

***LOOK HOMEWARD, ANGEL***

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***Free***editorial 

## **TO THE READER**

This is a first book, and in it the author has written of experience which is now far and lost, but which was once part of the fabric of his life. If any reader, therefore, should say that the book is “autobiographical” the writer has no answer for him: it seems to him that all serious work in fiction is autobiographical— that, for instance, a more autobiographical work than “Gulliver’s Travels” cannot easily be imagined.

This note, however, is addressed principally to those persons whom the writer may have known in the period covered by these pages. To these persons, he would say what he believes they understand already: that this book was written in innocence and nakedness of spirit, and that the writer’s main concern was to give fulness, life, and intensity to the actions and people in the book he was creating. Now that it is to be published, he would insist that this book is a fiction, and that he meditated no man’s portrait here.

But we are the sum of all the moments of our lives—all that is ours is in them: we cannot escape or conceal it. If the writer has used the clay of life to make his book, he has only used what all men must, what none can keep from using. Fiction is not fact, but fiction is fact selected and understood, fiction is fact arranged and charged with purpose. Dr. Johnson remarked that a man would turn over half a library to make a single book: in the same way, a novelist may turn over half the people in a town to make a single figure in his novel. This is not the whole method but the writer believes it illustrates the whole method in a book that is written from a middle distance and is without rancour or bitter intention.

## **PART ONE**

A destiny that leads the English to the Dutch is strange enough; but one that leads from Epsom into Pennsylvania, and thence into the hills that shut in Altamont over the proud coral cry of the cock, and the soft stone smile of an angel, is touched by that dark miracle of chance which makes new magic in a dusty world.

Each of us is all the sums he has not counted: subtract us into nakedness and night again, and you shall see begin in Crete four thousand years ago the love that ended yesterday in Texas.

The seed of our destruction will blossom in the desert, the alexin of our cure grows by a mountain rock, and our lives are haunted by a Georgia slattern, because a London cut-purse went unhung. Each moment is the fruit of forty thousand years. The minute-winning days, like flies, buzz home to death, and every moment is a window on all time.

This is a moment:

An Englishman named Gilbert Gaunt, which he later changed to Gant (a concession probably to Yankee phonetics), having come to Baltimore from Bristol in 1837 on a sailing vessel, soon let the profits of a public house which he had purchased roll down his improvident gullet. He wandered westward into Pennsylvania, eking out a dangerous living by matching fighting cocks against the champions of country barnyards, and often escaping after a night spent in a village jail, with his champion dead on the field of battle, without the clink of a coin in his pocket, and sometimes with the print of a farmer's big knuckles on his reckless face. But he always escaped, and coming at length among the Dutch at harvest time he was so touched by the plenty of their land that he cast out his anchors there. Within a year he married a rugged young widow with a tidy farm who like all the other Dutch had been charmed by his air of travel, and his grandiose speech, particularly when he did Hamlet in the manner of the great Edmund Kean. Every one said he should have been an actor.

The Englishman begot children—a daughter and four sons—lived easily and carelessly, and bore patiently the weight of his wife's harsh but honest tongue. The years passed, his bright somewhat staring eyes grew dull and bagged, the tall Englishman walked with a gouty shuffle: one morning when she came to nag him out of sleep she found him dead of an apoplexy. He left five children, a mortgage and—in his strange dark eyes which now stared bright and open—something that had not died: a passionate and obscure hunger for voyages.

So, with this legacy, we leave this Englishman and are concerned hereafter with the heir to whom he bequeathed it, his second son, a boy named Oliver. How this boy stood by the roadside near his mother's farm, and saw the dusty Rebels

march past on their way to Gettysburg, how his cold eyes darkened when he heard the great name of Virginia, and how the year the war had ended, when he was still fifteen, he had walked along a street in Baltimore, and seen within a little shop smooth granite slabs of death, carved lambs and cherubim, and an angel poised upon cold phthisic feet, with a smile of soft stone idiocy—this is a longer tale. But I know that his cold and shallow eyes had darkened with the obscure and passionate hunger that had lived in a dead man's eyes, and that had led from Fenchurch Street past Philadelphia. As the boy looked at the big angel with the carved stipe of lilystalk, a cold and nameless excitement possessed him. The long fingers of his big hands closed. He felt that he wanted, more than anything in the world, to carve delicately with a chisel. He wanted to wreak something dark and unspeakable in him into cold stone. He wanted to carve an angel's head.

Oliver entered the shop and asked a big bearded man with a wooden mallet for a job. He became the stone cutter's apprentice. He worked in that dusty yard five years. He became a stone cutter. When his apprenticeship was over he had become a man.

He never found it. He never learned to carve an angel's head. The dove, the lamb, the smooth joined marble hands of death, and letters fair and fine—but not the angel. And of all the years of waste and loss—the riotous years in Baltimore, of work and savage drunkenness, and the theatre of Booth and Salvini, which had a disastrous effect upon the stone cutter, who memorized each accent of the noble rant, and strode muttering through the streets, with rapid gestures of the enormous talking hands—these are blind steps and gropings of our exile, the painting of our hunger as, remembering speechlessly, we seek the great forgotten language, the lost lane-end into heaven, a stone, a leaf, a door. Where? When?

He never found it, and he reeled down across the continent into the Reconstruction South—a strange wild form of six feet four with cold uneasy eyes, a great blade of nose, and a rolling tide of rhetoric, a preposterous and comic invective, as formalized as classical epithet, which he used seriously, but with a faint uneasy grin around the corners of his thin wailing mouth.

He set up business in Sydney, the little capital city of one of the middle Southern states, lived soberly and industriously under the attentive eye of a folk still raw

with defeat and hostility, and finally, his good name founded and admission won, he married a gaunt tubercular spinstress, ten years his elder, but with a nest egg and an unshakable will to matrimony. Within eighteen months he was a howling maniac again, his little business went smash while his foot stayed on the polished rail, and Cynthia, his wife—whose life, the natives said, he had not helped to prolong—died suddenly one night after a hemorrhage.

So, all was gone again—Cynthia, the shop, the hard-bought praise of soberness, the angel's head—he walked through the streets at dark, yelling his pentameter curse at Rebel ways, and all their indolence; but sick with fear and loss and penitence, he wilted under the town's reproving stare, becoming convinced, as the flesh wasted on his own gaunt frame, that Cynthia's scourge was doing vengeance now on him.

He was only past thirty, but he looked much older. His face was yellow and sunken; the waxen blade of his nose looked like a beak. He had long brown mustaches that hung straight down mournfully.

His tremendous bouts of drinking had wrecked his health. He was thin as a rail and had a cough. He thought of Cynthia now, in the lonely and hostile town, and he became afraid. He thought he had tuberculosis and that he was going to die.

So, alone and lost again, having found neither order nor establishment in the world, and with the earth cut away from his feet, Oliver resumed his aimless drift along the continent. He turned westward toward the great fortress of the hills, knowing that behind them his evil fame would not be known, and hoping that he might find in them isolation, a new life, and recovered health.

The eyes of the gaunt spectre darkened again, as they had in his youth.

All day, under a wet gray sky of October, Oliver rode westward across the mighty state. As he stared mournfully out the window at the great raw land so sparsely tilled by the futile and occasional little farms, which seemed to have made only little grubbing patches in the wilderness, his heart went cold and leaden in him. He thought of the great barns of Pennsylvania, the ripe bending of golden grain, the plenty, the order, the clean thrift of the people. And he thought of how he had set out to get order and position for himself, and of the rioting confusion of his life, the blot and blur of years, and the red waste of his youth.

By God! he thought. I'm getting old! Why here?

The grisly parade of the spectre years trooped through his brain. Suddenly, he saw that his life had been channelled by a series of accidents: a mad Rebel singing of Armageddon, the sound of a bugle on the road, the mule-hoofs of the army, the silly white face of an angel in a dusty shop, a slut's pert wiggle of her hams as she passed by. He had reeled out of warmth and plenty into this barren land: as he stared out the window and saw the fallow unworked earth, the great raw lift of the Piedmont, the muddy red clay roads, and the slattern people gaping at the stations—a lean farmer gangling above his reins, a dawdling negro, a gap-toothed yokel, a hard sallow woman with a grimy baby—the strangeness of destiny stabbed him with fear. How came he here from the clean Dutch thrift of his youth into this vast lost earth of rickets?

The train rattled on over the reeking earth. Rain fell steadily. A brakeman came draftily into the dirty plush coach and emptied a scuttle of coal into the big stove at the end. High empty laughter shook a group of yokels sprawled on two turned seats. The bell tolled mournfully above the clacking wheels. There was a droning interminable wait at a junction-town near the foot-hills. Then the train moved on again across the vast rolling earth.

Dusk came. The huge bulk of the hills was foggily emergent. Small smoky lights went up in the hillside shacks. The train crawled dizzily across high trestles spanning ghostly hawsers of water. Far up, far down, plumed with wisps of smoke, toy cabins stuck to bank and gulch and hillside. The train toiled sinuously up among gouged red cuts with slow labor. As darkness came, Oliver descended at the little town of Old Stockade where the rails ended. The last great wall of the hills lay stark above him. As he left the dreary little station and stared into the greasy lamplight of a country store, Oliver felt that he was crawling, like a great beast, into the circle of those enormous hills to die.

The next morning he resumed his journey by coach. His destination was the little town of Altamont, twenty-four miles away beyond the rim of the great outer wall of the hills. As the horses strained slowly up the mountain road Oliver's spirit lifted a little. It was a gray-golden day in late October, bright and windy. There was a sharp bite and sparkle in the mountain air: the range soared above him, close, immense, clean, and barren. The trees rose gaunt and stark:

they were almost leafless. The sky was full of windy white rags of cloud; a thick blade of mist washed slowly around the rampart of a mountain.

Below him a mountain stream foamed down its rocky bed, and he could see little dots of men laying the track that would coil across the hill toward Altamont. Then the sweating team lipped the gulch of the mountain, and, among soaring and lordly ranges that melted away in purple mist, they began the slow descent toward the high plateau on which the town of Altamont was built.

In the haunting eternity of these mountains, rimmed in their enormous cup, he found sprawled out on its hundred hills and hollows a town of four thousand people.

There were new lands. His heart lifted.

This town of Altamont had been settled soon after the Revolutionary War. It had been a convenient stopping-off place for cattledrovers and farmers in their swing eastward from Tennessee into South Carolina. And, for several decades before the Civil War, it had enjoyed the summer patronage of fashionable people from Charleston and the plantations of the hot South. When Oliver first came to it it had begun to get some reputation not only as a summer resort, but as a sanitarium for tuberculars. Several rich men from the North had established hunting lodges in the hills, and one of them had bought huge areas of mountain land and, with an army of imported architects, carpenters and masons, was planning the greatest country estate in America—something in limestone, with pitched slate roofs, and one hundred and eighty-three rooms. It was modelled on the chateau at Blois. There was also a vast new hotel, a sumptuous wooden barn, rambling comfortably upon the summit of a commanding hill.

But most of the population was still native, recruited from the hill and country people in the surrounding districts. They were Scotch-Irish mountaineers, rugged, provincial, intelligent, and industrious.

Oliver had about twelve hundred dollars saved from the wreckage of Cynthia's estate. During the winter he rented a little shack at one edge of the town's public square, acquired a small stock of marbles, and set up business. But he had little to do at first save to think of the prospect of his death. During the bitter and

lonely winter, while he thought he was dying, the gaunt scarecrow Yankee that flapped muttering through the streets became an object of familiar gossip to the townspeople. All the people at his boarding-house knew that at night he walked his room with great caged strides, and that a long low moan that seemed wrung from his bowels quivered incessantly on his thin lips. But he spoke to no one about it.

And then the marvellous hill Spring came, green-golden, with brief spurting winds, the magic and fragrance of the blossoms, warm gusts of balsam. The great wound in Oliver began to heal. His voice was heard in the land once more, there were purple flashes of the old rhetoric, the ghost of the old eagerness.

One day in April, as with fresh awakened senses, he stood before his shop, watching the flurry of life in the square, Oliver heard behind him the voice of a man who was passing. And that voice, flat, drawling, complacent, touched with sudden light a picture that had lain dead in him for twenty years.

“Hit’s a comin’! Accordin’ to my figgers hit’s due June 11, 1886.”

Oliver turned and saw retreating the burly persuasive figure of the prophet he had last seen vanishing down the dusty road that led to Gettysburg and Armageddon.

“Who is that?” he asked a man.

The man looked and grinned.

“That’s Bacchus Pentland,” he said. “He’s quite a character. There are a lot of his folks around here.”

Oliver wet his great thumb briefly. Then, with a grin, he said:

“Has Armageddon come yet?”

“He’s expecting it any day now,” said the man.

Then Oliver met Eliza. He lay one afternoon in Spring upon the smooth leather sofa of his little office, listening to the bright piping noises in the Square. A restoring peace brooded over his great extended body. He thought of the loamy black earth with its sudden young light of flowers, of the beaded chill of beer, and of the plumbtree’s dropping blossoms. Then he heard the brisk heel-taps of a woman coming down among the marbles, and he got hastily to his feet. He was drawing on his well brushed coat of heavy black just as she entered.

“I tell you what,” said Eliza, pursing her lips in reproachful banter, “I wish I was a man and had nothing to do but lie around all day on a good easy sofa.”

“Good afternoon, madam,” said Oliver with a flourishing bow. “Yes,” he said, as a faint sly grin bent the corners of his thin mouth, “I reckon you’ve caught me taking my constitutional. As a matter of fact I very rarely lie down in the daytime, but I’ve been in bad health for the last year now, and I’m not able to do the work I used to.”

He was silent a moment; his face drooped in an expression of hangdog dejection. “Ah, Lord! I don’t know what’s to become of me!”

“Pshaw!” said Eliza briskly and contemptuously. “There’s nothing wrong with you in my opinion. You’re a big strapping fellow, in the prime of life. Half of it’s only imagination. Most of the time we think we’re sick it’s all in the mind. I remember three years ago I was teaching school in Hominy Township when I was taken down with pneumonia. Nobody ever expected to see me come out of it alive but I got through it somehow; I well remember one day I was sitting down—as the fellow says, I reckon I was convalescin’; the reason I remember is Old Doctor Fletcher had just been and when he went out I saw him shake his head at my cousin Sally. ‘Why Eliza, what on earth,’ she said, just as soon as he had gone, ‘he tells me you’re spitting up blood every time you cough; you’ve got consumption as sure as you live.’ ‘Pshaw,’ I said. I remember I laughed just as big as you please, determined to make a big joke of it all; I just thought to myself, I’m not going to give into it, I’ll fool them all yet; ‘I don’t believe a word of it’ (I said),” she nodded her head smartly at him, and pursed her lips, “and besides, Sally’ (I said) ‘we’ve all got to go some time, and there’s no use worrying about what’s going to happen. It may come tomorrow, or it may come later, but it’s bound to come to all in the end’.”

“Ah Lord!” said Oliver, shaking his head sadly. “You bit the nail on the head that time. A truer word was never spoken.”

Merciful God! he thought, with an anguished inner grin. How long is this to keep up? But she’s a pippin as sure as you’re born. He looked appreciatively at her trim erect figure, noting her milky white skin, her black-brown eyes, with their quaint child’s stare, and her jet black hair drawn back tightly from her high white forehead. She had a curious trick of pursing her lips reflectively before she

spoke; she liked to take her time, and came to the point after interminable divagations down all the lane-ends of memory and overtone, feasting upon the golden pageant of all she had ever said, done, felt, thought, seen, or replied, with egocentric delight. Then, while he looked, she ceased speaking abruptly, put her neat gloved hand to her chin, and stared off with a thoughtful pursed mouth.

“Well,” she said after a moment, “if you’re getting your health back and spend a good part of your time lying around you ought to have something to occupy your mind.” She opened a leather portmanteau she was carrying and produced a visiting card and two fat volumes. “My name,” she said portentously, with slow emphasis, “is Eliza Pentland, and I represent the Larkin Publishing Company.”

She spoke the words proudly, with dignified gusto. Merciful God! A book agent! thought Gant.

“We are offering,” said Eliza, opening a huge yellow book with a fancy design of spears and flags and laurel wreaths, “a book of poems called *Gems of Verse for Hearth and Fireside* as well as Larkin’s *Domestic Doctor and Book of Household Remedies*, giving directions for the cure and prevention of over five hundred diseases.”

“Well,” said Gant, with a faint grin, wetting his big thumb briefly, “I ought to find one that I’ve got out of that.”

“Why, yes,” said Eliza, nodding smartly, “as the fellow says, you can read poetry for the good of your soul and Larkin for the good of your body.”

“I like poetry,” said Gant, thumbing over the pages, and pausing with interest at the section marked *Songs of the Spur and Sabre*. “In my boyhood I could recite it by the hour.”

He bought the books. Eliza packed her samples, and stood up looking sharply and curiously about the dusty little shop.

“Doing any business?” she said.

“Very little,” said Oliver sadly. “Hardly enough to keep body and soul together. I’m a stranger in a strange land.”

“Pshaw!” said Eliza cheerfully. “You ought to get out and meet more people. You need something to take your mind off yourself. If I were you, I’d pitch right in and take an interest in the town’s progress. We’ve got everything here it takes to make a big town—scenery, climate, and natural resources, and we all ought to

work together. If I had a few thousand dollars I know what I'd do,"—she winked smartly at him, and began to speak with a curiously masculine gesture of the hand—forefinger extended, fist loosely clenched. "Do you see this corner here—the one you're on? It'll double in value in the next few years. Now, here!" she gestured before her with the loose masculine gesture. "They're going to run a street through there some day as sure as you live. And when they do—" she pursed her lips reflectively, "that property is going to be worth money."

She continued to talk about property with a strange meditative hunger. The town seemed to be an enormous blueprint to her: her head was stuffed uncannily with figures and estimates—who owned a lot, who sold it, the sale-price, the real value, the future value, first and second mortgages, and so on. When she had finished, Oliver said with the emphasis of strong aversion, thinking of Sydney:

"I hope I never own another piece of property as long as I live— save a house to live in. It is nothing but a curse and a care, and the tax-collector gets it all in the end."

Eliza looked at him with a startled expression, as if he had uttered a damnable heresy.

"Why, say! That's no way to talk!" she said. "You want to lay something by for a rainy day, don't you?"

"I'm having my rainy day now," he said gloomily. "All the property I need is eight feet of earth to be buried in."

Then, talking more cheerfully, he walked with her to the door of the shop, and watched her as she marched primly away across the square, holding her skirts at the curbs with ladylike nicety. Then he turned back among his marbles again with a stirring in him of a joy he thought he had lost forever.

The Pentland family, of which Eliza was a member, was one of the strangest tribes that ever came out of the hills. It had no clear title to the name of Pentland: a Scotch-Englishman of that name, who was a mining engineer, the grandfather of the present head of the family, had come into the hills after the Revolution, looking for copper, and lived there for several years, begetting several children by one of the pioneer women. When he disappeared the woman took for herself and her children the name of Pentland.

The present chieftain of the tribe was Eliza's father, the brother of the prophet Bacchus, Major Thomas Pentland. Another brother had been killed during the Seven Days. Major Pentland's military title was honestly if inconspicuously earned. While Bacchus, who never rose above the rank of Corporal, was blistering his hard hands at Shiloh, the Major, as commander of two companies of Home Volunteers, was guarding the stronghold of the native hills. This stronghold was never threatened until the closing days of the war, when the Volunteers, ambuscaded behind convenient trees and rocks, fired three volleys into a detachment of Sherman's stragglers, and quietly dispersed to the defense of their attendant wives and children.

The Pentland family was as old as any in the community, but it had always been poor, and had made few pretenses to gentility. By marriage, and by intermarriage among its own kinsmen, it could boast of some connection with the great, of some insanity, and a modicum of idiocy. But because of its obvious superiority, in intelligence and fibre, to most of the mountain people it held a position of solid respect among them.

The Pentlands bore a strong clan-marking. Like most rich personalities in strange families their powerful group-stamp became more impressive because of their differences. They had broad powerful noses, with fleshy deeply scalloped wings, sensual mouths, extraordinarily mixed of delicacy and coarseness, which in the process of thinking they convolved with astonishing flexibility, broad intelligent foreheads, and deep flat cheeks, a trifle hollowed. The men were generally ruddy of face, and their typical stature was meaty, strong, and of middling height, although it varied into gangling cadaverousness.

Major Thomas Pentland was the father of a numerous family of which Eliza was the only surviving girl. A younger sister had died a few years before of a disease which the family identified sorrowfully as "poor Jane's scrofula." There were six boys: Henry, the oldest, was now thirty, Will was twenty-six, Jim was twenty-two, and Thaddeus, Elmer and Greeley were, in the order named, eighteen, fifteen, and eleven. Eliza was twenty-four.

The four oldest children, Henry, Will, Eliza, and Jim, had passed their childhood in the years following the war. The poverty and privation of these years had been so terrible that none of them ever spoke of it now, but the bitter steel had sheared into their hearts, leaving scars that would not heal.

The effect of these years upon the oldest children was to develop in them an insane niggardliness, an insatiate love of property, and a desire to escape from the Major's household as quickly as possible.

"Father," Eliza had said with ladylike dignity, as she led Oliver for the first time into the sitting-room of the cottage, "I want you to meet Mr. Gant."

Major Pentland rose slowly from his rocker by the fire, folded a large knife, and put the apple he had been peeling on the mantel. Bacchus looked up benevolently from a whittled stick, and Will, glancing up from his stubby nails which he was paring as usual, greeted the visitor with a birdlike nod and wink. The men amused themselves constantly with pocket knives.

Major Pentland advanced slowly toward Gant. He was a stocky fleshy man in the middle fifties, with a ruddy face, a patriarchal beard, and the thick complacent features of his tribe.

"It's W. O. Gant, isn't it?" he asked in a drawling unctuous voice.

"Yes," said Oliver, "that's right."

"From what Eliza's been telling me about you," said the Major, giving the signal to his audience, "I was going to say it ought to be L. E. Gant."

The room sounded with the fat pleased laughter of the Pentlands.

"Whew!" cried Eliza, putting her hand to the wing of her broad nose. "I'll vow, father! You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

Gant grinned with a thin false painting of mirth.

The miserable old scoundrel, he thought. He's had that one bottled up for a week.

"You've met Will before," said Eliza.

"Both before and aft," said Will with a smart wink.

When their laughter had died down, Eliza said: "And this—as the fellow says—is Uncle Bacchus."

"Yes, sir," said Bacchus beaming, "as large as life an' twice as sassy."

"They call him Back-us everywhere else," said Will, including them all in a brisk wink, "but here in the family we call him Behind-us."

"I suppose," said Major Pentland deliberately, "that you've served on a great many juries?"

“No,” said Oliver, determined to endure the worst now with a frozen grin.  
“Why?”

“Because,” said the Major looking around again, “I thought you were a fellow who’d done a lot of COURTIN’.”

Then, amid their laughter, the door opened, and several of the others came in—Eliza’s mother, a plain worn Scotchwoman, and Jim, a ruddy porcine young fellow, his father’s beardless twin, and Thaddeus, mild, ruddy, brown of hair and eye, bovine, and finally Greeley, the youngest, a boy with lapping idiot grins, full of strange squealing noises at which they laughed. He was eleven, degenerate, weak, scrofulous, but his white moist hands could draw from a violin music that had in it something unearthly and untaught.

And as they sat there in the hot little room with its warm odor of mellowing apples, the vast winds howled down from the hills, there was a roaring in the pines, remote and demented, the bare boughs clashed. And as they peeled, or pared, or whittled, their talk slid from its rude jocularities to death and burial: they drawled monotonously, with evil hunger, their gossip of destiny, and of men but newly lain in the earth. And as their talk wore on, and Gant heard the spectre moan of the wind, he was entombed in loss and darkness, and his soul plunged downward in the pit of night, for he saw that he must die a stranger—that all, all but these triumphant Pentlands, who banqueted on death—must die. And like a man who is perishing in the polar night, he thought of the rich meadows of his youth: the corn, the plum tree, and ripe grain. Why here? O lost!

## **PART TWO**

The plum-tree, black and brittle, rocks stiffly in winter wind. Her million little twigs are frozen in spears of ice. But in the Spring, lithe and heavy, she will bend under her great load of fruit and blossoms. She will grow young again. Red plums will ripen, will be shaken desperately upon the tiny stems. They will fall bursted on the loamy warm wet earth; when the wind blows in the orchard the air will be filled with dropping plums; the night will be filled with the sound of their dropping, and a great tree of birds will sing, burgeoning, blossoming richly, filling the air also with warm-throated plum-dropping bird-notes.

The harsh hill-earth has moistly thawed and softened, rich soaking rain falls, fresh-bladed tender grass like soft hair growing sparsely streaks the land.

My Brother Ben's face, thought Eugene, is like a piece of slightly yellow ivory; his high white head is knotted fiercely by his old man's scowl; his mouth is like a knife, his smile the flicker of light across a blade. His face is like a blade, and a knife, and a flicker of light: it is delicate and fierce, and scowls beautifully forever, and when he fastens his hard white fingers and his scowling eyes upon a thing he wants to fix, he sniffs with sharp and private concentration through his long pointed nose. Thus women, looking, feel a well of tenderness for his pointed, bumpy, always scowling face: his hair shines like that of a young boy—it is crinkled and crisp as lettuce.

Into the April night-and-morning streets goes Ben. The night is brightly pricked with cool and tender stars. The orchard stirs leafily in the short fresh wind. Ben prowls softly out of the sleeping house. His thin bright face is dark within the orchard. There is a smell of nicotine and shoe leather under the young blossoms. His pigeon-toed tan shoes ring musically up the empty streets. Lazily slaps the water in the fountain on the Square; all the firemen are asleep—but Big Bill Merrick, the brave cop, hog-jowled and red, leans swinishly over mince-pie and coffee in Uneeda Lunch. The warm good ink-smell beats in rich waves into the street: a whistling train howls off into the Springtime South.

By the cool orchards in the dark the paper-carriers go. The copper legs of negresses in their dark dens stir. The creek brawls cleanly.

A new one, Number 6, heard boys speak of Foxy:

“Who's Foxy?” asked Number 6.

“Foxy's a bastard, Number 6. Don't let him catch you.”

“The bastard caught me three times last week. In the Greek's every time. Why can't they let us eat?”

Number 3 thought of Friday morning—he had the Niggertown route.

“How many—3?”

“One hundred and sixty-two.”

“How many Dead Heads you got, son?” said Mr. Randall cynically. “Do you ever try to collect from them?” he added, thumbing through the book.

“He takes it out in Poon-Tang,” said Foxy, grinning, “A week's subscription free for a dose.”

“What you got to say about it?” asked Number 3 belligerently. “You’ve been knocking down on them for six years.”

“Jazz ’em all if you like,” said Randall, “but get the money. Ben, I want you to go round with him Saturday.”

Ben laughed silently and cynically into the air:

“Oh, my God!” he said. “Do you expect me to check up on the little thug? He’s been knocking down on you for the last six months.”

“All right! All right!” said Randall, annoyed. “That’s what I want you to find out.”

“Oh, for God’s sake, Randall,” said Ben contemptuously, “he’s got niggers on that book who’ve been dead for five years. That’s what you get for keeping every little crook that comes along.”

“If you don’t get a move on, 3, I’ll give your route to another boy,” said Randall.

“Hell, get another boy. I don’t care,” said Number 3, toughly.

“Oh, for God’s sake! Listen to this, won’t you?” said Ben, laughing thinly and nodding to his angel, indicating Number 3 with a scowling jerk of his head.

“Yes, listen to this, won’t you! That’s what I said,” Number 3 answered pugnaciously.

“All right, little boy. Run on and deliver your papers now, before you get hurt,” said Ben, turning his scowl quietly upon him and looking at him blackly for a moment. “Ah, you little crook,” he said with profound loathing, “I have a kid brother who’s worth six like you.”

Spring lay strewn lightly like a fragrant gauzy scarf upon the earth; the night was a cool bowl of lilac darkness, filled with fresh orchard scents.

Gant slept heavily, rattling the loose window-sash with deep rasping snores; with short explosive thunders, ripping the lilac night, 36 began to climb Saluda. She bucked helplessly like a goat, her wheels spun furiously on the rails, Tom Cline stared seriously down into the milky boiling creek, and waited. She slipped, spun, held, ploughed slowly up, like a straining mule, into the dark. Content, he leaned far out the cab and looked: the starlight glimmered faintly on the rails. He ate a thick sandwich of cold buttered fried meat, tearing it raggedly and glueily staining it under his big black fingers. There was a smell of dogwood and laurel in the cool slow passage of the world. The cars clanked humpily

across the spur; the switchman, bathed murkily in the hot yellow light of his perilous bank-edged hut, stood sullen at the switch.

Arms spread upon his cab-sill, chewing thoughtfully, Tom, goggle-eyed, looked carefully down at him. They had never spoken. Then in silence he turned and took the milk-bottle, half full of cold coffee, that his fireman offered him. He washed his food down with the large easy gurgling swallows of a bishop.

At 18 Valley Street, the red shack-porch, slime-scummed with a greasy salve of yellow negroid mud, quaked rottenly. Number 3's square-folded ink-fresh paper struck flat against the door, falling on its edge stiffly to the porch like a block of light wood. Within, May Corpening stirred nakedly, muttering as if doped and moving her heavy copper legs, in the fetid bed-warmth, with the slow noise of silk.

Harry Tugman lit a Camel, drawing the smoke deep into his powerful ink-stained lungs as he watched the press run down. His bare arms were heavy-muscled as his presses. He dropped comfortably into his pliant creaking chair and tilted back, casually scanning the warm pungent sheet. Luxurious smoke steamed slowly from his nostrils. He cast the sheet away.

"Christ!" he said. "What a makeup!"

Ben came down stairs, moody, scowling, and humped over toward the ice-box.

"For God's sake, Mac," he called out irritably to the Make-up Man, as he scowled under the lifted lid, "don't you ever keep anything except root-beer and sour milk?"

"What do you want, for Christ's sake?"

"I'd like to get a Coca-Cola once in a while. You know," he said bitingly, "Old Man Candler down in Atlanta is still making it."

Harry Tugman cast his cigarette away.

"They haven't got the news up here yet, Ben," said he. "You'll have to wait till the excitement over Lee's surrender has died down. Come on," he said abruptly, getting up, "let's go over to the Greasy Spoon."

He thrust his big head down into the deep well of the sink, letting the lukewarm water sluice refreshingly over his broad neck and blue-white sallow night-time face, strong, tough, and humorous. He soaped his hands with thick slathering suds, his muscles twisting slowly like big snakes.

He sang in his powerful quartette baritone:

“Beware! Beware! Beware!

Many brave hearts lie asleep in the deep,

So beware! Bee-WARE!”

Comfortably they rested in the warm completed exhaustion of the quiet press-room: upstairs the offices, bathed in green-yellow light, sprawled like men relaxed after work. The boys had gone to their routes. The place seemed to breathe slowly and wearily. The dawn-sweet air washed coolly over their faces. The sky was faintly pearled at the horizon.

Strangely, in sharp broken fragments, life awoke in the lilac darkness. Clop-clopping slowly on the ringing street, Number Six, Mrs. Goulderbilt’s powerful brown mare, drew inevitably on the bottle-clinking cream-yellow wagon, racked to the top with creamy extra-heavy high-priced milk. The driver was a fresh-skinned young countryman, richly odorous with the smell of fresh sweat and milk. Eight miles, through the starlit dewy fields and forests of Biltburn, under the high brick English lodgegate, they had come into the town.

At the Pisgah Hotel, opposite the station, the last door clicked softly; the stealthy footfalls of the night ceased; Miss Bernice Redmond gave the negro porter eight one-dollar bills and went definitely to bed with the request that she be not disturbed until one o’clock; a shifting engine slatted noisily about in the yard; past the Biltburn crossing Tom Cline whistled with even, mournful respirations. By this time Number 3 had delivered 142 of his papers; he had only to ascend the rickety wooden stairs of the Eagle Crescent bank to finish the eight houses of the Crescent. He looked anxiously across the hill-and-dale-sprawled negro settlement to the eastern rim: behind Birdseye Gap the sky was pearl-gray—the stars looked drowned. Not much time left, he thought. He had a blond meaty face, pale-colored and covered thickly with young blond hair. His jaw was long and fleshy: it sloped backward. He ran his tongue along his full cracked underlip.

A 1910 model, four-cylinder, seven-passenger Hudson, with mounting steady roar, shot drunkenly out from the station curbing, lurched into the level negro-sleeping stretch of South End Avenue, where the firemen had their tournaments, and zipped townward doing almost fifty. The station quietly

stirred in its sleep: there were faint reverberating noises under the empty sheds; brisk hammer-taps upon car wheels, metallic heel-clicks in the tiled waiting-room. Sleepily a negress slopped water on the tiles, with languid sullen movement pushing a gray sopping rag around the floor.

It was now five-thirty. Ben had gone out of the house into the orchard at three twenty-five. In another forty minutes Gant would waken, dress, and build the morning fires.

“Ben,” said Harry Tugman, as they walked out of the relaxed office, “if Jimmy Dean comes messing around my press-room again they can get some one else to print their lousy sheet. What the hell! I can get a job on the Atlanta Constitution whenever I want it.”

“Did he come down to-night?” asked Ben.

“Yes,” said Harry Tugman, “and he got out again. I told him to take his little tail upstairs.”

“Oh, for God’s sake!” said Ben. “What did he say?”

“He said, ‘I’M the editor! I’m the editor of this paper!’ ‘I don’t give a good goddam,’ I said, ‘if you’re the President’s snotrag. If you want any paper today keep out of the pressroom.’ And believe me, he went!”

In cool blue-pearl darkness they rounded the end of the Post Office and cut diagonally across the street to Uneeda Lunch No. 3. It was a small beanery, twelve feet wide, wedged in between an optician’s and a Greek shoe parlor.

Within, Dr. Hugh McGuire sat on a stool patiently impaling kidney beans, one at a time, upon the prongs of his fork. A strong odor of corn whisky soaked the air about him. His thick skilful butcher’s hands, hairy on the backs, gripped the fork numbly. His heavy-jowled face was blotted by large brown patches. He turned round and stared owlshly as Ben entered, fixing the wavering glare of his bulbous red eyes finally upon him.

“Hello, son,” he said in his barking kindly voice, “what can I do for you?”

“Oh, for God’s sake,” said Ben laughing contemptuously, and jerking his head toward Tugman. “Listen to this, won’t you?”

They sat down at the lower end. At this moment, Horse Hines, the undertaker, entered, producing, although he was not a thin man, the effect of a skeleton clad

in a black frock coat. His long lantern mouth split horsily in a professional smile displaying big horse teeth in his white heavily starched face.

“Gentlemen, gentlemen,” he said for no apparent reason, rubbing his lean hands briskly as if it was cold. His palm-flesh rattled together like old bones.

Coker, the Lung Shark, who had not ceased to regard McGuire’s bean-hunt with sardonic interest, now took the long cigar out of his devil’s head and held it between his stained fingers as he tapped his companion.

“Let’s get out,” he grinned quietly, nodding toward Horse Hines. “It will look bad if we’re seen together here.”

“Good morning, Ben,” said Horse Hines, sitting down below him. “Are all the folks well?” he added, softly.

Sideways Ben looked at him scowling, then jerked his head back to the counterman, with a fast bitter flicker of his lips.

“Doctor,” said Harry Tugman with servile medicine-man respect, “what do you charge to operate?”

“Operate what?” McGuire barked presently, having pronged a kidney bean.

“Why—appendicitis,” said Harry Tugman, for it was all he could think of.

“Three hundred dollars when we go into the belly,” said McGuire. He coughed chokingly to the side.

“You’re drowning in your own secretions,” said Coker with his yellow grin. “Like Old Lady Sladen.”

“My God!” said Harry Tugman, thinking jealously of lost news. “When did she go?”

“To-night,” said Coker.

“God, I’m sorry to hear that,” said Harry Tugman, greatly relieved.

“I’ve just finished laying the old lady out,” said Horse Hines gently. “A bundle of skin and bones.” He sighed regretfully, and for a moment his boiled eye moistened.

Ben turned his scowling head around with an expression of nausea.

“Joe,” said Horse Hines with merry professionalism, “give me a mug of that embalming fluid.” He thrust his horsehead indicatively at the coffee urn.

“Oh, for God’s sake,” Ben muttered in terms of loathing. “Do you ever wash your damned hands before you come in here?” he burst out irritably.

Ben was twenty. Men did not think of his age.

“Would you like some cold pork, son?” said Coker, with his yellow malicious grin.

Ben made a retching noise in his throat, and put his hand upon his stomach.

“What’s the matter, Ben?” Harry Tugman laughed heavily and struck him on the back.

Ben got off the stool, took his coffee mug and the piece of tanned mince pie he had ordered, and moved to the other side of Harry Tugman. Every one laughed. Then he jerked his head toward McGuire with a quick frown.

“By God, Tug,” he said. “They’ve got us cornered.”

“Listen to him,” said McGuire to Coker. “A chip off the old block, isn’t he? I brought that boy into the world, saw him through typhoid, got the old man over seven hundred drunks, and I’ve been called eighteen different kinds of son of a bitch for my pains ever since. But let one of ’em get a belly ache,” he added proudly, “and you’ll see how quick they come running to me. Isn’t that right, Ben?” he said, turning to him.

“Oh, listen to this!” said Ben, laughing irritably and burying his peaked face in his coffee mug. His bitter savor filled the place with life, with tenderness, with beauty. They looked on him with drunken, kindly eyes—at his gray scornful face and the lonely demon flicker of his smile.

“And I tell you something else,” said McGuire, ponderously wheeling around on Coker, “if one of them’s got to be cut open, see who gets the job. What about it, Ben?” he asked.

“By God, if you ever cut me open, McGuire,” said Ben, “I’m going to be damned sure you can walk straight before you do.”

“Come on, Hugh,” said Coker, prodding McGuire under his shoulder. “Stop chasing those beans around the plate. Crawl off or fall off that damned stool—I don’t care which.”

McGuire, drunkenly lost in reverie, stared witlessly down at his bean plate and sighed.

“Come on, you damned fool,” said Coker, getting up, “you’ve got to operate in forty-five minutes.”

“Oh, for God’s sake,” said Ben, lifting his face from the stained mug, “who’s the victim? I’ll send flowers.”

“. . . all of us sooner or later,” McGuire mumbled puffily through his puff-lips. “Rich and poor alike. Here today and gone tomorrow. Doesn’t matter . . . doesn’t matter at all.”

“In heaven’s name,” Ben burst out irritably to Coker. “Are you going to let him operate like that? Why don’t you shoot them instead?”

Coker plucked the cigar from his long malarial grinning face:

“Why, he’s just getting hot, son,” said he.

Nacreous pearl light swam faintly about the hem of the lilac darkness; the edges of light and darkness were stitched upon the hills. Morning moved like a pearl-gray tide across the fields and up the hill-flanks, flowing rapidly down into the soluble dark.

At the curb now, young Dr. Jefferson Spaugh brought his Buick roadster to a halt, and got out, foppishly drawing off his gloves and flicking the silk lapels of his dinner jacket. His face, whisky-red, was highboned and handsome; his mouth was straightlipped, cruel, and sensual. An inherited aura of mountain-cornfield sweat hung scentlessly but telepathically about him; he was a smartened-up mountaineer with country-club and University of Pennsylvania glossings. Four years in Philly change a man.

Thrusting his gloves carelessly into his coat, he entered. McGuire slid bearishly off his stool and gazed him into focus. Then he made beckoning round-arm gestures with his fat hands.

“Look at it, will you,” he said. “Does any one know what it is?”

“It’s Percy,” said Coker. “You know Percy Van der Gould, don’t you?”

“I’ve been dancing all night at the Hilliards,” said Spaugh elegantly. “Damn! These new patent-leather pumps have ruined my feet.” He sat upon a stool, and elegantly displayed his large country feet, indecently broad and angular in the shoes.

“What’s he been doing?” said McGuire doubtfully, turning to Coker for enlightenment.

“He’s been dancing all night at the Hilliards,” said Coker in a mincing voice.

McGuire shielded his bloated face coyly with his hand.

“O crush me!” he said, “I’m a grape! Dancing at the Hilliards, were you, you damned Mountain Grill. You’ve been on a Poon–Tang Picnic in Niggertown. You can’t load that bunk on us.”

Bull-lunged, their laughter filled the nacreous dawn.

“Patent-leather pumps!” said McGuire. “Hurt his feet. By God, Coker, the first time he came to town ten years ago he’d never been carried above the knees. They had to throw him down to put shoes on him.”

Ben laughed thinly to the Angel.

“A couple of slices of buttered toast, if you please, not too brown,” said Spaugh delicately to the counterman.

“A mess of hog chitlings and sorghum, you mean, you bastard. You were brought up on salt pork and cornbread.”

“We’re getting too low and coarse for him, Hugh,” said Coker. “Now that he’s got drunk with some of the best families, he’s in great demand socially. He’s so highly thought of that he’s become the official midwife to all pregnant virgins.”

“Yes,” said McGuire, “he’s their friend. He helps them out. He not only helps them out, he helps them in again.”

“What’s wrong with that?” said Spaugh. “We ought to keep it in the family, oughtn’t we?”

Their laughter howled out into the tender dawn.

“This conversation is getting too rough for me,” said Horse Hines banteringly as he got off his stool.

“Shake hands with Coker before you go, Horse,” said McGuire. “He’s the best friend you’ve ever had. You ought to give him royalties.”

The light that filled the world now was soft and otherworldly like the light that fills the sea-floors of Catalina where the great fish swim. Flatfootedly, with kidney-aching back, Patrolman Leslie Roberts all unbuttoned slouched through the submarine pearl light and paused, gently agitating his club behind him, as he turned his hollow liverish face toward the open door.

“Here’s your patient,” said Coker softly, “the Constipated Cop.”

Aloud, with great cordiality, they all said: "How are you, Les?"

"Oh, totable, totable," said the policeman mournfully. As dragged as his mustaches, he passed on, hocking into the gutter a slimy gob of phlegm.

"Well, good morning, gentlemen," said Horse Hines, making to go.

"Remember what I told you, Horse. Be good to Coker, your best friend." McGuire jerked a thumb toward Coker.

Beneath his thin joviality Horse Hines was hurt.

"I do remember," said the undertaker gravely. "We are both members of honorable professions: in the hour of death when the storm-tossed ship puts into its haven of rest, we are the trustees of the Almighty."

"Why, Horse!" Coker exclaimed, "this is eloquence!"

"The sacred rites of closing the eyes, of composing the limbs, and of preparing for burial the lifeless repository of the departed soul is our holy mission; it is for us, the living, to pour balm upon the broken heart of Grief, to soothe the widow's ache, to brush away the orphan's tears; it is for us, the living, to highly resolve that—"

"—Government of the people, for the people, and by the people," said Hugh McGuire.

"Yes, Horse," said Coker, "you are right. I'm touched. And what's more, we do it all for nothing. At least," he added virtuously, "I never charge for soothing the widow's ache."

"What about embalming the broken heart of Grief?" asked McGuire.

"I said BALM," Horse Hines remarked coldly.

"Stay, Horse," said Harry Tugman, who had listened with great interest, "didn't you make a speech with all that in it last summer at the Undertakers' Convention?"

"What's true then is true now," said Horse Hines bitterly, as he left the place.

"Jesus!" said Harry Tugman, "we've got him good and sore. I thought I'd bust a gut, doc, when you pulled that one about embalming the broken heart of Grief."

At this moment Dr. Ravenel brought his Hudson to a halt across the street before the Post Office, and walked over rapidly, drawing his gauntlets off. He was bareheaded; his silver aristocratic hair was thinly rumped; his surgical gray

eyes probed restlessly below the thick lenses of his spectacles. He had a famous, calm, deeply concerned face, shaven, ashen, lean, lit gravely now and then by humor.

“Oh Christ!” said Coker. “Here comes Teacher!”

“Good morning, Hugh,” he said as he entered. “Are you going into training again for the bughouse?”

“Look who’s here!” McGuire roared hospitably. “Dead-eye Dick, the literary sawbones, whose private collection of gallstones is the finest in the world. When d’jew get back, son?”

“Just in time, it seems,” said Ravenel, holding a cigarette cleanly between his long surgical fingers. He looked at his watch. “I believe you have a little engagement at the Ravenel hospital in about half an hour. Is that right?”

“By God, Dick, you’re always right,” McGuire yelled enthusiastically. “What’d you tell ’em up there, boy?”

“I told them,” said Dick Ravenel, whose affection was like a flower that grew behind a wall, “that the best surgeon in America when he was sober was a lousy bum named Hugh McGuire who was always drunk.”

“Now wait, wait. Hold on a minute!” said McGuire, holding up his thick hand. “I protest, Dick. You meant well, son, but you got that mixed up. You mean the best surgeon in America when he’s not sober.”

“Did you read one of your papers?” said Coker.

“Yes,” said Dick Ravenel. “I read one on carcinoma of the liver.”

“How about one on pyorrhea of the toe-nails?” said McGuire. “Did you read that one?”

Harry Tugman laughed heavily, not wholly knowing why. McGuire belched into the silence loudly and was witlessly adrift for a moment.

“Literature, literature, Dick,” he returned portentously. “It’s been the ruin of many a good surgeon. You read too much, Dick. Yon Cassius hath a lean and hungry look. You know too much. The letter killeth the spirit, you know. Me— Dick, did you ever know me to take anything out that I didn’t put back? Anyway, don’t I always leave ’em something to go on with? I’m no scholar, Dick. I’ve never had your advantages. I’m a self-made butcher. I’m a carpenter, Dick. I’m an interior decorator. I’m a mechanic, a plumber, an electrician, a butcher, a

tailor, a jeweller. I'm a jewel, a gem, a diamond in the rough, Dick. I'm a practical man. I take out their works, spit upon them, trim off the dirty edges, and send them on their way again. I economize, Dick; I throw away everything I can't use, and use everything I throw away. Who made the Pope a tailbone from his knuckle? Who made the dog howl? Aha— that's why the governor looks so young. We are filled up with useless machinery, Dick. Efficiency, economy, power! Have you a Little Fairy in your Home? You haven't! Then let the Gold Dust Twins do the work! Ask Ben—he knows!"

"O my God!" laughed Ben thinly, "listen to that, won't you?"

Two doors below, directly before the Post Office, Pete Mascari rolled upward with corrugated thunder the shutters of his fruit shop. The pearl light fell coolly upon the fruity architecture, on the pyramided masonry of spit-bright wine-saps, the thin sharp yellow of the Florida oranges, the purple Tokays, sawdust-bedded. There was a stale fruity odor from the shop of ripening bananas, crated apples, and the acrid tang of powder; the windows are filled with Roman candles, crossed rockets, pinwheels, squat green Happy Hooligans, and multilating Jack Johnsons, red cannoncrackers, and tiny acrid packets of crackling spattering firecrackers. Light fell a moment on the ashen corpsiness of his face and on the liquid Sicilian poison of his eyes.

"Don' pincha da grape. Pinch da banan'!"

A street-car, toy-green with new Spring paint, went squareward.

"Dick," said McGuire more soberly, "take the job, if you like."

Ravenel shook his head.

"I'll stand by," said he. "I won't operate. I'm afraid of one like this. It's your job, drunk or sober."

"Removing a tumor from a woman, ain't you?" said Coker.

"No," said Dick Ravenel, "removing a woman from a tumor."

"Bet you it weighs fifty pounds, if it weighs an ounce," said McGuire with sudden professional interest.

Dick Ravenel winced ever so slightly. A cool spurt of young wind, clean as a kid, flowed by him. McGuire's meaty shoulders recoiled burlily as if from the cold shock of water. He seemed to waken.

“I’d like a bath,” he said to Dick Ravenel, “and a shave.” He rubbed his hand across his blotched hairy face.

“You can use my room, Hugh, at the hotel,” said Jeff Spaugh, looking at Ravenel somewhat eagerly.

“I’ll use the hospital,” he said.

“You’ll just have time,” said Ravenel.

“In God’s name, let’s get a start on,” he cried impatiently.

“Did you see Kelly do this one at Hopkins?” asked McGuire.

“Yes,” said Dick Ravenel, “after a very long prayer. That’s to give power to his elbow. The patient died.”

“Damn the prayers!” said McGuire. “They won’t do much good to this one. She called me a low-down lickered-up whisky-drinking bastard last night: if she still feels like that she’ll get well.”

“These mountain women take a lot of killing,” said Jeff Spaugh sagely.

“Do you want to come along?” McGuire asked Coker.

“No, thanks. I’m getting some sleep,” he answered. “The old girl took a hell of a time. I thought she’d never get through dying.”

They started to go.

“Ben,” said McGuire, with a return to his former manner, “tell the Old Man I’ll beat hell out of him if he doesn’t give Helen a rest. Is he staying sober?”

“In heaven’s name, McGuire, how should I know?” Ben burst out irritably. “Do you think that’s all I’ve got to do—watching your licker-heads?”

“That’s a great girl, boy,” said McGuire sentimentally. “One in a million.”

“Hugh, for God’s sake, come on,” cried Dick Ravenel.

The four medical men went out into the pearl light. The town emerged from the lilac darkness with a washed renascent cleanliness. All the world seemed as young as Spring. McGuire walked across to Ravenel’s car, and sank comfortably with a sense of invigoration into the cool leathers. Jeff Spaugh plunged off violently with a ripping explosion of his engine and a cavalier wave of his hand.

Admiringly Harry Tugman’s face turned to the slumped burly figure of Hugh McGuire.

“By God!” he boasted, “I bet he does the damnedest piece of operating you ever heard of.”

“Why, hell,” said the counterman loyally, “he ain’t worth a damn until he’s got a quart of corn licker under his belt. Give him a few drinks and he’ll cut off your damned head and put it on again without your knowing it.”

As Jeff Spough roared off Harry Tugman said jealously: “Look at that bastard. Mr. Vanderbilt. He thinks he’s hell, don’t he? A big pile of bull. Ben, do you reckon he was really out at the Hilliards to-night?”

“Oh for God’s sake,” said Ben irritably, “how the hell should I know! What difference does it make?” he added furiously.

“I guess Little Maudie will fill up the column tomorrow with some of her crap,” said Harry Tugman. “‘The Younger Set,’ she calls it! Christ! It goes all the way from every little bitch old enough to wear drawers, to Old Man Redmond. If Saul Gudger belongs to the Younger Set, Ben, you and I are still in the third grade. Why, hell, yes,” he said with an air of conviction to the grinning counterman, “he was bald as a pig’s knuckle when the Spanish American War broke out.”

The counterman laughed.

Foaming with brilliant slapdash improvisation Harry Tugman declaimed:

“Members of the Younger Set were charmingly entertained last night at a dinner dance given at Snotwood, the beautiful residence of Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Firkins, in honor of their youngest daughter, Gladys, who made her debut this season. Mr. and Mrs. Firkins, accompanied by their daughter, greeted each of the arriving guests at the threshold in a manner reviving the finest old traditions of Southern aristocracy, while Mrs. Firkins’ accomplished sister, Miss Catherine Hipkiss, affectionately known to members of the local younger set as Roaring Kate, supervised the checking of overcoats, evening wraps, jock-straps, and jewelry.

“Dinner was served promptly at eight o’clock, followed by coffee and Pluto Water at eight forty-five. A delicious nine-course collation had been prepared by Artaxerxes Papadopolos, the well-known confectioner and caterer, and proprietor of the Bijou Café for Ladies and Gents.

“After first-aid and a thorough medical examination by Dr. Jefferson Reginald Alfonso Spaugh, the popular GIN-ecologist, the guests adjourned to the Ball Room where dance music was provided by Zeke Buckner’s Upper Hominy Stringed Quartette, Mr. Buckner himself officiating at the trap drum and tambourine.

“Among those dancing were the Misses Aline Titsworth, Lena Ginster, Ophelia Legg, Gladys Firkins, Beatrice Slutsky, Mary Whitesides, Helen Shockett, and Lofta Barnes.

“Also the Messrs. I. C. Bottom, U. B. Freely, R. U. Reddy, O. I. Lovett, Cummings Strong, Sansom Horney, Preston Updyke, Dows Wicket, Pettigrew Biggs, Otis Goode, and J. Broad Stem.”

Ben laughed noiselessly, and bent his pointed face into the mug again. Then, he stretched his thin arms out, extending his body sensually upward, and forcing out in a wide yawn the night-time accumulation of weariness, boredom, and disgust.

“Oh-h-h-h my God!”

Virginal sunlight crept into the street in young moteless shafts. At this moment Gant awoke.

He lay quietly on his back for a moment in the pleasant yellow-shaded dusk of the sitting-room, listening to the rippling flutiness of the live piping birdy morning. He yawned cavernously and thrust his right hand scratching into the dense hairthicket of his breast.

The fast cackle-cluck of sensual hens. Come and rob us. All through the night for you, master. Rich protesting yielding voices of Jewesses. Do it, don’t it. Break an egg in them.

Sleepless, straight, alert, the counterpane moulded over his gaunt legs, he listened to the protesting invitations of the hens.

From the warm dust, shaking their fat feathered bodies, protesting but satisfied they staggered up. For me. The earth too and the vine. The moist new earth cleaving like cut pork from the plough. Or like water from a ship. The spongy sod spaded cleanly and rolled back like flesh. Or the earth loosened and hoed gently around the roots of the cherry trees. The earth receives my seed. For me the great lettuces. Spongy and full of sap now like a woman. The thick

grapevine—in August the heavy clustered grapes— How there? Like milk from a breast. Or blood through a vein. Fattens and plumps them.

All through the night the blossoms dropping. Soon now the White Wax. Green apples end of May. Isaacs' June Apple hangs half on my side. Bacon and fried green apples.

With sharp whetted hunger he thought of breakfast. He threw the sheet back cleanly, swung in an orbit to a sitting position and put his white somewhat phthisic feet on the floor. Standing up tenderly, he walked over to his leather rocker and put on a pair of clean white-footed socks. Then he pulled his nightgown over his head, looking for a moment in the dresser mirror at his great boned structure, the long stringy muscles of his arms, and his flat-meated hairy chest. His stomach sagged paunchily. He thrust his white flaccid calves quickly through the shrunken legs of a union suit, stretched it out elasticly with a comfortable widening of his shoulders and buttoned it. Then he stepped into his roomy sculpturally heavy trousers and drew on his soft-leathered laceless shoes. Crossing his suspender braces over his shoulders, he strode into the kitchen and had a brisk fire of oil and pine snapping in the range within three minutes. He was stimulated and alive in all the fresh wakefulness of the Spring morning.

Through Birdseye Gap, in the dewy richness of Lunn's Cove, Judge Webster Tayloe, the eminent, prosperous, and aristocratic corporation counsel (retired, but occasional consultations), rose in the rich walnut twilight of his bedchamber, noted approvingly, through the black lenses of the glasses that gave his long, subtle, and contemptuous face its final advantage over the rabble, that one of his country bumpkins was coming from the third pasture with a slopping pail of new milk, another was sharpening a scythe in the young glint of the sun, and another, emulating his more intelligent fellow, the horse, was backing a buggy slowly under the carriage shed.

Approvingly he watched his young mulatto son come over the lawn with lazy cat-speed, noting with satisfaction the grace and quickness of his movements, the slender barrel strength of his torso, his smallboned resiliency. Also the well-shaped intelligent head, the eager black eyes, the sensitive oval face, and the beautiful coprous olive of the skin. He was very like a better-class Spaniard. Quod potui perfeci. By this fusion, perhaps, men like men.

By the river the reed-pipes, the muse's temple, the sacred wood again. Why not? As in this cove. I, too, have lived in Arcady.

He took off his glasses for a moment and looked at the ptotic malevolence of his left eye, and the large harlequinesque wart in the cheek below it. The black glasses gave the suggestion that he was half-masked; they added a touch of unsearchable mystery to the subtle, sensual and disquieting intelligence of his face. His negro man appeared at this moment and told him his bath was ready. He drew the long thin nightgown over his freckled Fitzsimmons body and stepped vigorously into tepid water. Then for ten minutes he was sponged, scraped, and kneaded, upon a long table by the powerful plastic hands of the negro. He dressed in fresh laundered underwear and newly pressed clothes of black. He tied a black string carelessly below the wide belt of starched collar and buttoned across his straight long figure a frock coat that reached his knees. He took a cigarette from a box on his table and lighted it.

Bouncing tinnily down the coiling road that came through the Gap from the town, a flivver glinted momentarily through the trees. Two men were in it. His face hardened against it, he watched it go by his gates on the road with a scuffle of dust. Dimly he saw their lewd red mountain faces, and completed the image with sweat and corduroy. And in the town their city cousins. Brick, stucco, the white little eczema of Suburbia. Federated Half-Breeds of the World.

Into my Valley next with lawnmowers and front lawns. He ground out the life of the cigarette against an ashtray, and began a rapid window calculation of his horses, asses, kine, swine, and hens; the stored plenitude of his great barn, the heavy fruitage of his fields and orchards. A man came toward the house with a bucket of eggs in one hand and a bucket of butter in the other; each cake was stamped with a sheaf of wheat and wrapped loosely in clean white linen cloths. He smiled grimly: if attacked he could withstand a prolonged siege.

At Dixieland, Eliza slept soundly in a small dark room with a window opening on the uncertain light of the back porch. Her chamber was festooned with a pendant wilderness of cord and string; stacks of old newspapers and magazines were piled in the corners; and every shelf was loaded with gummed, labelled, half-filled medicine bottles. There was a smell in the air of mentholatum, Vick's Pneumonia Cure, and sweet glycerine. The negress arrived, coming under the

built-up house and climbing lazily the steep tunnel of back steps. She knocked at the door.

“Who’s there!” cried Eliza sharply, waking at once, and coming forward to the door. She wore a gray flannel nightgown over a heavy woollen undershirt that Ben had discarded: the pendant string floated gently to and fro as she opened the door, like some strange seamoss floating below the sea. Upstairs, in the small front room with the sleeping-porch, slept Miss Billie Edwards, twenty-four, of Missouri, the daring and masterful liontamer of Johnny L. Jones Combined Shows, then playing in the field on the hill behind the Plum Street School. Next to her, in the large airy room at the corner, Mrs. Marie Pert, forty-one, the wife of an itinerant and usually absent drug salesman, lay deep in the pit of alcoholic slumber. Upon each end of the mantel was a small snapshot in a silver frame—one of her absent daughter, Louise, eighteen, and one of Benjamin Gant, lying on the grass-bank in front of the house, propped on his elbow and wearing a wide straw hat that shaded all his face except his mouth. Also, in other chambers, front and back, Mr. Conway Richards, candy-wheel concessionaire with the Johnny L. Jones Combined Shows, Miss Lily Mangum, twenty-six, trained nurse, Mr. William H. Baskett, fifty-three, of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, cotton grower, banker, and sufferer from malaria, and his wife; in the large room at the head of the stairs Miss Annie Mitchell, nineteen, of Valdosta, Georgia, Miss Thelma Cheshire, twenty-one, of Florence, South Carolina, and Mrs. Rose Levin, twenty-eight, of Chicago, Illinois, all members of the chorus of “Molasses” Evans and His Broadway Beauties, booked out of Atlanta, Georgia, by the Piedmont Amusement Agency.

“O G-hirls! The Duke of Gorgonzola and the Count of Limburger are on their way here now. I want all you girls to be nice to them and to show them a good time when they arrive.”

“You BET we will.”

“And keep your eye on the little one—he’s the one with all the money.”

“I’ll SAY we will. Hurrah, Hurrah, Hurrah!”

“We are the girls that have the fun,

We’re snappy and happy every one;

We’re jolly and gay

And ready to play,  
And that is why we say-ee—”

Behind a bill-plastered fence-boarding on upper Valley Street, opposite the Y. M. I. (colored), and in the very heart of the crowded amusement and commercial centre of Altamont's colored population, Moses Andrews, twenty-six, colored, slept the last great sleep of white and black. His pockets, which only the night before had been full of the money Saul Stein, the pawnbroker, had given him in exchange for certain articles which he had taken from the home of Mr. George Rollins, the attorney (as an 18-carat Waltham gold watch with a heavy chain of twined gold, the diamond engagement ring of Mrs. Rollins, three pairs of the finest silk stockings, and two pairs of gentlemen's under-drawers), were now empty, a half-filled bottle of Cloverleaf Bonded Kentucky Rye, with which he had retired behind the boards to slumber, lay unmolested in the flaccid grip of his left hand, and his broad black throat gaped cleanly open from ear to ear, as a result of the skilled razor-work of his hated and hating rival, Jefferson Flack, twenty-eight, who now lay peacefully, unsuspected and unsought, with their mutual mistress, Miss Molly Fiske, in her apartment on east Pine Street. Moses had been murdered in moonlight.

A starved cat walked softly along by the boards on Upper Valley: as the courthouse bell boomed out its solid six strokes, eight negro laborers, the bottoms of their overalls stiff with agglutinated cement, tramped by like a single animal, in a wedge, each carrying his lunch in a small lard bucket.

Meanwhile, the following events occurred simultaneously throughout the neighborhood.

Dr. H. M. McRae, fifty-eight, minister of the First Presbyterian Church, having washed his lean Scotch body, arrayed himself in stiff black and a boiled white shirt, and shaved his spare clean unaging face, descended from his chamber in his residence on Cumberland Avenue, to his breakfast of oatmeal, dry toast, and boiled milk. His heart was pure, his mind upright, his faith and his life like a clean board scrubbed with sandstone. He prayed in thirty-minute prayers without impertinence for all men and the success of all good ventures. He was a white unwasting flame that shone through love and death; his speech rang out like steel with a steady passion.

In Dr. Frank Engel's Sanitarium and Turkish Bath Establishment on Liberty Street, Mr. J. H. Brown, wealthy sportsman and publisher of the Altamont Citizen, sank into dreamless sleep, after five minutes in the steam-closet, ten in the tub, and thirty in the dry-room, where he had submitted to the expert osteopathy of "Colonel" Andrews (as Dr. Engel's skilled negro masseur was affectionately known), from the soles of his gouty feet to the veinous silken gloss of his slightly purple face.

Across the street, at the corner of Liberty and Federal, and at the foot of Battery Hill, a white-jacketed negro sleepily restacked in boxes the scattered poker-chips that covered the centre table in the upstairs centre room of the Altamont City Club. The guests, just departed, were Mr. Gilbert Woodcock, Mr. Reeves Stikeleather, Mr. Henry Pentland, Jr., Mr. Sidney Newbeck, of Cleveland, Ohio (retired), and the aforementioned Mr. J. H. Brown.

"And, Jesus, Ben!" said Harry Tugman, emerging at this moment from Uneeda No. 3. "I thought I'd have a hemorrhage when they pulled the Old Man out of the closet. After all the stuff he printed about cleaning up the town, too."

"It wouldn't surprise me if Judge Sevier had them raid him," said Ben.

"Why certainly, Ben," said Harry Tugman impatiently, "that's the idea, but Queen Elizabeth was behind it. You don't think there's anything she doesn't hear about, do you? So help me Jesus, you never heard a yap out of him for a week. He was afraid to show his face out of the office."

At the Convent School of Saint Catherine's on Saint Clement's Road, Sister Theresa, the Mother Superior, walked softly through the dormitory lifting the window-shade beside each cot, letting the orchard cherry-apple bloom come gently into the long cool glade of roseleaf sleeping girls. Their breath expired gently upon their dewy half-opened mouths, light fell rosily upon the pillowed curve of their arms, their slender young sides, and the crisp pink buds of their breasts. At the other end of the room a fat girl lay squarely on her back, her arms and legs outspread, and snored solidly through blubbering lips. They had yet an hour of sleep.

From one of the little white tables between the cots Theresa picked up an opened book incautiously left there the night before, read below her gray mustache with the still inward smile of her great-boned face, its title—The

Common Law, by Robert W. Chambers—and gripping a pencil in her broad earthstained hand, scrawled briefly in jagged male letters:“Rubbish, Elizabeth—but see for yourself.” Then, on her soft powerful tread, she went downstairs, and entered her study, where Sister Louise (French), Sister Mary (History), and Sister Bernice (Ancient Languages) were waiting for the morning consultation. When they had gone, she sat down to her desk and worked for an hour on the manuscript of that book, modestly intended for school children, which has since celebrated her name wherever the noble architecture of prose is valued—the great *Biology*.

Then the gong rang in the dormitory, she heard the high laughter of young maidens, and rising saw, coming from the plum-tree by the wall, a young nun, Sister Agnes, with blossoms in her arms.

Below, tree-hidden, in the Biltburn bottom, there was a thunder on the rails, a wailing whistle cry.

Beneath the City Hall, in the huge sloping cellar, the market booths were open. The aproned butchers swung their cleavers down on fresh cold joints, slapping the thick chops on heavy sheets of mottled paper, and tossing them, roughly tied, to the waiting negro delivery-boys.

The self-respecting negro, J. H. Jackson, stood in his square vegetable-stall, attended by his two grave-faced sons, and his spectacled businesslike daughter. He was surrounded by wide slanting shelves of fruit and vegetables, smelling of the earth and morning—great crinkled lettuces, fat radishes still clotted damply with black loam, quill-stemmed young onions newly wrenched from gardens, late celery, spring potatoes, and the thin rinded citrous fruits of Florida.

Above him, Sorrell, the fish and oyster man, drew up from the depths of an enamelled ice-packed can dripping ladlefuls of oysters, pouring them into thick cardboard cartons. Wide-bellied heavy seafish—carp, trout, bass, shad—lay gutted in beds of ice.

Mr. Michael Walter Creech, the butcher, having finished his hearty breakfast of calves' liver, eggs and bacon, hot biscuits and coffee, made a sign to one of the waiting row of negro boys. The line sprang forward like hounds; he stopped them with a curse and a lifted cleaver. The fortunate youth who had been chosen then came forward and took the tray, still richly morselled with food and a pot

half full of coffee. As he had to depart at this moment on a delivery, he put it down in the sawdust at the end of the bench and spat copiously upon it in order to protect it from his scavenging comrades. Then he wheeled off, full of rich laughter and triumphant malice. Mr. Creech looked at his niggers darkly.

The town had so far forgotten Mr. Creech's own African blood (an eighth on his father's side, old Walter Creech, out of Yellow Jenny) that it was about ready to offer him political preferment; but Mr. Creech himself had not forgotten. He glanced bitterly at his brother, Jay, who, happily ignorant of hatred, that fanged poison which may taint even a brother's heart, was enthusiastically cleaving spare-ribs on the huge bole of his own table, singing meanwhile in a rich tenor voice the opening bars of "The Little Gray Home In The West":

" . . . there are blue eyes that shine  
Just because they meet mine . . ."

Mr. Creech looked venomously at Jay's yellow jowls, the fat throbbing of his jaundiced throat, the crisp singed whorl of his hair.

By God, he thought in his anguish of spirit, he might be taken for a Mexican.

Jay's golden voice neared its triumph, breaking with delicate restraint, on the last note, into a high sweet falsetto which he maintained for more than twenty seconds. All of the butchers stopped working, several of them, big strong men with grown-up families dashed a tear out of their eyes.

The great audience was held spellbound. Not a soul stirred. Not even a dog or a horse stirred. As the last sweet note melted away in a gossamer tremolo, a silence profound as that of the tombs, nay, of death itself, betokened the highest triumph the artist is destined to know upon this earth. Somewhere in the crowd a woman sobbed and collapsed in a faint. She was immediately carried out by two Boy Scouts who happened to be present, and who administered first aid to her in the rest-room, one of them hastily kindling a crackling fire of pine boughs by striking two flints together, while the other made a tourniquet, and tied several knots in his handkerchief. Then pandemonium broke loose. Women tore the jewels from their fingers, ropes of pearls from their necks, chrysanthemums, hyacinths, tulips and daisies from their expensive corsages, while the fashionably-dressed men in the near-by stalls kept up a constant bombardment

of tomatoes, lettuces, new potatoes, beef-tallow, pigs' knuckles, fishheads, clams, loin-chops, and pork-sausages.

Among the stalls of the market, the boarding-house keepers of Altamont walked with spying bargain-hunting eyes and inquisitive nose. They were of various sizes and ages, but they were all stamped with the print of haggling determination and a pugnacious closure of the mouth. They pried in among the fish and vegetables, pinching cabbages, weighing onions, exfoliating lettuce-heads. You've got to keep your eye on people or they'll skin you. And if you leave things to a lazy shiftless nigger she'll waste more than she cooks. They looked at one another hardfaced—Mrs. Barrett of the Grosvenor at Mrs. Neville of Glen View; Mrs. Ambler of the Colonial at Miss Mamie Featherstone of Ravencrest; Mrs. Ledbetter of the Belvedere—

"I hear you're full up, Mrs. Coleman," said she inquiringly.

"O, I'm full up all the time," said Mrs. Coleman. "My people are all permanents, I don't want to fool with transients," she said loftily.

"Well," said Mrs. Ledbetter acidly, "I could fill my house up at any time with lungers who call themselves something else, but I won't have them. I was saying the other day—"

Mrs. Michalove of Oakwood at Mrs. Jarvis of The Waverly; Mrs. Cowan of Ridgmont at—

The city is splendidly equipped to meet the demands of the great and steadily growing crowd of tourists that fill the Mountain Metropolis during the busy months of June, July, and August. In addition to eight hotels de luxe of the highest quality, there were registered at the Board of Trade in 1911 over 250 private hotels, boarding-houses and sanitariums all catering to the needs of those who come on missions of business, pleasure, or health.

Stop their baggage at the station.

At this moment Number 3, having finished his route, stepped softly on to the slime-scummed porch of the house on Valley Street, rapped gently at the door, and opened it quietly, groping his way through black miasmatic air to the bed in which May Corpening lay. She muttered as if drugged as he touched her, turned toward him, and sleepily awakened, drew him down to her with heavied and sensual caress, yoked under her big coppery arms. Tom Cline clumped greasily

up the steps of his residence on Barlett Street, swinging his tin pail; Ben returned to the paper office with Harry Tugman; and Eugene, in the back room on Woodson Street, waking suddenly to Gant's powerful command from the foot of the stairs, turned his face full into a momentary vision of rose-flushed blue sky and tender blossoms that drifted slowly earthward.

## PART THREE

Eugene was not quite sixteen years old when he was sent away to the university. He was, at the time, over six feet and three inches tall, and weighed perhaps 130 pounds. He had been sick very little in his life, but his rapid growth had eaten sharply at his strength: he was full of a wild energy of mind and body that devoured him and left him exhausted. He tired very quickly.

He was a child when he went away: he was a child who had looked much on pain and evil, and remained a fantasist of the Ideal. Walled up in his great city of visions, his tongue had learned to mock, his lip to sneer, but the harsh rasp of the world had worn no grooving in the secret life. Again and again he had been bogged in the gray slough of factuality. His cruel eyes had missed the meaning of no gesture, his packed and bitter heart had sweltered in him like a hot ingot, but all his hard wisdom melted at the glow of his imagination. He was not a child when he reflected, but when he dreamt, he was; and it was the child and dreamer that governed his belief. He belonged, perhaps, to an older and simpler race of men: he belonged with the Mythmakers. For him, the sun was a lordly lamp to light him on his grand adventuring. He believed in brave heroic lives. He believed in the fine flowers of tenderness and gentleness he had little known. He believed in beauty and in order, and that he would wreak out their mighty forms upon the distressful chaos of his life. He believed in love, and in the goodness and glory of women. He believed in valiance, and he hoped that, like Socrates, he would do nothing mean or common in the hour of danger. He exulted in his youth, and he believed that he could never die.

Four years later, when he was graduated, he had passed his adolescence, the kiss of love and death burned on his lips, and he was still a child.

When it was at last plain that Gant's will was on this inflexible, Margaret Leonard had said, quietly:

"Well, then, go your ways, boy. Go your ways. God bless you."

She looked a moment at his long thin figure and turned to John Dorsey Leonard with wet eyes:

“Do you remember that shaver in knee-pants who came to us four years ago? Can you believe it?”

John Dorsey Leonard laughed quietly, with weary gentle relaxation.

“What do you know about it?” he said.

When Margaret turned to him again her voice, low and gentle, was charged with the greatest passion he had ever heard in it.

“You are taking a part of our heart with you, boy. Do you know that?”

She took his trembling hand gently between her own lean fingers. He lowered his head and closed his eyelids tightly.

“Eugene,” she continued, “we could not love you more if you were our own child. We wanted to keep you with us for another year, but since that cannot be, we are sending you out with our hopes pinned to you. Oh, boy, you are fine. There is no atom in you that is not fine. A glory and a chrism of bright genius rest upon you. God bless you: the world is yours.”

The proud words of love and glory sank like music to his heart, evoking their bright pictures of triumph, and piercing him with the bitter shame of his concealed desires. Love bade him enter, but his soul drew back, guilty of lust and sin.

He tore his hand from her grasp, clinching, with the strangled cry of an animal, his convulsive throat.

“I can’t!” he choked. “You mustn’t think—” He could not go on; his life groped blindly to confessional.

Later, after he left her, her light kiss upon his cheek, the first she had ever given him, burned like a ring of fire.

That summer he was closer to Ben than ever before. They occupied the same room at Woodson Street. Luke had returned to the Westinghouse plant at Pittsburgh after Helen’s marriage.

Gant still occupied his sitting-room, but the rest of the house he had rented to a sprightly gray-haired widow of forty. She looked after them beautifully, but she served Ben with an especial tenderness. At night, on the cool veranda, Eugene

would find them below the ripening clusters, hear the quiet note of his brother's voice, his laugh, see the slow red arc of his cigarette in darkness.

The quiet one was more quiet and morose than he had ever been before: he stalked through the house scowling ferociously. All his conversation with Eliza was short and bitterly scornful; with Gant he spoke hardly at all. They had never talked together. Their eyes never met—a great shame, the shame of father and son, that mystery that goes down beyond motherhood, beyond life, that mysterious shame that seals the lips of all men, and lives in their hearts, had silenced them.

But to Eugene, Ben talked more freely than ever before. As they sat upon their beds at night, reading and smoking before they slept, all of the pain and bitterness of Benjamin Gant's life burst out in violent denunciation. He began to speak with slow sullen difficulty, halting over his words as he did when he read, but speaking more rapidly as his quiet voice became more passionate.

"I suppose they've told you how poor they are?" he began, tossing his cigarette away.

"Well," said Eugene, "I've got to go easy. I mustn't waste my money."

"Ah-h!" said Ben, making an ugly face. He laughed silently, with a thin and bitter contortion of his lips.

"Papa said that a lot of boys pay their own way through college by waiting on tables and so on. Perhaps I can do something like that."

Ben turned over on his side until he faced his brother, propping himself on his thin hairy forearm.

"Now listen, 'Gene," he said sternly, "don't be a damned little fool, do you hear? You take every damn cent you can get out of them," he added savagely.

"Well, I appreciate what they're doing. I'm getting a lot more than the rest of you had. They're doing a lot for me," said the boy.

"For YOU, you little idiot!" said Ben, scowling at him in disgust. "They're doing it all for themselves. Don't let them get away with that. They think you'll make good and bring a lot of credit to them some day. They're rushing you into it two years too soon, as it is. No, you take everything you can get. The rest of us never had anything, but I want to see you get all that's coming to you. My God!" he cried furiously.

“Their money’s doing no one any good rotting in the damned bank, is it? No, ‘Gene, get all you can. When you get down there, if you find you need more to hold your own with the other boys, make the old man give it to you. You’ve never had a chance to hold your head up in your own home town, so make the most of your chances when you get away.”

He lighted a cigarette and smoked in bitter silence for a moment.

“To hell with it all!” he said. “What in God’s name are we living for!”

Eugene’s first year at the university was filled for him with loneliness, pain, and failure. Within three weeks of his matriculation, he had been made the dupe of a half-dozen classic jokes, his ignorance of all campus tradition had been exploited, his gullibility was a byword. He was the greenest of all green Freshmen, past and present: he had listened attentively to a sermon in chapel by a sophomore with false whiskers; he had prepared studiously for an examination on the contents of the college catalogue; and he had been guilty of the inexcusable blunder of making a speech of acceptance on his election, with fifty others, to the literary society.

And these buffooneries—a little cruel, but only with the cruelty of vacant laughter, and a part of the schedule of rough humor in an American college—salty, extravagant, and national—opened deep wounds in him, which his companions hardly suspected. He was conspicuous at once not only because of his blunders, but also because of his young wild child’s face, and his great raw length of body, with the bounding scissor legs. The undergraduates passed him in grinning clusters: he saluted them obediently, but with a sick heart. And the smug smiling faces of his own classmen, the wiser Freshmen, complacently guiltless of his own mistakes, touched him at moments with insane fury.

“Smile and smile and s-mile—damn you!” he cursed through his grating teeth. For the first time in his life he began to dislike whatever fits too snugly in a measure. He began to dislike and envy the inconspicuous mould of general nature—the multitudinous arms, legs, hands, feet, and figures that are comfortably shaped for ready-made garments. And the prettily regular, wherever he found it, he hated—the vacantly handsome young men, with shining hair, evenly parted in the middle, with sure strong middling limbs meant to go gracefully on dancefloors. He longed to see them commit some

awkward blunder—to trip and sprawl, to be flatulent, to lose a strategic button in mixed company, to be unconscious of a hanging shirt-tail while with a pretty girl. But they made no mistakes.

As he walked across the campus, he heard his name called mockingly from a dozen of the impartial windows, he heard the hidden laughter, and he ground his teeth. And at night, he stiffened with shame in his dark bed, ripping the sheet between his fingers as, with the unbalanced vision, the swollen egotism of the introvert, the picture of a crowded student-room, filled with the grinning historians of his exploits, burned in his brain. He strangled his fierce cry with a taloned hand. He wanted to blot out the shameful moment, unweave the loom. It seemed to him that his ruin was final, that he had stamped the beginning of his university life with folly that would never be forgotten, and that the best he could do would be to seek out obscurity for the next four years. He saw himself in his clown's trappings and thought of his former vision of success and honor with a lacerating self-contempt.

There was no one to whom he could turn: he had no friends. His conception of university life was a romantic blur, evoked from his reading and tempered with memories of Stover at Yale, Young Fred Fearnot, and jolly youths with affectionate linked arms, bawling out a cheer-song. No one had given him even the rudimentary data of the somewhat rudimentary life of an American university. He had not been warned of the general taboos. Thus, he had come greenly on his new life, unprepared, as he came ever thereafter on all new life, save for his opium visions of himself a stranger in Arcadias.

He was alone. He was desperately lonely.

But the university was a charming, an unforgettable place. It was situated in the little village of Pulpit Hill, in the central midland of the big State. Students came and departed by motor from the dreary tobacco town of Exeter, twelve miles away: the countryside was raw, powerful and ugly, a rolling land of field, wood, and hollow; but the university itself was buried in a pastoral wilderness, on a long tabling butte, which rose steeply above the country. One burst suddenly, at the hill-top, on the end of the straggling village street, flanked by faculty houses, and winding a mile in to the town centre and the university. The central campus sloped back and up over a broad area of rich turf, groved with magnificent ancient trees. A quadrangle of post-Revolutionary buildings of weathered brick

bounded the upper end: other newer buildings, in the modern bad manner (the Pedagogic Neo-Greeky), were scattered around beyond the central design: beyond, there was a thickly forested wilderness. There was still a good flavor of the wilderness about the place—one felt its remoteness, its isolated charm. It seemed to Eugene like a provincial outpost of great Rome: the wilderness crept up to it like a beast.

Its great poverty, its century-long struggle in the forest, had given the university a sweetness and a beauty it was later to forfeit. It had the fine authority of provincialism—the provincialism of an older South. Nothing mattered but the State: the State was a mighty empire, a rich kingdom—there was, beyond, a remote and semi-barbaric world.

Few of the university's sons had been distinguished in the nation's life—there had been an obscure President of the United States, and a few Cabinet members, but few had sought such distinction: it was glory enough to be a great man in one's State. Nothing beyond mattered very much.

In this pastoral setting a young man was enabled to loaf comfortably and delightfully through four luxurious and indolent years. There was, God knows, seclusion enough for monastic scholarship, but the rare romantic quality of the atmosphere, the prodigal opulence of Springtime, thick with flowers and drenched in a fragrant warmth of green shimmering light, quenched pretty thoroughly any incipient rash of bookishness. Instead, they loafed and invited their souls or, with great energy and enthusiasm, promoted the affairs of glee-clubs, athletic teams, class politics, fraternities, debating societies, and dramatic clubs. And they talked—always they talked, under the trees, against the ivied walls, assembled in their rooms, they talked—in limp sprawls—incessant, charming, empty Southern talk; they talked with a large easy fluency about God, the Devil, and philosophy, the girls, politics, athletics, fraternities and the girls—My God! how they talked!

“Observe,” lisped Mr. Torrington, the old Rhodes Scholar (Pulpit Hill and Merton, ‘14), “observe how skilfully he holds suspense until the very end. Observe with what consummate art he builds up to his climax, keeping his meaning hidden until the very last word.” Further, in fact.

At last, thought Eugene, I am getting an education. This must be good writing, because it seems so very dull. When it hurts, the dentist says, it does you good. Democracy must be real, because it is so very earnest. It must be a certainty, because it is so elegantly embalmed in this marble mausoleum of language. Essays For College Men—Woodrow Wilson, Lord Bryce and Dean Briggs.

But there was no word here of the loud raucous voice of America, political conventions and the Big Brass Band, Tweed, Tammany, the Big Stick, lynching bees and black barbecue parties, the Boston Irish, and the damnable machinations of the Pope as exposed by the Babylon Hollow Trumpet (Dem.), the rape of the Belgian virgins, rum, oil, Wall Street and Mexico.

All that, Mr. Torrington would have said, was temporary and accidental. It was unsound.

Mr. Torrington smiled moistly at Eugene and urged him tenderly into a chair drawn intimately to his desk.

“Mr.—? Mr.—?—” he said, fumbling at his index cards.

“Gant,” said Eugene.

“Ah, yes—Mr. Gant,” he smiled his contrition. “Now—about your outside reading?” he began.

But what, thought Eugene, about my inside reading?

Did he like to read? Ah—that was good. He was so glad to hear it. The true university in these days, said Carlyle (he did hope Eugene liked rugged old Thomas), was a collection of books.

“Yes, sir,” said Eugene.

That, it seemed to him, was the Oxford Plan. Oh, yes—he had been there, three years, in fact. His mild eye kindled. To loaf along the High on a warm Spring day, stopping to examine in the bookseller’s windows the treasures that might be had for so little. Then to Buol’s or to a friend’s room for tea, or for a walk in the meadows or Magdalen gardens, or to look down into the quad, at the gay pageant of youth below. Ah—Ah! A great place? Well—he’d hardly say that. It all depended what one meant by a great place. Half the looseness in thought—unfortunately, he fancied, more prevalent among American than among English youth—came from an indefinite exuberance of ill-defined speech.

“Yes, sir,” said Eugene.

A great place? Well, he'd scarcely say that. The expression was typically American. Butter-lipped, he turned on the boy a smile of soft unfriendliness:

"It kills," he observed, "a man's useless enthusiasms."

Eugene whitened a little.

"That's fine," he said.

Now—let him see. Did he like plays—the modern drama? Excellent. They were doing some very interesting things in the modern drama. Barrie—oh, a charming fellow! What was that? Shaw!

"Yes, sir," said Eugene. "I've read all the others. There's a new book out."

"Oh, but really! My dear boy!" said Mr. Torrington with gentle amazement. He shrugged his shoulders and became politely indifferent. Very well, if he liked. Of course, he thought it rather a pity to waste one's time so when they were really doing some first-rate things. That was JUST the trouble, however. The appeal of a man like that was mainly to the unformed taste, the uncritical judgment. He had a flashy attraction for the immature. Oh, yes! Undoubtedly an amusing fellow. Clever—yes, but hardly significant. And—didn't he think—a trifle noisy? Or had he noticed that? Yes—there was to be sure an amusing Celtic strain, not without charm, but unsound. He was not in line with the best modern thought.

"I'll take the Barrie," said Eugene.

Yes, he rather thought that would be better.

"Well, good day. Mr.—Mr.—?—?" he smiled, fumbling again with his cards.

"Gant."

Oh yes, to be sure,—Gant. He held out his plump limp hand. He did hope Mr. Gant would call on him. Perhaps he'd be able to advise him on some of the little problems that, he knew, were constantly cropping up during the first year. Above all, he mustn't get discouraged.

"Yes, sir," said Eugene, backing feverishly to the door. When he felt the open space behind him, he fell through it, and vanished.

Anyway, he thought grimly, I've read all the damned Barries. I'll write the damned report for him, and damned well read what I damn well please.

God save our King and Queen!

He had courses besides in Chemistry, Mathematics, Greek, and Latin.

He worked hard and with interest at his Latin. His instructor was a tall shaven man, with a yellow saturnine face. He parted his scant hair cleverly in such a way as to suggest horns. His lips were always twisted in a satanic smile, his eyes gleamed sideward with heavy malicious humor. Eugene had great hopes of him. When the boy arrived, panting and breakfastless, a moment after the class had settled to order, the satanic professor would greet him with elaborate irony: "Ah there, Brother Gant! Just in time for church again. Have you slept well?"

The class roared its appreciation of these subtleties. And later, in an expectant pause, he would deepen his arched brows portentously, stare up mockingly under his bushy eyebrows at his expectant audience, and say, in a deep sardonic voice:

"And now, I am going to request Brother Gant to favor us with one of his polished and scholarly translations."

These heavy jibes were hard to bear because, of all the class, two dozen or more, Brother Gant was the only one to prepare his work without the aid of a printed translation. He worked hard on Livy and Tacitus, going over the lesson several times until he had dug out a smooth and competent reading of his own. This he was stupid enough to deliver in downright fashion, without hesitation, or a skilfully affected doubt here and there. For his pains and honesty he was handsomely rewarded by the Amateur Diabolist. The lean smile would deepen as the boy read, the man would lift his eyes significantly to the grinning class, and when it was over, he would say:

"Bravo, Brother Gant! Excellent! Splendid! You are riding a good pony—but a little too smoothly, my boy. You ride a little too well."

The class sniggered heavily.

When he could stand it no longer, he sought the man out one day after the class.

"See here, sir! See here!" he began in a voice choking with fury and exasperation. "Sir—I assure you—" he thought of all the grinning apes in the class, palming off profitably their stolen translations, and he could not go on.

The Devil's Disciple was not a bad man; he was only, like most men who pride themselves on their astuteness, a foolish one.

"Nonsense, Mr. Gant," said he kindly. "You don't think you can fool me on a translation, do you? It's all right with me, you know," he continued, grinning. "If

you'd rather ride a pony than do your own work, I'll give you a passing grade—so long as you do it well.”

“But—” Eugene began explosively.

“But I think it's a pity, Mr. Gant,” said the professor, gravely, “that you're willing to slide along this way. See here, my boy, you're capable of doing first-rate work. I can see that. Why don't you make an effort? Why don't you buckle down and really study, after this?”

Eugene stared at the man, with tears of anger in his eyes. He sputtered but could not speak. But suddenly, as he looked down into the knowing leer, the perfect and preposterous injustice of the thing—like a caricature—overcame him: he burst into an explosive laugh of rage and amusement which the teacher, no doubt, accepted as confession.

“Well, what do you say?” he asked. “Will you try?”

“All right! Yes!” the boy yelled. “I'll try it.”

He bought at once a copy of the translation used by the class. Thereafter, when he read, faltering prettily here and there over a phrase, until his instructor should come to his aid, the satanic professor listened gravely and attentively, nodding his head in approval from time to time, and saying, with great satisfaction, when he had finished: “Good, Mr. Gant. Very good. That shows what a little real work will do.”

And privately, he would say: “You see the difference, don't you? I knew at once when you stopped using that pony. Your translation is not so smooth, but it's your own now. You're doing good work, my boy, and you're getting something out of it. It's worth it, isn't it?”

“Yes,” said Eugene gratefully, “it certainly is—”

By far the most distinguished of his teachers this first year was Mr. Edward Pettigrew (“Buck”) Benson, the Greek professor. Buck Benson was a little man in the middle-forties, a bachelor, somewhat dandified, but old-fashioned, in his dress. He wore wing collars, large plump cravats, and suede-topped shoes. His hair was thick, heavily grayed, beautifully kept. His face was courteously pugnacious, fierce, with large yellow bulging eyeballs, and several bulldog pleatings around the mouth. It was an altogether handsome ugliness.

His voice was low, lazy, pleasant, with an indolent drawl, but without changing its pace or its inflection he could flay a victim with as cruel a tongue as ever wagged, and in the next moment wipe out hostility, restore affection, heal all wounds by the same agency. His charm was enormous. Among the students he was the subject for comical speculation—in their myths, they made of him a passionate and sophisticated lover, and his midget cycle-car, which bounded like an overgrown toy around the campus, the scene of many romantic seductions.

He was a good Grecian—an elegant indolent scholar. Under his instruction Eugene began to read Homer. The boy knew little grammar—he had learned little at Leonard's—but, since he had had the bad judgment to begin Greek under some one other than Buck Benson, Buck Benson thought he knew even less than he did. He studied desperately, but the bitter dyspeptic gaze of the elegant little man frightened him into halting, timorous, clumsy performances. And as he proceeded, with thumping heart and tremulous voice, Buck Benson's manner would become more and more weary, until finally, dropping his book, he would drawl:

“Mister Gant, you make me so damned mad I could throw you out the window.”

But, on the examination, he gave an excellent performance, and translated from sight beautifully. He was saved. Buck Benson commended his paper publicly with lazy astonishment, and gave him a fair grade. Thereafter, they slipped quickly into an easier relation: by Spring, he was reading Euripides with some confidence.

But that which remained most vividly, later, in the drowning years which cover away so much of beauty, was the vast sea-surge of Homer which beat in his brain, his blood, his pulses, as did the sea-sound in Gant's parlor shells, when first he heard it to the slowly pacing feet and the hexametrical drawl of Buck Benson, the lost last weary son of Hellas.

Dwaney de clangay genett, argereoyo beeoyo—above the whistle's shriek, the harsh scream of the wheel, the riveter's tattoo, the vast long music endures, and ever shall. What dissonance can quench it? What jangling violence can disturb or conquer it— entombed in our flesh when we were young, remembered like “the apple tree, the singing, and the gold”?

**Free**editorial 