

A snow-blanching evening of ringing pavements and eager lights.

Great golden lights of trolley-cars sliding along the packed snow of the roadway. Demure lights of little houses. The belching glare of a distant foundry, wiping out the sharp-edged stars. Lights of neighborhood drug stores where friends gossiped, well pleased, after the day's work.

The green light of a police-station, and greener radiance on the snow; the drama of a patrol-wagon – gong beating like a terrified heart, headlights scorching the crystal-sparkling street, driver not a chauffeur but a policeman proud in uniform, another policeman perilously dangling on the step at the back, and a glimpse of the prisoner. A murderer, a burglar, a coiner cleverly trapped?

An enormous graystone church with a rigid spire; dim light in the Parlors, and cheerful droning of choir-practise. The quivering green mercury-vapor light of a photo-engraver's loft. Then the storming lights of down-town; parked cars with ruby tail-lights; white arched entrances to movie theaters, like frosty mouths of winter caves; electric signs – serpents and little dancing men of fire; pink-shaded globes and scarlet jazz music in a cheap up-stairs dance-hall; lights of Chinese restaurants, lanterns painted with cherry-blossoms and with pagodas, hung against lattices of lustrous gold and black. Small dirty lamps in small stinking lunchrooms. The smart shopping-district, with rich and quiet light on crystal pendants and furs and suave surfaces of polished wood in velvet-hung reticent windows. High above the street, an unexpected square hanging in the darkness, the window of an office where some one was working late, for a reason unknown and stimulating. A man meshed in bankruptcy, an ambitious boy, an oil-man suddenly become rich?

The air was shrewd, the snow was deep in uncleared alleys, and beyond the city, Babbitt knew, were hillsides of snow-drift among wintry oaks, and the curving ice-enchanted river.

He loved his city with passionate wonder. He lost the accumulated weariness of business-worry and expansive oratory; he felt young and potential. He was ambitious. It was not enough to be a Vergil Gunch, an Orville Jones. No. "They're bully fellows, simply lovely, but they haven't got any finesse." No. He was going to be an Eathorne; delicately rigorous, coldly powerful.

"That's the stuff. The wallop in the velvet mitt. Not let anybody get fresh with you. Been getting careless about my diction. Slang. Colloquial. Cut it out. I was first-rate at rhetoric in college. Themes on – Anyway, not bad. Had too much of this hooptedoodle and good-fellow stuff. I – Why couldn't I organize a bank of my own some day? And Ted succeed me!"

He drove happily home, and to Mrs. Babbitt he was a William Washington Eathorne, but she did not notice it.

Sinclair LEWIS. *Babbitt*. Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2003 (originally published 1922), pp. 166-7.