

Look Homeward Angel  
Thomas Wolfe

P. 3 "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 cutpurse 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."

P. 22 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.

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"Nobody knows--nobody knows," she began, bursting quickly into a rapid flow of tears, "what I've been through." She wiped her eyes in a moment on a corner of the coverlid: her broad powerful nose, founded redly on her white face, was like flame. **[gd description of Rosacea]**

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And as they sat there more quietly now, swarming pity rose in them--not for themselves, but for each other, and for the waste, the confusion, the groping accident of life.

Gant thought briefly of his four and fifty years, his vanished youth, his diminishing strength, the ugliness and badness of so much of it; and he had the very quiet despair of a man who knows the forged chain may not be unlinked, the threaded design unwound, the done undone.

"If I had known. If I had known," said Eliza. And then: "I'm sorry." But he knew that her sorrow at that moment was not for him or for herself, or even for the boy whom idiot chance had thrust in the way of pestilence, but that, with a sudden inner flaming of her clairvoyant Scotch soul, she had looked cleanly, without pretense for the first time, upon the inexorable tides of Necessity, and that she was sorry for all who had lived, were living, or would live, fanning with their prayers the useless altar flames, suppliant with their hopes to an unwitting spirit, casting the tiny rockets of their belief against remote eternity, and hoping for grace, guidance, and delivery upon the spinning and forgotten

cinder of this earth. O lost.

P. 61 (afte the death of a son) The death of Grover gave Eliza the most terrible wound of her life: her courage was snapped, her slow but powerful adventure toward freedom was abruptly stopped. Her flesh seemed to turn rotten when she thought of the distant city and the Fair: she was appalled before the hidden adversary who had struck her down.

With her desperate sadness she encysted herself within her house and her family, reclaimed that life she had been ready to renounce, lived laborious days and tried to drink, in toil, oblivion. But the dark lost face gleamed like a sudden and impalpable faun within the thickets of memory: she thought of the mark on his brown neck and wept.

During the grim winter the shadows lifted slowly. Gant brought back the roaring fires, the groaning succulent table, the lavish and explosive ritual of the daily life. The old gusto surged back in their lives.

P. 63 The family was at the very core and ripeness of its life together. Gant lavished upon it his abuse, his affection, and his prodigal provisioning. They came to look forward eagerly to his entrance, for he brought with him the great gusto of living, of ritual. They would watch him in the evening as he turned the corner below with eager strides, follow carefully the processional of his movements from the time he flung his provisions upon the kitchen table to the re-kindling of his fire, with which he was always at odds when he entered, and on to which he poured wood, coal and kerosene lavishly. This done, he would remove his coat and wash himself at the basin vigorously, rubbing his great hands across his shaven, tough-bearded face with the cleansing and male sound of sandpaper. Then he would thrust his body against the door jamb and scratch his back energetically by moving it violently to and fro. This done, he would empty another half can of kerosene on the howling flame, lunging savagely at it, and muttering to himself.

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They fed stupendously. Eugene began to observe the food and the seasons. In the autumn, they barrelled huge frosty apples in the cellar. Gant bought whole hogs from the butcher, returning home early to salt them, wearing a long work-apron, and rolling his sleeves half up his lean hairy arms. Smoked bacons hung in the pantry, the great bins were full of flour, the dark recessed shelves groaned with preserved cherries, peaches, plums, quinces,

apples, pears. All that he touched waxed in rich pungent life: his Spring gardens, wrought in the black wet earth below the fruit trees, flourished in huge crinkled lettuces that wrenched cleanly from the loamy soil with small black clots stuck to their crisp stocks; fat red radishes; heavy tomatoes. The rich plums lay bursted on the grass; his huge cherry trees oozed with heavy gum jewels; his apple trees bent with thick green clusters. The earth was spermy for him like a big woman.

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As the flame shot roaring up from the oiled pine sticks, and he felt the fire-full chimney-throat tremble, he recovered joy. He brought back the width of the desert; the vast yellow serpent of the river, alluvial with the mined accretions of the continent; the rich vision of laden ships, masted above the sea-walls, the world-nostalgic ships, bearing about them the filtered and concentrated odors of the earth, sensual negroid rum and molasses, tar, ripening guavas, bananas, tangerines, pineapples in the warm holds of tropical boats, as cheap, as profuse, as abundant as the lazy equatorial earth and all its women; the great names of Louisiana, Texas, Arizona, Colorado, California; the blasted fiend-world of the desert, and the terrific boles of trees, tunnelled for the passage of a coach; water that fell from a mountain-top in a smoking noiseless coil, internal boiling lakes flung skywards by the punctual respiration of the earth, the multitudinous torture in form of granite oceans, gouged depthlessly by canyons, and iridescent with the daily chameleon-shift beyond man, beyond nature, of terrific colors, below the un-human iridescence of the sky.

P. 79 (influence of Coleridge)

Yes, musty cotton, bated and piled under long sheds of railway sidings; and odorous pine woodlands of the level South, saturated with brown faery light, and broken by the tall straight leafless poles of trees; a woman's leg below an elegantly lifted skirt mounting to a carriage in Canal Street (French or Creole probably); a white arm curved reaching for a window shade, French-olive faces window-glimmering, the Georgia doctor's wife who slept above him going out, the unquenchable fish-filled abundance of the unfenced, blue, slow cat-slapping lazy Pacific; and the river, the all-drinking, yellow, slow-surgng snake that drained the continent. His life was like that river, rich with its own deposited and onward-borne agglutinations, fecund with its sedimental accretions, filled exhaustlessly by life in order to be more richly itself, and this life, with the great purpose of a river, he emptied now into the harbor of his house, the sufficient haven of himself, for whom

the **gnarled vines wove round him thrice**, the earth burgeoned with abundant fruit and blossom, the fire burnt madly.

P. 81 (perhaps an influence on Fern Hill)

Eugene was loose now in the limitless meadows of sensation: his sensory equipment was so complete that at the moment of perception of a single thing, the whole background of color, warmth, odor, sound, taste established itself, so that later, the breath of hot dandelion brought back the grass-warm banks of Spring, a day, a place, the rustling of young leaves, or the page of a book, the thin exotic smell of tangerine, the wintry bite of great apples; or, as with Gulliver's Travels, a bright windy day in March, the spurting moments of warmth, the drip and reek of the earth-thaw, the feel of the fire.

P. 93 There was a boy named Otto Krause, a cheese-nosed, hair-faced, inch-browed German boy, lean and swift in the legs, hoarse-voiced and full of idiot laughter, who showed him the gardens of delight. There was a girl named Bessie Barnes, a black-haired, tall, bold-figured girl of thirteen years who acted as model. Otto Krause was fourteen, Eugene was eight: they were in the third grade. The German boy sat next to him, drew obscenities on his books, and passed his furtive scrawled indecencies across the aisle to Bessie.

And the nymph would answer with a lewd face, and a contemptuous blow against her shapely lifted buttock, a gesture which Otto considered as good as a promise, and which tickled him into hoarse sniggers.

P. 139 This starched and well brushed world of Sunday morning Presbyterianism, with its sober decency, its sense of restraint, its suggestion of quiet wealth, solid position, ordered ritual, seclusive establishment, moved him deeply with its tranquillity. He felt concretely his isolation from it, he entered it from the jangled disorder of his own life once a week, looking at it, and departing from it, for years, with the sad heart of a stranger. And from the mellow gloom of the church, the rich distant organ, the quiet nasal voice of the Scotch minister, the interminable prayers, and the rich little pictures of Christian mythology which he had collected as a child under the instruction of the spinsters, he gathered something of the pain, the mystery, the sensuous beauty of religion, something deeper and greater than this austere decency.

P. 145 She liked, almost invariably, young fast women. She liked the hectic pleasure of their lives, the sense of danger, their humor

and liberality. She was drawn magnetically to all the wedded harlotry, which, escaping the Sunday discipline of a Southern village, and the Saturday lust of sodden husbands, came gaily to Altamont in summer. She liked people who, as she said, "didn't mind taking a little drink now and then."

She liked Mary Thomas, a tall jolly young prostitute who came from Kentucky: she was a manicurist in an Altamont Hotel.

"There are two things I want to see," said Mary, "a rooster's you-know-what and a hen's what-is-it." She was full of loud compelling laughter. She had a small room with a sleeping porch, at the front of the house upstairs. Eugene brought her some cigarettes once: she stood before the window in a thin petticoat, her feet wide apart, her long sensual legs outlined against the light.

P. 147 When Mrs. Selborne first came to Dixieland from the hot South she was only twenty-three but she looked older. Ripeness with her was all: she was a tall heavy-bodied blonde, well kept and elegant. She moved leisurely with a luxurious sensual swing of the body: her smile was tender and full of vague allurements, her voice gentle, her sudden laughter, bubbling out of midnight secrecy, rich and full. She was one of several handsome and bacchic daughters of a depleted South Carolinian of good family; she had married at sixteen a red heavy man who came and went from her incomparable table, eating rapidly and heartily, muttering, when pressed, a few shy-sullen words, and departing to the closed leather-and-horse smell of his little office in the livery-stable he owned. She had two children by him, both girls: she moved with wasted stealth around all the quiet slander of a South Carolina mill-town, committing adultery carefully with a mill owner, a banker, and a lumber man, walking circumspectly with her tender blonde smile by day past all the sly smiles of town and trade, knowing that the earth was mined below her feet, and that her name, with clerk and merchant, was a sign for secret laughter. The natives, the men in particular, treated her with even more elaborate respect than a woman is usually given in a Southern town, but their eyes, behind the courteous unctious of their masks, were shiny with invitation.

Eugene felt when he first saw her, and knew about her, that she would never be caught and always known. His love for her was desperate. She was the living symbol of his desire--the dim vast figure of love and maternity, ageless and autumnal, waiting, corn-haired, deep-breasted, blonde of limb, in the ripe fields of harvest--Demeter, Helen, the ripe exhaustless and renewing energy, the cradling nurse of weariness and disenchantment. Below the

thrust of Spring, the sharp knife, the voices of the young girls in the darkness, the sharp inchoate expectancies of youth, his deep desire burned inextinguishably: something turned him always to the older women.

When Mrs. Selborne first came to Dixieland her oldest child was seven years old, her youngest five. She received a small check from her husband every week, and a substantial one from the lumber man. She brought a negro girl with her: she was lavish in her dispensations to the negress, and to her children: this wastefulness, ease of living, and her rich seductive laughter fascinated Helen, drew her to the older woman.

P. 158 -9 She went to Hot Springs in the winter that followed.

Eliza boiled herself out at the baths daily; sometimes, he went along with her, leaving her with a sensation of drunken independence, while he went into the men's quarters, stripping himself in a cool room, entering thence a hot one lined with couches, shutting himself in a steam-closet where he felt himself momentarily dwindling into the raining puddle of sweat at his feet, to emerge presently on trembling legs and to be rolled and kneaded about magnificently in a huge tub by a powerful grinning negro. Later, languorous, but with a feeling of deep purification, he lay out on one of the couches, victoriously his own man in a man's world. They talked from couch to couch, or walked pot-belliedly about, sashed coyly with bath towels--malarial Southerners with malarial drawls, paunch-eyed alcoholics, purple-skinned gamblers, and broken down prize-fighters. He liked the smell of steam and of the sweaty men.

P. 160 He drank endlessly the water that came smoking from the earth, hoping somehow to wash himself clean from all pollution, beginning his everlasting fantasy of the miraculous spring, or the bath, neck-high, of curative mud, which would draw out of a man's veins each drop of corrupted blood, dry up in him a cancerous growth, dwindle and absorb a cyst, remove all scorbutic blemishes, scoop and suck and thread away the fibrous slime of all disease, leaving him again with the perfect flesh of an animal.

P. 170ff **Uneda Lunch # 3 and Doctors**

In cool blue-pearl darkness they rounded the end of the Post Office and cut diagonally across the street to Uneda 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.

"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.

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

"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.

"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 revery, 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 to-day and gone to-morrow. 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?"

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.

"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.

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!"

Foaming with brilliant slapdash improvisation Harry Tugman declaimed:

"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.

P. 179 "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 Stern."

P. Across the Square, at its other edge, the young virgins of the eastern part of town walked lightly home in chattering groups. They came to town at four o'clock in the afternoon, walked up and down the little avenue several times, entered a shop to purchase small justifications, and finally went into the chief drugstore, where the bucks of the town loafed and drawled in lazy alert groups. It was their club, their brasserie, the forum of the sexes. With confident smiles the young men detached themselves from their group and strolled back to booth and table.

"Hey theah! Wheahd you come from?"

"Move ovah theah, lady. I want to tawk to you."

Eyes as blue as Southern skies looked roguishly up to laughing gray ones, the winsome dimples deepened, and the sweetest little tail in dear old Dixie slid gently over on the polished board.

P.

But he remained at Dixieland as long as there was any one to listen to him, and to the bleak little group of winter boarders he brought magic. They fed hungrily on all the dramatic gusto with which, lunging back and forth in the big rocker, before the blazing parlor fire, **he told and retold the legends of his experience**, taking, before their charmed eyes, an incident that had touched him romantically, and embellishing, weaving and building it up. A whole mythology grew up as, goggle-eyed, they listened:

p.

He thought that Troy should be like this--perfect, undecayed as the day when Hector died. Only they burned it. To find old cities as they were, unruined--the picture charmed him. The Lost Atlantis. Ville d'Ys. The old lost towns, seasunken. Great vacant ways, unruined, echoed under his lonely feet; he haunted vast arcades, he pierced the atrium, his shoes rang on the temple flags.

Or to be, he lusciously meditated, left alone with a group of pretty women in a town whence all the other people had fled from some terror of plague, earthquake, volcano, or other menace to which he, quite happily, was immune. Lolling his tongue delicately, he saw himself loafing sybaritically through first-class confectioners' and grocers' shops, gorging like an anaconda on imported dainties: exquisite small fish from Russia, France, and Sardinia; coal-black hams from England; ripe olives, brandied peaches, and liqueur chocolates. He would loot old cellars for fat Burgundies, crack the gold necks of earth-chilled bottles of Pol Roger against the wall, and slake his noonday thirst at the spouting bung of a great butt of Münchener dunkels. When his linen was soiled he would outfit himself anew with silk underwear and the finest shirtings; he would have a new hat every day in the week and new suits whenever he pleased.

He would occupy a new house every day, and sleep in a different bed every night, selecting the most luxurious residence ultimately for permanent occupancy, and bringing together in it the richest treasures of every notable library in the city. Finally, when he wanted a woman from the small group that remained and that spent its time in weaving new enticements for him, he would summons her by ringing out the number he had given her on the Court House bell.

P. He had a disease that is very common among old men who have lived carelessly and lustily--enlargement of the prostate gland. It was not often in itself a fatal disease--it was more often one of the flags of age and death, but it was ugly and uncomfortable. It was generally treated successfully by surgery--the operation was not desperate. But Gant hated and feared the knife: he listened eagerly to all persuasions against it.

He had no gift for philosophy. He could not view with amusement and detachment the death of the senses, the waning of desire, the waxing of physical impotence. He fed hungrily, lewdly, on all news of seduction: his amusement had in it the eyes of eagerness, the

hot breath of desire. He was incapable of the pleasant irony by which the philosophic spirit mocks that folly it is no longer able to enjoy.

Gant was incapable of resignation. He had the most burning of all lusts--the lust of memory, the ravenous hunger of the will which tries to waken what is dead. He had reached the time of life when he read the papers greedily for news of death. As friends and acquaintances died he shook his head with the melancholy hypocrisy of old men, saying: "They're all going, one by one. Ah, Lord! The old man will be the next." But he did not believe it. Death was still for the others, not for himself.

He grew old very rapidly. He began to die before their eyes--a quick age, and a slow death, impotent, disintegrating, horrible because his life had been so much identified with physical excess--huge drinking, huge eating, huge rioting debauchery. It was fantastic and terrible to see the great body waste. They began to watch the progress of his disease with something of the horror with which one watches the movements of a dog with a broken leg, before he is destroyed--a horror greater than that one feels when a man has a similar hurt, because a man may live without legs. A dog is all included in his hide.

P. He went three times a week to Cardiac's office for treatment. The dry doctor had grown old; behind his dusty restraint, the prim authority of his manner, there was a deepening well of senile bawdry. He had a comfortable fortune, he cared little for his dwindling practice. He was still a brilliant bacteriologist: he spent hours over slides etched in flowering patterns of bacilli, and he was sought after by diseased prostitutes, to whom he rendered competent service.

He dissuaded the Gants from surgery. He was jealously absorbed in the treatment of Gant's disease, scoffed at operations, and insisted he could give adequate relief by manipulation of the affected parts and the use of the catheter.

The two men became devoted friends. The doctor gave up entire mornings to the treatment of Gant's disease. The consulting-room was filled with their sly laughter while scrofulous mountaineers glared dully at the pages of *Life* in the antechamber. As Gant sprawled out voluptuously on the table after his masseur had finished his work, he listened appreciatively to the secrets of light women, or to tidbits from books of pseudoscientific pornography, of which the doctor had a large number.

"You say," he demanded eagerly, "that the monks petitioned the archbishop?"

"Yes," said the doctor. "They suffered during the hot weather. He wrote 'granted' across the petition. Here's a photograph of the document." He held the book open in his clean parched fingers.

"Merciful God!" said Gant, staring. "I suppose it's pretty bad in those hot countries."

He licked his thumb, smiling lewdly to himself. The late Oscar Wilde, for instance.

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[ Mrs. Leonard, his teacher]

She did not have knowledge. But she had wisdom. She found immediately a person's quality. Boys were her heroes, her little gods. She believed that the world was to be saved, life redeemed, by one of them. She saw the flame that burns in each of them, and she guarded it. She tried somehow to reach the dark gropings toward light and articulation, of the blunt, the stolid, the shamefast. She spoke a calm low word to the trembling racehorse, and he was still.

Thus, he made no confessions. He was still prison-pent. But he turned always to Margaret Leonard as toward the light: she saw the unholy fires that cast their sword-dance on his face, she saw the hunger and the pain, and she fed him--majestic crime!--on poetry.

Whatever of fear or shame locked them in careful silence, whatever decorous pretense of custom guarded their tongues, they found release in the eloquent symbols of verse. And by that sign, Margaret was lost to the good angels. For what care the ambassadors of Satan, for all the small fidelities of the letter and the word, if from the singing choir of earthly methodism we can steal a single heart--lift up, flame-tipped, one great lost soul to the high sinfulness of poetry?

The wine of the grape had never stained her mouth, but the wine of poetry was inextinguishably mixed with her blood, entombed in her flesh.

By the beginning of his fifteenth year Eugene knew almost every major lyric in the language. He possessed them to their living

core, not in a handful of scattered quotations, but almost line for line. His thirst was drunken, insatiate: he added to his hoard entire scenes from Schiller's Wilhelm Tell, which he read by himself in German; the lyrics of Heine, and several folk songs. He committed to memory the entire passage in the Anabasis, the mounting and triumphal Greek which described the moment when the starving remnant of the Ten Thousand had come at length to the sea, and sent up their great cry, calling it by name. In addition, he memorized some of the sonorous stupidities of Cicero, because of the sound, and a little of Caesar, terse and lean.

The great lyrics of Burns he knew from music, from reading, or from hearing Gant recite them. But "Tam O'Shanter" Margaret Leonard read to him, her eyes sparkling with laughter as she read:

"In hell they'll roast thee like a herrin'."

The shorter Wordsworth pieces he had read at grammar school. "My heart leaps up," "I wandered lonely as a cloud," and "Behold her, single in the field," he had known for years; but Margaret read him the sonnets and made him commit "The world is too much with us" to memory. Her voice trembled and grew low with passion when she read it.

He knew all the songs in Shakespeare's plays, but the two that moved him most were: "O mistress mine, where are you roaming?" which blew a far horn in his heart, and the great song from Cymbeline: "Fear no more the heat o' the sun." He had tried to read all the sonnets, and failed, because their woven density was too much for his experience, but he had read, and forgotten, perhaps half of them, and remembered a few which burned up from the page, strangely, immediately, like lamps for him.

Those that he knew were: "When, in the chronicle of wasted time," "To me, fair friend, you never can be old," "Let me not to the marriage of true minds," "The expense of spirit in a waste of shame," "When to the sessions of sweet silent thought," "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" "From you have I been absent in the spring," and "That time of year thou mayest in me behold," the greatest of all, which Margaret brought him to, and which shot through him with such electric ecstasy when he came to "Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang," that he could hardly hold his course unbroken through the rest of it.

He read all the plays save Timon, Titus Andronicus, Coriolanus, and King John, but the only play that held his interest from first to last was King Lear. With most of the famous declamatory passages he had been familiar, for years, by Gant's recitation, and now they wearied him. And all the wordy pinwheels of the clowns, which Margaret laughed at dutifully, and exhibited as specimens of the master's swingeing wit, he felt vaguely were very dull. He never had any confidence in Shakespeare's humor--his Touchstones were not only windy fools, but dull ones.

"For my part I had rather bear with you than bear you; yet I should bear no cross if I did bear you, for I think you have no money in your purse."

This sort of thing reminded him unpleasantly of the Pentlands. The Fool in "Lear" alone he thought admirable--a sad, tragic, mysterious fool. For the rest, he went about and composed parodies, which, with a devil's grin, he told himself would split the sides of posterity. Such as: "Aye, nuncle, an if Shrove Tuesday come last Wednesday, I'll do the capon to thy cock, as Tom O'Ludgate told the shepherd when he found the cowslips gone. Dost bay with two throats, Cerberus? Down, boy, down!"

The admired beauties he was often tired of, perhaps because he had heard them so often, and it seemed to him, moreover, that Shakespeare often spoke absurdly and pompously when he might better have spoken simply, as in the scene where, being informed by the Queen of the death of his sister by drowning, Laertes says:

"Too much of water hast thou, poor Ophelia,  
And therefore I forbid my tears."

You really can't beat that (he thought). Aye, Ben! Would he had blotted a hundred! A thousand!

But he was deep in other passages which the elocutionist misses, such as the terrible and epic invocation of Edmund, in King Lear, drenched in evil, which begins:

"Thou, Nature, art my goddess,"

and ends,

"Now, gods, stand up for bastards."

It was as dark as night, as evil as Niggertown, as vast as the elemental winds that howled down across the hills: he chanted it in the black hours of his labor, into the dark and the wind. He understood; he exulted in its evil--which was the evil of earth, of illicit nature. It was a call to the unclassed; it was a cry for those beyond the fence, for rebel angels, and for all of the men who are too tall.

He knew nothing of the Elizabethan drama beyond Shakespeare's plays. But he very early came to know a little of the poetry of Ben Jonson, whom Margaret looked on as a literary Falstaff, condoning, with the familiar weakness of the schoolmarm, his Gargantuan excess as a pardonable whimsy of genius.

She was somewhat academically mirthful over the literary bacchanalia, as a professor in a Baptist college smacks his lips appetizingly and beams ruddily at his classes when he reads of sack and porter and tankards foaming with the musty ale. All this is part of the liberal tradition. Men of the world are broadminded. Witness Professor Albert Thorndyke Firkins, of the University of Chicago, at the Falcon in Soho. Smiling bravely, he sits over a half-pint of bitter beer, in the company of a racing tout, a sway-backed barmaid, broad in the stern, with adjustable teeth, and three companionable tarts from Lisle street, who are making the best of two pints of Guinness. With eager impatience he awaits the arrival of G. K. Chesterton and E. V. Lucas.

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Miss Margaret Blanchard and Mrs. C. M. McReady, the druggist's drugged wife who, by the white pitted fabric of her skin, and the wide bright somnolence of her eyes, on honey-dew had fed too often, came out of the theatre and turned down toward Wood's pharmacy.

### **[Ben wants to enlist in the Canadian Army]**

At the second entrance to the Doctors' and Surgeons' Building, he turned in, and began to mount the dark creaking stairs. Somewhere, with punctual developing monotony, a single drop of water was falling into the wet black basin of a sink. He paused in the wide corridor of the first floor to control the nervous thudding of his heart. Then he walked half-way down and entered the waiting-room of Dr. J. H. Coker. It was vacant. Frowning, he sniffed the air.

The whole building was sharp with the clean nervous odor of antiseptics. A litter of magazines--Life, Judge, The Literary Digest, and The American--on the black mission table, told its story of weary and distressed fumbling. The inner door opened and the doctor's assistant, Miss Ray, came out. She had on her hat. She was ready to depart.

"Do you want to see the doctor?" she asked.

"Yes," said Ben, "is he busy?"

"Come on in, Ben," said Coker, coming to the door. He took his long wet cigar from his mouth, grinning yellowly. "That's all for to-day, Laura. You can go."

"Good-bye," said Miss Laura Ray, departing.

Ben went into Coker's office. Coker closed the door and sat down at his untidy desk.

"You'll be more comfortable if you lie down on that table," he said grinning.

Ben gave the doctor's table a look of nausea.

"How many have died on that thing?" he asked. He sat down nervously in a chair by the desk, and lighted a cigarette, holding the flame to the charred end of cigar Coker thrust forward.

"Well, what can I do for you, son?" he asked.

"I'm tired of pushing daisies here," said Ben. "I want to push them somewhere else."

"What do you mean, Ben?"

"I suppose you've heard, Coker," said Ben quietly and insultingly, "that there's a war going on in Europe. That is, if you've learned to read the papers."

"No, I hadn't heard about it, son," said Coker, puffing slowly and deeply. "I read a paper--the one that comes out in the morning. I suppose they haven't got the news yet." He grinned maliciously. "What do you want, Ben?"

"I'm thinking of going to Canada and enlisting," said Ben. "I want

you to tell me if I can get in."

Coker was silent a moment. He took the long chewed weed from his mouth and looked at it thoughtfully.

"What do you want to do that for, Ben?" he said.

Ben got up suddenly, and went to the window. He cast his cigarette away into the court. It struck the cement well with a small dry plop. When he turned around, his sallow face had gone white and passionate.

"In Christ's name, Coker," he said, "what's it all about? Are you able to tell me? What in heaven's name are we here for? You're a doctor--you ought to know something."

Coker continued to look at his cigar. It had gone out again.

"Why?" he said deliberately. "Why should I know anything?"

"Where do we come from? Where do we go to? What are we here for? What the hell is it all about?" Ben cried out furiously in a rising voice. He turned bitterly, accusingly, on the older man. "For God's sake, speak up, Coker. Don't sit there like a damned tailor's dummy. Say something, won't you?"

"What do you want me to say?" said Coker. "What am I? a mindreader? A spiritualist? I'm your physician, not your priest. I've seen them born, and I've seen them die. What happens to them before or after, I can't say."

"Damn that!" said Ben. "What happens to them in between?"

"You're as great an authority on that as I am, Ben," said Coker. "What you want, son, is not a doctor, but a prophet."

"They come to you when they're sick, don't they?" said Ben. "They all want to get well, don't they? You do your best to cure them, don't you?"

"No," said Coker. "Not always. But I'll grant that I'm supposed to. What of it?"

"You must all think that it's about something," said Ben, "or you wouldn't do it!"

"A man must live, mustn't he?" said Coker with a grin.

"That's what I'm asking you, Coker. Why must he?"

"Why," said Coker, "in order to work nine hours a day in a newspaper office, sleep nine hours, and enjoy the other six in washing, shaving, dressing, eating at the Greasy Spoon, loafing in front of Wood's, and occasionally taking the Merry Widow to see Francis X. Bushman. Isn't that reason enough for any man? If a man's hard-working and decent, and invests his money in the Building and Loan every week, instead of squandering it on cigarettes, coca-cola, and Kuppenheimer clothes, he may own a little home some day." Coker's voice sank to a hush of reverence. "He may even have his own car, Ben. Think of that! He can get in it, and ride, and ride, and ride. He can ride all over these damned mountains. He can be very, very happy. He can take exercise regularly in the Y. M. C. A. and think only clean thoughts. He can marry a good pure woman and have any number of fine sons and daughters, all of whom may be brought up in the Baptist, Methodist, or Presbyterian faiths, and given splendid courses in Economics, Commercial Law, and the Fine Arts, at the State university. There's plenty to live for, Ben. There's something to keep you busy every moment."

"You're a great wit, Coker," Ben said, scowling. "You're as funny as a crutch." He straightened his humped shoulders self-consciously, and filled his lungs with air.

"Well, what about it?" he asked, with a nervous grin. "Am I fit to go?"

"Let's see," said Coker deliberately, beginning to look him over. "Feet--pigeon-toed, but good arch." He looked at Ben's tan leathers closely.

"What's the matter, Coker?" said Ben. "Do you need your toes to shoot a gun with?"

"How're your teeth, son?"

Ben drew back his thin lips and showed two rows of hard white grinders. At the same moment, casually, swiftly, Coker prodded him with a strong yellow finger in the solar plexis. His distended chest collapsed; he bent over, laughing, and coughed dryly. Coker turned away to his desk and picked up his cigar.

"What's the matter, Coker?" said Ben. "What's the idea?"

"That's all, son. I'm through with you," said Coker.

"Well, what about it?" said Ben nervously.

"What about what?"

"Am I all right?"

"Certainly you're all right," said Coker. He turned with burning match. "Who said you weren't all right?"

Ben stared at him, scowling, with fear-bright eyes.

"Quit your kidding, Coker," he said. "I'm three times seven, you know. Am I fit to go?"

"What's the rush?" said Coker. "The war's not over yet. We may get into it before long. Why not wait a bit?"

"That means I'm not fit," said Ben. "What's the matter with me, Coker?"

"Nothing," said Coker carefully. "You're a bit thin. A little run down, aren't you, Ben? You need a little meat on those bones, son. You can't sit on a stool at the Greasy Spoon, with a cigarette in one hand and a cup of coffee in the other, and get fat."

"Am I all right or not, Coker?"

Coker's long death's-head widened in a yellow grin.

"Yes," he said. "You're all right, Ben. You're one of the most all right people I know."

Ben read the true answer in Coker's veined and weary eyes. His own were sick with fear. But he said bitingly:

"Thanks, Coker. You're a lot of help. I appreciate what you've done a lot. As a doctor, you're a fine first baseman."

### **College Days**

"Observe," lisped Mr. Torrington, the old Rhodes Scholar (Pulpit Hill and Merton, '14), "observe how skillfully 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.

### Chapter 33

#### Ch. 33

What he had drunk beat pleasantly through his veins in warm pulses, bathing the tips of ragged nerves, giving to him a feeling of power and tranquillity he had never known. Presently, he went to the pantry where the liquor was stored. He took a water tumbler and filled it experimentally with equal portions of whiskey, gin, and rum. Then, seating himself at the kitchen table, he began to drink the mixture slowly.

The terrible draught smote him with the speed and power of a man's fist. He was made instantly drunken, and he knew instantly why men drank. It was, he knew, one of the great moments in his life--he lay, greedily watching the mastery of the grape over his virgin flesh, like a girl for the first time in the embrace of her lover. And suddenly, he knew how completely he was his father's son--how completely, and with what added power and exquisite refinement of sensation, was he Gantian. He exulted in the great length of his limbs and his body, through which the mighty liquor could better work its wizardry. In all the earth there was no other like him, no other fitted to be so sublimely and magnificently drunken. **It was greater than all the music he had ever heard; it was as great as the highest poetry.** Why had he never been told? Why had no one ever written adequately about it? Why, when it was possible to buy

a god in a bottle, and drink him off, and become a god oneself, were men not forever drunken?

He had a moment of great wonder--the magnificent wonder with which we discover the simple and unspeakable things that lie buried and known, but unconfessed, in us. So might a man feel if he wakened after death and found himself in Heaven.

Then a divine paralysis crept through his flesh. His limbs were numb; his tongue thickened until he could not bend it to the cunning sounds of words. He spoke aloud, repeating difficult phrases over and over, filled with wild laughter and delight at his effort. Behind his drunken body his brain hung poised like a falcon, looking on him with scorn, with tenderness, looking on all laughter with grief and pity. There lay in him something that could not be seen and could not be touched, which was above and beyond him--an eye within an eye, a brain above a brain, the Stranger that dwelt in him and regarded him and was him, and that he did not know. But, thought he, I am alone now in this house; if I can come to know him, I will.

\*\*\*\*\*

"We should all be thankful for what we have," said Luke sententiously. "Many a fellow would give his right eye for the chance you've been given."

...

"Yes, I have a great deal to give thanks for," said Eugene. "I give thanks for every dirty lust and hunger that crawled through the polluted blood of my noble ancestors. I give thanks for every scrofulous token that may ever come upon me. I give thanks for the love and mercy that kneaded me over the washtub the day before my birth. I give thanks for the country slut who nursed me and let my dirty bandage fester across my navel. I give thanks for every blow and curse I had from any of you during my childhood, for every dirty cell you ever gave me to sleep in, for the ten million hours of cruelty or indifference, and the thirty minutes of cheap advice."

"Unnatural!" Eliza whispered. "Unnatural son! You will be punished if there's a just God in heaven."

"Oh, there is! I'm sure there is!" cried Eugene. "Because I have been punished. By God, I shall spend the rest of my life getting my heart back, healing and forgetting every scar you put upon me when I was a child. The first move I ever made, after the cradle, was to crawl for the door, and every move I have made since has been an effort to escape. And now at last I am free from you all, although you may hold me for a few years more. If I am not free, I am at least locked up in my own prison, but I shall get me some beauty, I shall get me some order out of this jungle of my life: I shall find my way out of it yet, though it take me twenty years more--alone."

"Alone?" said Eliza, with the old suspicion. "Where are you going?"

"Ah," he said, "you were not looking, were you? I've gone."

Of Norfolk News, VA

His imperial country, for the first time, was gathering the huge thrust of her might. The air was charged with murderous exuberance, rioting and corrupt extravagance.

Through the hot streets of that town seethed the toughs, the crooks, the vagabonds of a nation--Chicago gunmen, bad niggers from Texas, Bowery bums, pale Jews with soft palms, from the shops of the city, Swedes from the Middle-West, Irish from New England, mountaineers from Tennessee and North Carolina, whores, in shoals and droves, from everywhere. For these the war was a fat enormous goose raining its golden eggs upon them. There was no thought or belief in any future. There was only the triumphant Now. There was no life beyond the moment. There was only an insane flux and re-flux of getting and spending.

Young men from Georgia farms came, in the evenings, from their work on piers, in camps, in shipyards, to dress up in their peacock plumage. And at night, hard and brown and lean of hand and face, they stood along the curbing in \$18.00 tan leathers, \$80.00 suits, and \$8.00 silk shirts striped with broad alternating bands of red and blue. They were carpenters, masons, gang overseers, or said they were: they were paid ten, twelve, fourteen, eighteen dollars a day.

There by the sea of the dark Virginias, he thought of the forgotten faces, of all the million patterns of himself, the ghost of his lost flesh. The child that heard Swain's cow, the lost boy in the Ozarks, the carrier of news among the blacks, and the boy who went

in by the lattice with Jim Trivett. And the waitress, and Ben, and  
Laura? Dead, too? **Where? How? Why? Why has the web been woven?**  
**Why do we die so many deaths? How came I here beside the sea?**  
**O lost, O far and lonely, where?**

Sometimes, as he walked back among the dancers, a scarecrow in  
flapping rags, he looked and saw himself among them. He seemed to  
be two people: he constantly saw himself with dark bent face  
sitting upon the top rail of a fence, watching himself go by with a  
bright herd of young people. He saw himself among the crowds,  
several inches shorter than he was, fitting comfortably into a  
world where everything was big enough for him.

And while he stared and saw himself beloved and admitted, he heard  
them laugh: he felt suddenly the hard white ring of their faces  
about him, and he plunged away, with cursing mouth.

O my sweet bitches! My fine cheap sluts! You little crawling itch  
of twiddlers: you will snigger at me! At me! At me! (He beat his  
hands against his ribs.) You will mock at me, with your drug-store  
pimps, your Jazz-bo apes, your gorilla gobs, you cute little side-  
porch chippies! What do you understand? The lust of a goat, the  
stink of your kind--that does for you, my girls. And yet you laugh  
at me! Ah, but I'll tell you why you laugh: you are afraid of me  
because I am not like the others. You hate me because I do not  
belong. You see I am finer and greater than any one you know: you  
cannot reach me and you hate me. That's it! The ethereal (yet  
manly) beauty of my features, my boyish charm (for I am Just a Boy)  
blended with the tragic wisdom of my eyes (as old as life and  
filled with the brooding tragedy of the ages), the sensitive and  
delicate flicker of my mouth, and my marvellous dark face blooming  
inward on strange loveliness like a flower--all this you want to  
kill because you cannot touch it. Ah me! (Thinking of his strange  
beauty, his eyes grew moist with love and glory, and he was forced  
to blow his nose.) Ah, but She will know. The love of a lady.  
Proudly, with misty eyes, he saw her standing beside him against  
the rabble: her elegant small head, wound with a bracelet of bright  
hair, against his shoulder, and with two splendid pearls in her  
ears. Dearest! Dearest! We stand here on a star. We are beyond  
them now. Behold! They shrink, they fade, they pass--victorious,  
enduring, marvellous love, my dearest, we remain.

### **Influenza Epidemic of 1918 – Ben's Death**

For a moment Eugene could see nothing, for dizziness and fear. Then, in the gray shaded light of the room, he descried Bessie Gant, the nurse, and the long yellow skull's-head of Coker, smiling wearily at him, with big stained teeth, over a long chewed cigar. Then, under the terrible light which fell directly and brutally upon the bed alone, he saw Ben. And in that moment of searing recognition he saw, what they had all seen, that Ben was dying.

Ben's long thin body lay three-quarters covered by the bedding; its gaunt outline was bitterly twisted below the covers, in an attitude of struggle and torture. It seemed not to belong to him, it was somehow distorted and detached as if it belonged to a beheaded criminal. And the sallow yellow of his face had turned gray; out of this granite tint of death, lit by two red flags of fever, the stiff black furze of a three-day beard was growing. The beard was somehow horrible; it recalled the corrupt vitality of hair, which can grow from a rotting corpse. And Ben's thin lips were lifted, in a constant grimace of torture and strangulation, about his white somehow dead-looking teeth, as inch by inch he gasped a thread of air into his lungs.

And the sound of this gasping--loud, hoarse, rapid, unbelievable, filling the room, and orchestrating every moment in it--gave to the scene its final note of horror.

Ben lay upon the bed below them, drenched in light, like some enormous insect on a naturalist's table, fighting, while they looked at him, to save with his poor wasted body the life that no one could save for him. It was monstrous, brutal.

As Eugene approached, Ben's fear-bright eyes rested upon the younger brother for the first time and bodilessly, without support, he lifted his tortured lungs from the pillow, seizing the boy's wrists fiercely in the hot white circle of his hands, and gasping in strong terror like a child: "Why have you come? Why have you come home, 'Gene?'"

### Chapter 35

"How long have you known this?" she said.

"For two days," he answered. "From the beginning." He was silent for a moment. "For ten years!" he went on with growing energy. "Since I first saw him, at three in the morning, in the Greasy Spoon, with a doughnut in one hand and a cigarette in the other.

My dear, dear girl," he said gently as she tried to speak, "we can't turn back the days that have gone. We can't turn life back to the hours when our lungs were sound, our blood hot, our bodies young. We are a flash of fire--a brain, a heart, a spirit. And we are three-cents-worth of lime and iron--which we cannot get back."

He picked up his greasy black slouch hat, and jammed it carelessly upon his head. Then he fumbled for a match and lit the chewed cigar.

"Has everything been done?" she said again. "I want to know! Is there anything left worth trying?"

He made a weary gesture of his arms.

"My dear girl!" he said. "He's drowning! Drowning!"

She stood frozen with the horror of his pronouncement.

Coker looked for a moment at the gray twisted shadow on the bed. Then, quietly, sadly, with tenderness and tired wonder, he said: "Old Ben. When shall we see HIS like again?"

...

We can believe in the nothingness of life, we can believe in the nothingness of death and of life after death--but who can believe in the nothingness of Ben? Like Apollo, who did his penance to the high god in the sad house of King Admetus, he came, a god with broken feet, into the gray hovel of this world. And he lived here a stranger, trying to recapture the music of the lost world, trying to recall the great forgotten language, the lost faces, the stone, the leaf, the door.

O Artemidorus, farewell!

### Chapter 37

His mind gathered itself out of the wreckage of little things: out of all that the world had shown or taught him he could remember now only the great star above the town, and the light that had swung over the hill, and the fresh sod upon Ben's grave, and the wind, and far sounds and music, and Mrs. Pert.

Wind pressed the boughs, the withered leaves were shaking. It was October, but the leaves were shaking. A star was shaking. A light was waking. Wind was quaking. The star was far. The night, the

light. The light was bright. A chant, a song, the slow dance of the little things within him. The star over the town, the light over the hill, the sod over Ben, night over all. His mind fumbled with little things. Over us all is something. Star, night, earth, light . . . light . . . O lost! . . . a stone . . . a leaf . . . a door . . . O ghost! . . . a light . . . a song . . . a light . . . a light swings over the hill . . . over us all . . . a star shines over the town . . . over us all . . . a light.

We shall not come again. We never shall come back again. But over us all, over us all, over us all is--something.

Wind pressed the boughs; the withered leaves were shaking. It was October, but some leaves were shaking.

A light swings over the hill. (We shall not come again.) And over the town a star. (Over us all, over us all that shall not come again.) And over the day the dark. But over the darkness--what?

We shall not come again. We never shall come back again.

Over the dawn a lark. (That shall not come again.) And wind and music far. O lost! (It shall not come again.) And over your mouth the earth. O ghost! But, over the darkness--what?

Wind pressed the boughs; the withered leaves were quaking.

We shall not come again. We never shall come back again. It was October, but we never shall come back again.

When will they come again? When will they come again?

The laurel, the lizard, and the stone will come no more. The women weeping at the gate have gone and will not come again. And pain and pride and death will pass, and will not come again. And light and dawn will pass, and the star and the cry of a lark will pass, and will not come again. And we shall pass, and shall not come again.

What things will come again? O Spring, the cruellest and fairest of the seasons, will come again. And the strange and buried men will come again, in flower and leaf the strange and buried men will come again, and death and the dust will never come again, for death and the dust will die. And Ben will come again, he will not die again, in flower and leaf, in wind and music far, he will come back again.

Below, benched in rapt servility, they waited for his first husky word. Eugene looked at the dull earnest faces, lured from the solid pews of Calvinism to the shadowland of metaphysics. And now his mockery will play like lightning around their heads, but they will never see it, nor feel it strike. They will rush forward to wrestle with his shadow, to hear his demon's laughter, to struggle solemnly with their unborn souls.

The clean cuffed hand holds up an abraded stick. Their stare follows obediently along its lustre.

"Mr. Willis?"

White, bewildered, servile, the patient slave's face.

"Yes, sir."

"What have I here?"

"A stick, sir."

"What is a stick?"

"It's a piece of wood, sir."

A pause. Ironic eyebrows ask their laughter. They snicker smugly for the wolf that will devour them.

"Mr. Willis says a stick is a piece of wood."

Their laughter rattles against the walls. Absurd.

"But a stick IS a piece of wood," says Mr. Willis.

"So is a tree or a telephone-pole. No, I'm afraid that will not do. Does the class agree with Mr. Willis?"

"A stick is a piece of wood cut off at a certain length."

"Then we agree, Mr. Ransom, that a stick is not simply wood with unlimited extension?"

The stunned peasant's face with its blink of effort.

"I see that Mr. Gant is leaning forward in his seat. There is a light in his face that I have seen there before. Mr. Gant will not

sleep of nights, for thinking."

"A stick," said Eugene, "is not only wood but the negation of wood. It is the meeting in Space of Wood and No-Wood. A stick is finite and unextended wood, a fact determined by its own denial."

The old head listens gravely above the ironic intake of their breath. He will bear me out and praise me, for I am measured against this peasant earth. He sees me with the titles of proud office; and he loves victory.

"We have a new name for him, Professor Weldon," said Nick Mabley. "We call him Hegel Gant."

He listened to their shout of laughter; he saw their pleased faces turn back on him. That was meant well. I shall smile--their Great Original, the beloved eccentric, the poet of substantial yokels.

"That's a name he may be worthy of," said Vergil Weldon seriously.

Old Fox, I too can juggle with your phrases so they will never catch me. Over the jungle of their wits our unfoiled minds strike irony and passion. Truth? Reality? The Absolute? The Universal? Wisdom? Experience? Knowledge? The Fact? The Concept? Death--the great negation? Parry and thrust, Volpone! Have we not words? We shall prove anything. But Ben, and the demon-flicker of his smile? Where now?

The Spring comes back. I see the sheep upon the hill. The belled cows come along the road in wreaths of dust, and the wagons creak home below the pale ghost of the moon. But what stirs within the buried heart? Where are the lost words? And who has seen his shadow in the Square?

"And if they asked you, Mr. Rountree?"

"I'd have told the truth," said Mr. Rountree, removing his glasses.

"But they had built a good big fire, Mr. Rountree."

"That doesn't matter," said Mr. Rountree, putting his glasses on again.

How nobly we can die for truth--in conversation.

"It was a very hot fire, Mr. Rountree. They'd have burned you if you hadn't recanted."

"Ah. I'd have let them burn," said the martyred Rountree through moistening spectacles.

"I think it might be painful," Vergil Weldon suggested. "Even a little blister hurts."

"Who wants to be burned for anything?" said Eugene. "I'd have done what Galileo did--backed out of it."

"So should I," said Vergil Weldon, and their faces arched with gleeful malice over the heavy laughter of the class.

Nevertheless, it moves.

"On one side of the table stood the combined powers of Europe; on the other stood Martin Luther, the son of a blacksmith."

The voice of husky passion, soul-shaken. This they can remember, and put down.

"There, if ever, was a situation to try the strongest soul. But the answer came like a flash. Ich kann nicht anders--I can't do otherwise. It was one of the great utterances of history."

That phrase, used now for thirty years, relic of Yale and Harvard: Royce and Munsterberg. In all this jugglery, the Teutons were Weldon's masters, yet mark how thirstily the class lap it up. He will not let them read, lest some one find the rag-quilt of his takings from Zeno to Immanuel Kant. The crazy patchwork of three thousand years, the forced marriage of irreconcilables, the summation of all thought, in his old head. Socrates begat Plato. Plato begat Plotinus. Plotinus begat St. Augustine. . . . Kant begat Hegel. Hegel begat Vergil Weldon. Here we pause. There's no more to beget. An Answer to All Things in Thirty Easy Lessons. How sure they are they've found it!

And to-night they will carry their dull souls into his study, will make unflinchingly confessions, will writhe in concocted tortures of the spirit, revealing struggles that they never had. "It took character to do a thing like that. It took a man who refused to

crack under pressure. And that is what I want my boys to do! I want them to succeed! I want them to absorb their negations. I want them to keep as clean as a hound's tooth!"

Eugene winced, and looked around on all the faces set in a resolve to fight desperately for monogamy, party politics, and the will of the greatest number.

And yet the Baptists fear this man! Why? He has taken the whiskers off their God, but for the rest, he has only taught them to vote the ticket.

So here is Hegel in the Cotton Belt!

...

During these years Eugene would go away from Pulpit Hill, by night and by day, when April was a young green blur, or when the Spring was deep and ripe. But he liked best to go away by night, rushing across a cool Spring countryside full of dew and starlight, under a great beach of the moon ribbed with clouds.

He would go to Exeter or Sydney; sometimes he would go to little towns he had never before visited. He would register at hotels as "Robert Herrick," "John Donne," "George Peele," "William Blake," and "John Milton." No one ever said anything to him about it. The people in those small towns had such names. Once he registered at a hotel, in a small Piedmont town, as "Ben Jonson."

The clerk spun the book critically.

"Isn't there an h in that name?" he said.

"No," said Eugene. "That's another branch of the family. I have an uncle, Samuel, who spells his name that way."

Sometimes, at hotels of ill-repute, he would register, with dark buried glee, as "Robert Browning," "Alfred Tennyson," and "William Wordsworth."

Once he registered as "Henry W. Longfellow."

"You can't fool me," said the clerk, with a hard grin of disbelief. "That's the name of a writer."

...

He went back to Pulpit Hill for two or three days of delightful loneliness in the deserted college. He prowled through the empty campus at midnight under the great moons of the late rich Spring; he breathed the thousand rich odors of tree and grass and flower, of the opulent and seductive South; and he felt a delicious sadness when he thought of his departure, and saw there in the moon the thousand phantom shapes of the boys he had known who would come no more.

....

And in the day he went to talk with Vergil Weldon. The old man was charming, confidential, full of wise intimacy, gentle humor. They sat beneath the great trees of his yard and drank iced tea. Eugene was thinking of California, Peru, Asia, Alaska, Europe, Africa, China. But he mentioned Harvard. For him, it was not the name of a university--it was rich magic, wealth, elegance, joy, proud loneliness, rich books and golden browsing; it was an enchanted name like Cairo and Damascus. And he felt somehow that it gave a reason, a goal of profit, to his wild ecstasy.

"Yes," said Vergil Weldon approvingly. "It's the place for you, Mr. Gant. It doesn't matter about the others. They're ready now. But a mind like yours must not be pulled green. You must give it a chance to ripen. There you will find yourself."

And he talked enchantingly about the good free life of the mind, cloistered study, the rich culture of the city, and about the food. "They give you food there that a man can eat, Mr. Gant," he said. "Your mind can do its work on it." Then he spoke of his own student days there, and of the great names of Royce and Everett, and William James.

Eugene looked with passionate devotion at the grand old head, calm, wise and comforting. In a moment of vision, he saw that, for him, here was the last of the heroes, the last of those giants to whom we give the faith of our youth, believing like children that the riddle of our lives may be solved by their quiet judgment. He believed, and no experience, he knew, would ever make him disbelieve, that one of the great lives of his time had unfolded itself quietly in the little college town.

### **Cf – The Wasteland (1922)**

What things will come again? **O Spring, the cruellest and fairest of the seasons**, will come again. And the strange and buried men will come again, in flower and leaf the strange and buried men will

come again, and death and the dust will never come again, for death  
and the dust will die. And Ben will come again, he will not die  
again, in flower and leaf, in wind and music far, he will come back  
again.