

Look Homeward, Angel **Excerpt for Part One**

Eugene saw his father's name, faded, on the old brick in moonlight. On the stone porch of the shop, the angels held their marble posture. They seemed to have frozen, in the moonlight.

Leaning against the iron railing of the porch, above the sidewalk, a man stood smoking. Troubled and a little afraid, Eugene came over. Slowly, he mounted the long wooden steps, looking carefully at the man's face. It was half-obscurd in shadow.

"Is there anybody there?" said Eugene.

No one answered.

But, as Eugene reached the top, he saw that the man was Ben.

Ben stared at him a moment without speaking. Although Eugene could not see his face very well under the obscuring shadow of his gray felt hat, he knew that he was scowling.

"Ben?" said Eugene doubtfully, faltering a little on the top step.
"Is it you, Ben?"

"Yes," said Ben. In a moment, he added in a surly voice: "Who did you think it was, you little idiot?"

"I wasn't sure," said Eugene somewhat timidly. "I couldn't see your face."

They were silent a moment. Then Eugene, clearing his throat in his embarrassment, said: "I thought you were dead, Ben."

"Ah-h!" said Ben contemptuously, jerking his head sharply upward.
"Listen to this, won't you?"

He drew deeply on his cigarette: the spiral fumes coiled out and melted in the moon-bright silence.

"No," he said in a moment, quietly. "No, I am not dead."

Eugene came up on the porch and sat down on a limestone base, up-ended. Ben turned, in a moment, and climbed up on the rail, bending forward comfortably upon his knees.

Eugene fumbled in his pockets for a cigarette, with fingers that were stiff and trembling. He was not frightened: he was speechless with wonder and strong eagerness, and afraid to betray his thoughts to ridicule. He lighted a cigarette. Presently he said, painfully, hesitantly, in apology:

"Ben, are you a ghost?"

Ben did not mock.

"No," he said. "I am not a ghost."

There was silence again, while Eugene sought timorously for words.

"I hope," he began presently, with a small cracked laugh, "I hope, then, this doesn't mean that I'm crazy?"

"Why not?" said Ben, with a swift flickering grin. "Of course you're crazy."

"Then," said Eugene slowly, "I'm imagining all this?"

"In heaven's name!" Ben cried irritably. "How should I know? Imagining all what?"

"What I mean," said Eugene, "is, are we here talking together, or not?"

"Don't ask me," said Ben. "How should I know?"

With a strong rustle of marble and a cold sigh of weariness, the angel nearest Eugene moved her stone foot and lifted her arm to a higher balance. The slender lily stipe shook stiffly in her elegant cold fingers.

"Did you see that?" Eugene cried excitedly.

"Did I see what?" said Ben, annoyed.

"Th-th-that angel there!" Eugene chattered, pointing with a trembling finger. "Did you see it move? It lifted its arm."

"What of it?" Ben asked irritably. "It has a right to, hasn't it? You know," he added with biting sarcasm, "there's no law against an angel lifting its arm if it wants to."

"No, I suppose not," Eugene admitted slowly, after a moment. "Only, I've always heard--"

"Ah! Do you believe all you hear, fool?" Ben cried fiercely.

"Because," he added more calmly, in a moment, drawing on his cigarette, "you're in a bad way if you do."