, until it became apparent that the pleasure arose entirely from the fact that he thought he was freeing his conscience of a one hundred and fifty dollar debt long owing to the author of *N by E* and *Voyaging*. He was explicit on that point, but I think he never got the names straightened out. And I never got the one hundred and fifty dollars, either.

Only a few days ago the following letter arrived in the mail:

My dear Mr. Rockwell:

I shall be very grateful if you will send me your autograph for my collection.

I have enjoyed your N by E greatly and I am very anxious to read your book soon to be published.

And so it has gone on until yesterday when I received a letter from one of *The Colophon's* editors, accompanied by Rockwell Kent's manuscript, and I made the discovery that I had caused him as much trouble as he had ever given me. And now I feel I must tell him that the reverse, as he can see if he reads this, is equally true. Then we shall both feel better.

It is certainly a comment on the nature of fame that two men whose work is at opposite poles in the field of art—Rockwell Kent, National Academician and immortal, a painter of stark and esthetic beauty; and myself, a painter of human interest magazine covers—should be so often confused. I do think, however, that I get a good bit the best of the whole matter in receiving the praise due to Rockwell Kent while he only gets what belongs to me.