FRONTIER LEGACIES

A DAUGHTER OF THE MIDDLE BORDER

HAMLIN GARLAND

This edition published 2026
by Living Book Press

ISBN: 978-1-76183-081-5 (hardcover)
978-1-76183-078-5 (softcover)

First published in 1921.

A catalogue record for this
book is available from the
National Library of Australia

A Daughter of the Middle Border

by

Hamlin Garland

Isabel McClintock Garland,
A daugher of the Middie Border.

Zulime Taft: "The New Daughter".

Contents

To my wife Zulime Taft, who for more than twenty years has shared my toil and borne with my shortcomings, I dedicate this story of a household on the vanishing Middle Border, with an ever-deepening sense of her fortitude and serenity.

Acknowledgments are made to Florence Huber Schott, Edward Foley and Arthur Dudley for the use of the photographs which illustrate this volume.

FOREWORD

—I—
To My New Readers

In the summer of 1893, after nine years of hard but happy literary life in Boston and New York, I decided to surrender my residence in the East and reëstablish my home in the West, a decision which seemed to be—as it was—a most important event in my career.

This change of headquarters was due not to a diminishing love for New England, but to a deepening desire to be near my aging parents, whom I had persuaded, after much argument, to join in the purchase of a family homestead, in West Salem, Wisconsin, the little village from which we had all adventured some thirty years before.

My father, a typical pioneer, who had grown gray in opening new farms, one after another on the wind-swept prairies of Iowa and Dakota, was not entirely content with my plan but my mother, enfeebled by the hardships of a farmer's life, and grateful for my care, was glad of the arrangement I had brought about. In truth, she realized that her days of pioneering were over and the thought of ending her days among her friends and relatives was a comfort to her. That I had rescued her from a premature grave on the barren Dakota plain was certain, and the hope of being able to provide for her comfort was the strongest element in my plan.

After ten years of separation we were agreed upon a project which would enable us as a family to spend our summers together; for my brother, Franklin, an actor in New York City, had promised to take his vacation in the home which we had purchased.

As this homestead (which was only eight hours by rail from Chicago) is to be one of the chief characters in this story, I shall begin by describing it minutely. It was not the building in which my life began—I should like to say it was, but it was not. My birthplace was a

cabin—part logs and part lumber—on the opposite side of the town. Originally a squatter's cabin, it was now empty and forlorn, a dreary monument of the pioneer days, which I did not take the trouble to enter. The house which I had selected for the final Garland homestead, was entirely without any direct associations with my family. It was only an old frame cottage, such as a rural carpenter might build when left to his own devices, rude, angular, ugly of line and drab in coloring, but it stood in the midst of a four-acre field, just on the edge of the farmland. Sheltered by noble elms and stately maples, its windows fronted on a low range of wooded hills, whose skyline (deeply woven into my childish memories) had for me the charm of things remembered, and for my mother a placid beauty which (after her long stay on the treeless levels of Dakota) was almost miraculous in effect. Entirely without architectural dignity, our new home was spacious and suggested the comfort of the region round about.

My father, a man of sixty-five, though still actively concerned with a wide wheat farm in South Dakota, had agreed to aid me in maintaining this common dwelling place in Wisconsin provided he could return to Dakota during seeding and again at harvest. He was an eagle-eyed, tireless man of sixty-five years of age, New England by origin, tall, alert, quick-spoken and resolute, the kind of natural pioneer who prides himself on never taking the back trail. In truth he had yielded most reluctantly to my plan, influenced almost wholly by the failing health of my mother, to whom the work of a farm household had become an intolerable burden. As I had gained possession of the premises early in November we were able to eat our Thanksgiving Dinner in our new home, happy in the companionship of old friends and neighbors. My mother and my Aunt Susan were entirely content. The Garlands seemed anchored at last.

—II—
To the Readers of "A Son of the Middle Border"

In taking up and carrying forward the theme of "A Son of the Middle Border" I am fully aware of my task's increasing difficulties, realizing that I must count on the clear understanding and continuing good will of my readers.

First of all, you must grant that the glamor of childhood, the glories of the Civil War, the period of prairie conquest which were the chief claims to interest in the first volume of my chronicle can not be restated in these pages. The action of this book moves forward into the light of manhood, into the region of middle age. Furthermore, its theme is more personal. Its scenes are less epic. It is a study of individuals and their relationships rather than of settlements and migrations. In short, "A Daughter of the Middle Border" is the complement of "A Son of the Middle Border," a continuation, not a repetition, in which I attempt to answer the many questions which readers of the first volume have persistently put to me.

"Did your mother get her new daughter?" "How long did she live to enjoy the peace of her Homestead?" "What became of David and Burton?" "Did your father live to see his grandchildren?" These and many other queries, literary as well as personal, are—I trust—satisfactorily answered in this book. Like the sequel to a novel, it attempts to account for its leading characters and to satisfy the persistent interest which my correspondents have so cordially expressed.

It remains to say that the tale is as true as my memory will permit—it is constructed only by leaving things out. If it reads, as some say, like fiction, that result is due not to invention but to the actual lives of the characters involved. Finally this closes my story of the Garlands and McClintocks and the part they took in a marvelous era in American settlement.

BOOK I

CHAPTER ONE

My First Winter in Chicago

"Well, Mother," I said as I took my seat at the breakfast table the second day after our Thanksgiving dinner, "I must return to Chicago. I have some lectures to deliver and besides I must get back to my writing."

She made no objection to my announcement but her eyes lost something of their happy light. "When will you come again?" she asked after a pause.

"Almost any minute," I replied assuringly. "You must remember that I'm only a few hours away now. I can visit you often. I shall certainly come up for Christmas. If you need me at any time send me word in the afternoon and I'll be with you at breakfast."

That night at six o'clock I was in my city home, a lodging quite as humble in character as my fortunes.

In a large chamber on the north side of a house on Elm Street and only three doors from Lake Michigan, I had assembled my meager library and a few pitiful mementoes of my life in Boston. My desk stood near a narrow side window and as I mused I could look out upon the shoreless expanse of blue-green water fading mistily into the north-east sky, and, at night, when the wind was in the East the crushing thunder of the breakers along the concrete wall formed a noble accompaniment to my writing, filling me with vaguely ambitious literary plans. Exalted by the sound of this mighty orchestra

I felt entirely content with the present and serenely confident of the future.

"This is where I belong," I said. "Here in the great Midland metropolis with this room for my pivot, I shall continue my study of the plains and the mountains."

I had burned no bridges between me and the Island of Manhattan, however! Realizing all too well that I must still look to the East for most of my income, I carefully retained my connections with *Harper's*, the *Century* and other periodicals. Chicago, rich and powerful as it had become, could not establish—or had not established—a paying magazine, and its publishing firms were mostly experimental and not very successful; although the Columbian Exposition which was just closing, had left upon the city's clubs and societies (and especially on its young men) an esthetic stimulation which bade fair to carry on to other and more enduring enterprises.

Nevertheless in the belief that it was to become the second great literary center of America I was resolved to throw myself into the task of hurrying it forward on the road to new and more resplendent achievement.

My first formal introduction to the literary and artistic circle in which I was destined to work and war for many years, took place through the medium of an address on *Impressionism in Art* which I delivered in the library of Franklin Head, a banker whose home had become one of the best-known intellectual meeting places on the North Side. This lecture, considered very radical at the time, was the direct outcome of several years of study and battle in Boston in support of the open-air school of painting, a school which was astonishing the West with its defiant play of reds and yellows, and the flame of its purple shadows. As a missionary in the interest of the New Art, I rejoiced in this opportunity to advance its inspiring heresies.

While uttering my shocking doctrines (entrenched behind a broad, book-laden desk), my eyes were attracted to the face of a slender black-bearded young man whose shining eyes and occasional

smiling nod indicated a joyous agreement with the main points of my harangue. I had never seen him before, but I at once recognized in him a fellow conspirator against "The Old Hat" forces of conservatism in painting.

At the close of my lecture he drew near and putting out his hand, said, "My name is Taft—Lorado Taft. I am a sculptor, but now and again I talk on painting. Impressionism is all very new here in the West, but like yourself I am an advocate of it, I am doing my best to popularize a knowledge of it, and I hope you will call upon me at my studio some afternoon—any afternoon and discuss these isms with me."

Young Lorado Taft interested me, and I instantly accepted his invitation to call, and in this way (notwithstanding a wide difference in training and temperament), a friendship was established which has never been strained even in the fiercest of our esthetic controversies. Many others of the men and women I met that night became my co-workers in the building of the "greater Chicago," which was even then coming into being—the menace of the hyphenate American had no place in our thoughts.

In less than a month I fell into a routine as regular, as peaceful, as that in which I had moved in Boston. Each morning in my quiet sunny room I wrote, with complete absorption, from seven o'clock until noon, confidently composing poems, stories, essays, and dramas. I worked like a painter with several themes in hand passing from one to the other as I felt inclined. After luncheon I walked down town seeking exercise and recreation. It soon became my habit to spend an hour or two in Taft's studio (I fear to his serious detriment), and in this way I soon came to know most of the "Bunnies" of "the Rabbit-Warren" as Henry B. Fuller characterized this studio building—and it well deserved the name! Art was young and timid in Cook County.

Among the women of this group Bessie Potter, who did lovely statuettes of girls and children, was a notable figure. Edward Kemeys, Oliver Dennett Grover, Charles Francis Browne, and Hermon Mac-

Neill, all young artists of high endowment, and marked personal charm became my valued associates and friends. We were all equally poor and equally confident of the future. Our doubts were few and transitory as cloud shadows, our hopes had the wings of eagles.

As Chicago possessed few clubs of any kind and had no common place of meeting for those who cultivated the fine arts, Taft's studio became, naturally, our center of esthetic exchange. Painting and sculpture were not greatly encouraged anywhere in the West, but Lorado and his brave colleagues, hardy frontiersmen of art, laughed in the face of all discouragement.

A group of us often lunched in what Taft called "the Beanery"—a noisy, sloppy little restaurant on Van Buren Street, where our lofty discussions of Grecian sculpture were punctuated by the crash of waiter-proof crockery, or smothered with the howl of slid chairs. However, no one greatly minded these barbarities. They were all a part of the game. If any of us felt particularly flush we dined, at sixty cents each, in the basement of a big department store a few doors further west; and when now and then some good "lay brother" like Melville Stone, or Franklin Head, invited us to a "royal gorge" at Kinsley's or to a princely luncheon in the tower room of the Union League, we went like minstrels to the baron's ball. None of us possessed evening suits and some of us went so far as to denounce swallowtail coats as "undemocratic." I was one of these.

This "artistic gang" also contained several writers who kept a little apart from the journalistic circle of which Eugene Field and Opie Read were the leaders, and though I passed freely from one of these groups to the other I acknowledged myself more at ease with Henry Fuller and Taft and Browne, and a little later I united with them in organizing a society to fill our need of a common meeting place. This association we called *The Little Room*, a name suggested by Madelaine Yale Wynne's story of an intermittently vanishing chamber in an old New England homestead.

For a year or two we met in Bessie Potter's studio, and on the theory that our club, visible and hospitable on Friday afternoon, was

non-existent during all the other days of the week, we called it "the Little Room." Later still we shifted to Ralph Clarkson's studio in the Fine Arts Building—where it still flourishes.

The fact is, I was a poor club man. I did not smoke, and never used rum except as a hair tonic—and beer and tobacco were rather distasteful to me. I do not boast of this singularity, I merely state it. No doubt I was considered a dull and profitless companion even in "the Little Room," but in most of my sobrieties Taft and Browne upheld me, though they both possessed the redeeming virtue of being amusing, which I, most certainly, never achieved.

Taft was especially witty in his sly, sidewise comment, and often when several of us were in hot debate, his sententious or humorous retorts cut or stung in defence of some esthetic principle much more effectively than most of my harangues. Sculpture, with him, was a religious faith, and he defended it manfully and practiced it with skill and an industry which was astounding.

Though a noble figure and universally admired, he had, like myself, two very serious defects, he was addicted to frock coats and the habit of lecturing! Although he did not go so far as to wear a plaid Windsor tie with his "Prince Albert" coat (as I have been accused of doing), he displayed something of the professor's zeal in his platform addresses. I would demur against the plaid Windsor tie indictment if I dared to do so, but a certain snapshot portrait taken by a South-side photographer of that day (and still extant) forces me to painful confession—I had such a tie, and I wore it with a frock coat. My social status is thus clearly defined.

Taft's studio, which was on the top floor of the Athenæum Building on Van Buren Street, had a section which he called "the morgue," for the reason that it was littered with plaster duplicates of busts, arms, and hands. This room, fitted up with shelf-like bunks, was filled nearly every night with penniless young sculptors who camped in primitive simplicity amid the grewsome discarded portraits of Cook County's most illustrious citizens. Several of these roomers have since become artists of wide renown, and I refrain from

disclosing their names. No doubt they will smile as they recall those nights amid their landlord's cast-off handiwork.

Taft was an "easy mark" in those times, a shining hope to all the indigent models, discouraged painters and other esthetic derelicts of the Columbian Exposition. No artist suppliant ever knocked at his door without getting a dollar, and some of them got twenty. For several years Clarkson and I had him on our minds because of this gentle and yielding disposition until at last we discovered that in one way or another, in spite of a reckless prodigality, he prospered. The bread which he cheerfully cast upon these unknown waters, almost always returned (sometimes from another direction) in loaves at least as large as biscuits. His fame steadily increased with his charity. I did not understand the principle of his manner of life then, and I do not now. By all the laws of my experience he should at this moment be in the poorhouse, but he isn't—he is rich and honored and loved.

In sculpture he was, at this time a conservative, a worshiper of the Greek, and it would seem that I became his counter-irritant, for my demand for "A native art" kept him wholesomely stirred up. One by one as the years passed he yielded esthetic positions which at first he most stoutly held. He conceded that the Modern could not be entirely expressed by the Ancient, that America might sometime grow to the dignity of having an art of its own, and that in sculpture (as in painting and architecture) new problems might arise. Even in his own work (although he professed but one ideal, the Athenian) he came at last to include the plastic value of the red man, and to find in the expression of the Sioux or Omaha a certain sorrowful dignity which fell parallel with his own grave temperament, for, despite his smiling face, his best work remained somber, almost tragic in spirit.

Henry B. Fuller, who in *The Chevalier of Pensieri-Vani* had shown himself to be the finest literary craftsman in the West, became (a little later) a leader in our group and a keen delight to us all. He was at this time a small, brown-bearded man of thirty-five, whose quick humor, keen insight and unfailing interest in all things literary made him a caustic corrective of the bombast to which our local reviewers were

sadly liable. Although a merciless critic of Chicago, he was a native of the city, and his comment on its life had to be confronted with such equanimity as our self-elected social hierarchy could assume.

Elusive if not austere with strangers, Henry's laugh (a musical "ha ha") was often heard among his friends. His face could be impassive not to say repellent when approached by those in whom he took no interest, and there were large numbers of his fellow citizens for whom the author of *Pensieri-Vani* had only contempt. Strange to say, he became my most intimate friend and confidant—antithetic pair!

Eugene Field, his direct opposite, and the most distinguished member of "the journalistic gang," took very little interest in the doings of "the Bunnies" and few of them knew him, but I often visited him in his home on the North Side, and greatly enjoyed his solemn-faced humor. He was a singular character, as improvident as Lorado but in a far different way.

I recall meeting him one day on the street wearing, as usual, a long, gray plaid ulster with enormous pockets at the sides. Confronting me with coldly solemn visage, he thrust his right hand into his pocket and lifted a heavy brass candlestick to the light. "Look," he said. I looked. Dropping this he dipped his left hand into the opposite pocket and displayed another similar piece, then with a faint smile lifting the corners of his wide, thin-lipped mouth, he gravely boomed, "Brother Garland—you see before you—a man—who lately—had ten dollars."

Thereupon he went his way, leaving me to wonder whether his wife would be equally amused with his latest purchase.

His library was filled with all kinds of curious objects—worthless junk they seemed to me—clocks, snuffers, butterflies, and the like but he also possessed many autographed books and photographs whose value I granted. His cottage which was not large, swarmed with growing boys and noisy dogs; and Mrs. Field, a sweet and patient soul, seemed sadly out of key with her husband's habit of buying collections of rare moths, door-knockers, and candle molds

with money which should have gone to buy chairs and carpets or trousers for the boys.

Eugene was one of the first "Colyumists" in the country, and to fill his "Sharps and Flats" levied pitilessly upon his friends. From time to time we all figured as subjects for his humorous paragraphs; but each new victim understood and smiled. For example, in his column I read one morning these words: "La Crosse, a small city in Wisconsin, famous for the fact that all its trains back into town, and as the home of Hamlin Garland."

He was one of the most popular of Western writers, and his home of a Sunday was usually crowded with visitors, many of whom were actors. I recall meeting Francis Wilson there—also E. S. Willard and Bram Stoker—but I do not remember to have seen Fuller there, although, later, Roswell, Eugene's brother, became Fuller's intimate friend.

George Ade, a thin, pale, bright-eyed young Hoosier, was a frequent visitor at Field's. George had just begun to make a place for himself as the author of a column in the *News* called "Stories of the Street and of the Town"; and John T. McCutcheon, another Hoosier of the same lean type was his illustrator. I believed in them both and took a kind of elder brother interest in their work.

In the companionship of men like Field and Browne and Taft, I was happy. My writing went well, and if I regretted Boston, I had the pleasant sense of being so near West Salem that I could go to bed in a train at ten at night, and breakfast with my mother in the morning, and just to prove that this was true I ran up to the Homestead at Christmas time and delivered my presents in person—keenly enjoying the smile of delight with which my mother received them.

West Salem was like a scene on the stage that day—a setting for a rural mid-winter drama. The men in their gayly-colored Mackinac jackets, the sleighbells jingling pleasantly along the lanes, the cottage roofs laden with snow, and the sidewalks, walled with drifts, were almost arctic in their suggestion, and yet, my parents in the shelter of the friendly hills, were at peace. The cold was not being driven

against them by the wind of the plain, and a plentiful supply of food and fuel made their fireside comfortable and secure.

During this vacation I seized the opportunity to go a little farther and spend a few days in the Pineries which I had never seen. Out of this experience I gained some beautiful pictures of the snowy forest, and a suggestion for a story or two. A few days later, on a commission from *McClure's*, I was in Pittsburg writing an article on "Homestead and Its Perilous Trades," and the clouds of smoke, the flaming chimneys, the clang of steel, the roar of blast-furnaces and the thunder of monstrous steel rollers made Wisconsin lumber camps idyllic. The serene white peace of West Salem set Pittsburg apart as a sulphurous hell and my description of it became a passionate indictment of an industrial system which could so work and so house its men. The grimy hovels in which the toilers lived made my own homestead a poem. More than ever convinced that our social order was unjust and impermanent, I sent in my "story," in some doubt about its being accepted. It was printed with illustrations by Orson Lowell and was widely quoted at the time.

Soon after this I made a trip to Memphis, thus gaining my first impression of the South. Like most northern visitors, I was immediately and intensely absorbed in the negroes. Their singing entranced me, and my hosts, Mr. and Mrs. Judah, hired a trio of black minstrels to come in and perform for me. Their songs so moved me, and I became so interested in one old negro's curious chants that I fairly wore them out with demands for their most characteristic spirituals. Some of the hymns were of such sacred character that one of the men would not sing them. "I ain't got no right to sing dem songs," he said.

In Atlanta I met Joel Chandler Harris, who had done so much to portray the negro's inner kindliness, as well as his singularly poetic outlook. Harris was one of the editors of the *Atlanta Constitution*, and there I found him in a bare, prosaic office, a short, shy, red-haired man whom I liked at once. Two nights later I was dining with James A. Herne and William Dean Howells in New York City, and the day

following I read some of my verses for the Nineteenth Century Club. At the end of March I was again at my desk in Chicago.

These sudden changes of scene, these dramatic meetings, so typical of my life for many years, took away all sense of drudgery, all routine weariness. Seldom remaining in any one place long enough to become bored I had little chance to bore others. Literary clubs welcomed my readings and lectures; and, being vigorous and of good digestion, I accepted travel as a diversion as well as a business. As a student of American life, I was resolved to know every phase of it.

Among my pleasant jobs I recall the putting into shape of a "Real Conversation" with James Whitcomb Riley, the material for which had been gained in a visit to Greenfield, Riley's native town, during August of the previous year.

My first meeting with Riley had been in Boston at a time when I was a penniless student and he the shining, highly-paid lecturer; and I still suffered a feeling of wonder that a poet—any poet—could demand such pay. I did not resent it—I only marveled at it—for in our conversation he had made his philosophy plain.

"Tell of the things just like they was, they don't need no excuse," one of his characters said. "Don't tech 'em up as the poets does till they're all too fine fer use," and in his talk with me Riley quaintly added, "Nature is good enough for God, it's good enough for me."

In this article which I wrote for *McClure's*, I made comment on the essential mystery of the poet's art, a conjury which is able to transmute a perfectly commonplace landscape into something fine and mellow and sweet; for the region in which Riley spent his youth, and from which he derived most of his later material, was to me a depressing land, a country without a hill, a river or a lake; a commonplace country, flat, unkempt and without a line of beauty, and yet from these rude fields and simple gardens the singer had drawn the sweetest honey of song, song with a tang in it, like the odor of ripe buckwheat and the taste of frost-bit persimmons. It reinforced my resolution that the mid-land was about to blossom into art.

In travel and in work such as this and in pleasant intercourse

with the painters, sculptors, and writers of Chicago my first winter in the desolate, drab, and tumultuous city passed swiftly and on the whole profitably, I no longer looked backward to Boston, but as the first warm spring-winds began to blow, my thoughts turned towards my newly-acquired homestead and the old mother who was awaiting me there.

Eager to start certain improvements which should tend to make the house more nearly the kind of dwelling place I had promised myself it should become, hungry for the soil, rejoicing in the thought of once more planting and building, I took the train for the North with all my summer wardrobe and most of my manuscripts, with no intention of reëntering the city till October at the earliest.

CHAPTER TWO

I Return to the Saddle

To pass from the crowds, the smoke and the iron clangor of Chicago into the clear April air of West Salem was a celestial change for me. For many years the clock of my seasons had been stilled. The coming of the birds, the budding of the leaves, the serial blossoming of spring had not touched me, and as I walked up the street that exquisite morning, a reminiscent ecstasy filled my heart. The laughter of the robins, the shrill ki-ki-ki of the golden-wing woodpeckers, and the wistful whistle of the lark, brought back my youth, my happiest youth, and when my mother met me at the door it seemed that all my cares and all my years of city life had fallen from me.

"Well, here I am!" I called, "ready for the spring's work."

With a silent laugh, as preface, she replied, "You'll get a-plenty. Your father is all packed, impatient to leave for Ordway."

The old soldier, who came in from the barn a few moments later, confirmed this. "I'm no truck farmer," he explained with humorous contempt. "I turn this onion patch over to you. It's no place for me. In two days I'll be broad-casting wheat on a thousand-acre farm. That's my size"—a fact which I admitted.

As we sat at breakfast he went on to say that he found Wisconsin woefully unprogressive. "These fellows back here are all stuck in the mud. They've got to wake up to the reform movements. I'll be glad to get back to Dakota where people are alive."

With the spirit of the seed-sower swelling within him he took the noon train, handing over to me the management of the Homestead.

An hour later mother and I went out to inspect the garden and to plan the seeding. The pie-plant leaves were unfolding and slender asparagus spears were pointing from the mold. The smell of burning leaves brought back to us both, with magic power, memories of the other springs and other plantings on the plain. It was glorious, it was medicinal!

"This is the life!" I exultantly proclaimed. "Work is just what I need. I shall set to it at once. Aren't you glad you are here in this lovely valley and not out on the bleak Dakota plain?"

Mother's face sobered. "Yes, I like it here—it seems more like home than any other place—and yet I miss the prairie and my Ordway friends."

As I went about the village I came to a partial understanding of her feeling. The small dark shops, the uneven sidewalks, the rickety wooden awnings were closely in character with the easy-going citizens who moved leisurely and contentedly about their small affairs. It came to me (with a sense of amusement) that these coatless shopkeepers who dealt out sugar and kerosene while wearing their derby hats on the backs of their heads, were not only my neighbors, but members of the Board of Education. Though still primitive to my city eyes, they no longer appeared remote. Something in their names and voices touched me nearly. They were American. Their militant social democracy was at once comical and corrective.

O, the peace, the sweetness of those days! To be awakened by the valiant challenge of early-rising roosters; to hear the chuckle of dawn-light worm-hunting robins brought a return of boy-hood's exultation. Not only did my muscles harden to the spade and the hoe, my soul rejoiced in a new and delightful sense of establishment. I had returned to citizenship. I was a proprietor. The clock of the seasons had resumed its beat.

Hiring a gardener, I bought a hand-book on Horticulture and announced my intent to make those four fat acres feed my little flock.