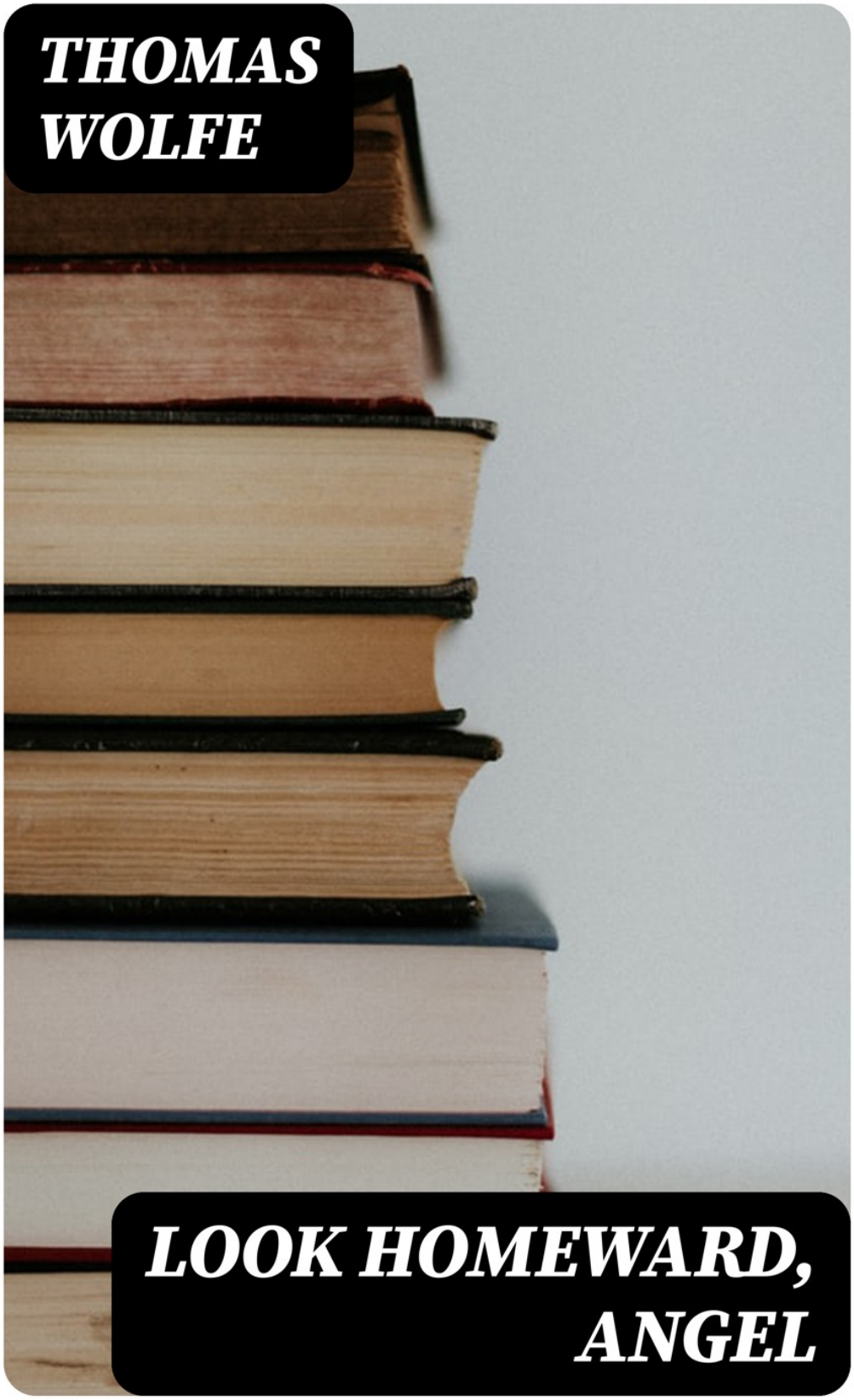
THOMAS WOLFE
LOOK HOMEWARD, ANGEL

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Look Homeward, Angel

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To the Reader

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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

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. . . a stone, a leaf, an unfound door; of a stone, a leaf, a door. And of all the forgotten faces.

Naked and alone we came into exile. In her dark womb we did not know our mother’s face; from the prison of her flesh have we come into the unspeakable and incommunicable prison of this earth.

Which of us has known his brother? Which of us has looked into his father’s heart? Which of us has not remained forever prison-pent? Which of us is not forever a stranger and alone?

O waste of loss, in the hot mazes, lost, among bright stars on this most weary unbright cinder, lost! Remembering speechlessly we seek the great forgotten language, the lost lane-end into heaven, a stone, a leaf, an unfound door. Where? When?

O lost, and by the wind grieved, ghost, come back again.

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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 plumtree’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 jocularity 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!

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Oliver married Eliza in May. After their wedding trip to Philadelphia, they returned to the house he had built for her on Woodson Street. With his great hands he had laid the foundations, burrowed out deep musty cellars in the earth, and sheeted the tall sides over with smooth trowellings of warm brown plaster. He had very little money, but his strange house grew to the rich modelling of his fantasy: when he had finished he had something which leaned to the slope of his narrow uphill yard, something with a high embracing porch in front, and warm rooms where one stepped up and down to the tackings of his whim. He built his house close to the quiet hilly street; he bedded the loamy soil with flowers; he laid the short walk to the high veranda steps with great square sheets of colored marble; he put a fence of spiked iron between his house and the world.

Then, in the cool long glade of yard that stretched four hundred feet behind the house he planted trees and grape vines. And whatever he touched in that rich fortress of his soul sprang into golden life: as the years passed, the fruit trees — the peach, the plum, the cherry, the apple — grew great and bent beneath their clusters. His grape vines thickened into brawny ropes of brown and coiled down the high wire fences of his lot, and hung in a dense fabric, upon his trellises, roping his domain twice around. They climbed the porch end of the house and framed the upper windows in thick bowers. And the flowers grew in rioting glory in his yard — the velvet-leaved nasturtium, slashed with a hundred tawny dyes, the rose, the snowball, the redcupped tulip, and the lily. The honeysuckle drooped its heavy mass

upon the fence; wherever his great hands touched the earth it grew fruitful for him.

For him the house was the picture of his soul, the garment of his will. But for Eliza it was a piece of property, whose value she shrewdly appraised, a beginning for her hoard. Like all the older children of Major Pentland she had, since her twentieth year, begun the slow accretion of land: from the savings of her small wage as teacher and book-agent, she had already purchased one or two pieces of earth. On one of these, a small lot at the edge of the public square, she persuaded him to build a shop. This he did with his own hands, and the labor of two negro men: it was a two-story shack of brick, with wide wooden steps, leading down to the square from a marble porch. Upon this porch, flanking the wooden doors, he placed some marbles; by the door, he put the heavy simpering figure of an angel.

But Eliza was not content with his trade: there was no money in death. People, she thought, died too slowly. And she foresaw that her brother Will, who had begun at fifteen as helper in a lumber yard, and was now the owner of a tiny business, was destined to become a rich man. So she persuaded Gant to go into partnership with Will Pentland: at the end of a year, however, his patience broke, his tortured egotism leaped from its restraint, he howled that Will, whose business hours were spent chiefly in figuring upon a dirty envelope with a stub of a pencil, paring reflectively his stubby nails, or punning endlessly with a birdlike wink and nod, would ruin them all. Will therefore quietly bought out his partner’s interest, and moved on toward the accumulation of a fortune, while Oliver returned to isolation and his grimy angels.

The strange figure of Oliver Gant cast its famous shadow through the town. Men heard at night and morning the great formula of his curse to Eliza. They saw him plunge to house and shop, they saw him bent above his marbles, they saw him mould in his great hands — with curse, and howl, with

passionate devotion — the rich texture of his home. They laughed at his wild excess of speech, of feeling, and of gesture. They were silent before the maniac fury of his sprees, which occurred almost punctually every two months, and lasted two or three days. They picked him foul and witless from the cobbles, and brought him home — the banker, the policeman, and a burly devoted Swiss named Jannadeau, a grimy jeweller who rented a small fenced space among Gant's tombstones. And always they handled him with tender care, feeling something strange and proud and glorious lost in that drunken ruin of Babel. He was a stranger to them: no one — not even Eliza — ever called him by his first name. He was — and remained thereafter —"Mister" Gant.

And what Eliza endured in pain and fear and glory no one knew. He breathed over them all his hot lion-breath of desire and fury: when he was drunk, her white pursed face, and all the slow octopal movements of her temper, stirred him to red madness. She was at such times in real danger from his assault: she had to lock herself away from him. For from the first, deeper than love, deeper than hate, as deep as the unfleshed bones of life, an obscure and final warfare was being waged between them. Eliza wept or was silent to his curse, nagged briefly in retort to his rhetoric, gave like a punched pillow to his lunging drive — and slowly, implacably had her way. Year by year, above his howl of protest, he did not know how, they gathered in small bits of earth, paid the hated taxes, and put the money that remained into more land. Over the wife, over the mother, the woman of property, who was like a man, walked slowly forth.

In eleven years she bore him nine children of whom six lived. The first, a girl, died in her twentieth month, of infant cholera; two more died at birth. The others outlived the grim and casual littering. The oldest, a boy, was born in 1885. He was given the name of Steve. The second, born fifteen months later, was a girl — Daisy. The next, likewise a girl —

Helen — came three years later. Then, in 1892, came twins — boys — to whom Gant, always with a zest for politics, gave the names of Grover Cleveland and Benjamin Harrison. And the last, Luke, was born two years later, in 1894.

Twice, during this period, at intervals of five years, Gant's periodic spree lengthened into an unbroken drunkenness that lasted for weeks. He was caught, drowning in the tides of his thirst. Each time Eliza sent him away to take a cure for alcoholism at Richmond. Once, Eliza and four of her children were sick at the same time with typhoid fever. But during a weary convalescence she pursed her lips grimly and took them off to Florida.

Eliza came through stolidly to victory. As she marched down these enormous years of love and loss, stained with the rich dyes of pain and pride and death, and with the great wild flare of his alien and passionate life, her limbs faltered in the grip of ruin, but she came on, through sickness and emaciation, to victorious strength. She knew there had been glory in it: insensate and cruel as he had often been, she remembered the enormous beating color of his life, and the lost and stricken thing in him which he would never find. And fear and a speechless pity rose in her when at times she saw the small uneasy eyes grow still and darken with the foiled and groping hunger of old frustration. O lost!

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In the great processional of the years through which the history of the Gants was evolving, few years had borne a heavier weight of pain, terror, and wretchedness, and none was destined to bring with it more conclusive events than that year which marked the beginning of the twentieth century. For Gant and his wife, the year 1900, in which one day they found themselves, after growing to maturity in another century — a transition which must have given, wherever it has happened, a brief but poignant loneliness to thousands of imaginative people — had coincidences, too striking to be unnoticed, with other boundaries in their lives.

In that year Gant passed his fiftieth birthday: he knew he was half as old as the century that had died, and that men do not often live as long as centuries. And in that year, too, Eliza, big with the last child she would ever have, went over the final hedge of terror and desperation and, in the opulent darkness of the summer night, as she lay flat in her bed with her hands upon her swollen belly, she began to design her life for the years when she would cease to be a mother.

In the already opening gulf on whose separate shores their lives were founded, she was beginning to look, with the infinite composure, the tremendous patience which waits through half a lifetime for an event, not so much with certain foresight, as with a prophetic, brooding instinct. This quality, this almost Buddhistic complacency which, rooted in the fundamental structure of her life, she could neither suppress nor conceal, was the quality he could least understand, that infuriated him most. He was fifty: he had a tragic consciousness of time — he saw the passionate fulness of his life upon the wane, and he cast about him like a senseless and infuriate beast. She had perhaps a greater

reason for quietude than he, for she had come on from the cruel openings of her life, through disease, physical weakness, poverty, the constant imminence of death and misery: she had lost her first child, and brought the others safely through each succeeding plague; and now, at forty-two, her last child stirring in her womb, she had a conviction, enforced by her Scotch superstition, and the blind vanity of her family, which saw extinction for others but not for itself, that she was being shaped to a purpose.

As she lay in her bed, a great star burned across her vision in the western quarter of the sky; she fancied it was climbing heaven slowly. And although she could not have said toward what pinnacle her life was moving, she saw in the future freedom that she had never known, possession and power and wealth, the desire for which was mixed inextinguishably with the current of her blood. Thinking of this in the dark, she pursed her lips with thoughtful satisfaction, unhumorously seeing herself at work in the carnival, taking away quite easily from the hands of folly what it had never known how to keep.

“I’ll get it!” she thought, “I’ll get it. Will has it! Jim has it. And I’m smarter than they are.” And with regret, tinctured with pain and bitterness, she thought of Gant:

“Pshaw! If I hadn’t kept after him he wouldn’t have a stick to call his own today. What little we have got I’ve had to fight for; we wouldn’t have a roof over our heads; we’d spend the rest of our lives in a rented house”— which was to her the final ignominy of shiftless and improvident people.

And she resumed: “The money he squanders every year in licker would buy a good lot: we could be well-to-do people now if we’d started at the very beginning. But he’s always hated the very idea of owning anything: couldn’t bear it, he told me once, since he lost his money in that trade in Sydney. If I’d been there, you can bet your bottom dollar there’d been no loss. Or, it’d be on the other side,” she added grimly.

And lying there while the winds of early autumn swept down from the Southern hills, filling the black air with dropping leaves, and making, in intermittent rushes, a remote sad thunder in great trees, she thought of the stranger who had come to live in her, and of that other stranger, author of so much woe, who had lived with her for almost twenty years. And thinking of Gant, she felt again an inchoate aching wonder, recalling the savage strife between them, and the great submerged struggle beneath, founded upon the hatred and the love of property, in which she did not doubt of her victory, but which baffled her, foiled her.

"I'll vow!" she whispered. "I'll vow! I never saw such a man!"

Gant, faced with the loss of sensuous delight, knowing the time had come when all his Rabelaisian excess in eating, drinking, and loving must come under the halter, knew of no gain that could compensate him for the loss of libertinism; he felt, too, the sharp ache of regret, feeling that he had possessed powers, had wasted chances, such as his partnership with Will Pentland, that might have given him position and wealth. He knew that the century had gone in which the best part of his life had passed; he felt, more than ever, the strangeness and loneliness of our little adventure upon the earth: he thought of his childhood on the Dutch farm, the Baltimore days, the aimless drift down the continent, the appalling fixation of his whole life upon a series of accidents. The enormous tragedy of accident hung like a gray cloud over his life. He saw more clearly than ever that he was a stranger in a strange land among people who would always be alien to him. Strangest of all, he thought, was this union, by which he had begotten children, created a life dependent on him, with a woman so remote from all he understood.

He did not know whether the year 1900 marked for him a beginning or an ending; but with the familiar weakness of the sensualist, he resolved to make it an ending, burning

the spent fire in him down to a guttering flame. In the first half of the month of January, still penitently true to the New Year's reformation, he begot a child: by Spring, when it was evident that Eliza was again pregnant, he had hurled himself into an orgy to which even a notable four months' drunk in 1896 could offer no precedent. Day after day he became maniacally drunk, until he fixed himself in a state of constant insanity: in May she sent him off again to a sanitarium at Piedmont to take the "cure," which consisted simply in feeding him plainly and cheaply, and keeping him away from alcohol for six weeks, a regime which contributed no more ravenously to his hunger than it did to his thirst. He returned, outwardly chastened, but inwardly a raging furnace, toward the end of June: the day before he came back, Eliza, obviously big with child, her white face compactly set, walked sturdily into each of the town's fourteen saloons, calling up the proprietor or the bar-man behind his counter, and speaking clearly and loudly in the sodden company of bar clientry:

"See here: I just came in to tell you that Mr. Gant is coming back tomorrow, and I want you all to know that if I hear of any of you selling him a drink, I'll put you in the penitentiary."

The threat, they knew, was preposterous, but the white judicial face, the thoughtful pursing of the lips, and the right hand, which she held loosely clenched, like a man's, with the forefinger extended, emphasizing her proclamation with a calm, but somehow powerful gesture, froze them with a terror no amount of fierce excoriation could have produced. They received her announcement in beery stupefaction, muttering at most a startled agreement as she walked out.

"By God," said a mountaineer, sending a brown inaccurate stream toward a cuspidor, "she'll do it, too. That woman means business."

"Hell!" said Tim O'Donnel, thrusting his simian face comically above his counter, "I wouldn't give W.O. a drink

now if it was fifteen cents a quart and we was alone in a privy. Is she gone yet?”

There was vast whisky laughter.

“Who is she?” some one asked.

“She’s Will Pentland’s sister.”

“By God, she’ll do it then,” cried several; and the place trembled again with their laughter.

Will Pentland was in Loughran’s when she entered. She did not greet him. When she had gone he turned to a man near him, prefacing his remark with a birdlike nod and wink: “Bet you can’t do that,” he said.

Gant, when he returned, and was publicly refused at a bar, was wild with rage and humiliation. He got whisky very easily, of course, by sending a drayman from his steps, or some negro, in for it; but, in spite of the notoriety of his conduct, which had, he knew, become a classic myth for the children of the town, he shrank at each new advertisement of his behaviour; he became, year by year, more, rather than less, sensitive to it, and his shame, his quivering humiliation on mornings after, product of rasped pride and jangled nerves, was pitiable. He felt bitterly that Eliza had with deliberate malice publicly degraded him: he screamed denunciation and abuse at her on his return home.

All through the summer Eliza walked with white boding placidity through horror — she had by now the hunger for it, waiting with terrible quiet the return of fear at night. Angered by her pregnancy, Gant went almost daily to Elizabeth’s house in Eagle Crescent, whence he was delivered nightly by a band of exhausted and terrified prostitutes into the care of his son Steve, his oldest child, by now pertly free with nearly all the women in the district, who fondled him with good-natured vulgarity, laughed heartily at his glib innuendoes, and suffered him, even, to slap them smartly on their rumps, making for him roughly as he skipped nimbly away.