

# ANN VICKERS

*by*

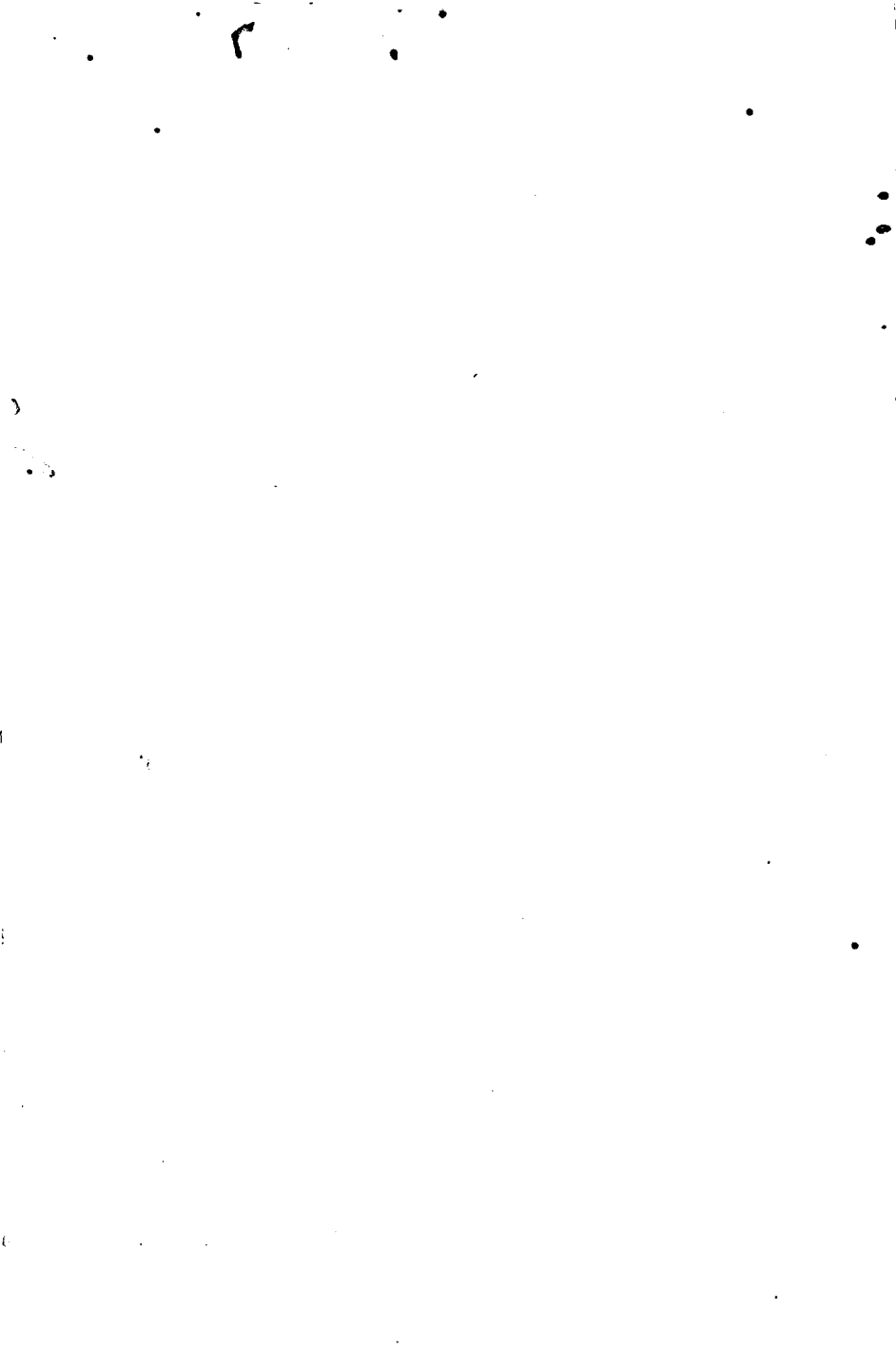
SINCLAIR LEWIS



LONDON

JONATHAN CAPE 30 BEDFORD SQUARE

ANN VICKERS



NOVELS BY  
SINCLAIR LEWIS

OUR MR. WRENN  
THE TRAIL OF THE HAWK  
THE JOB  
FREE AIR  
MAIN STREET  
BABBITT  
ARROWSMITH  
MANTRAP  
ELMER GANTRY  
THE MAN WHO KNEW COOLIDGE  
DODSWORTH  
ANN VICKERS



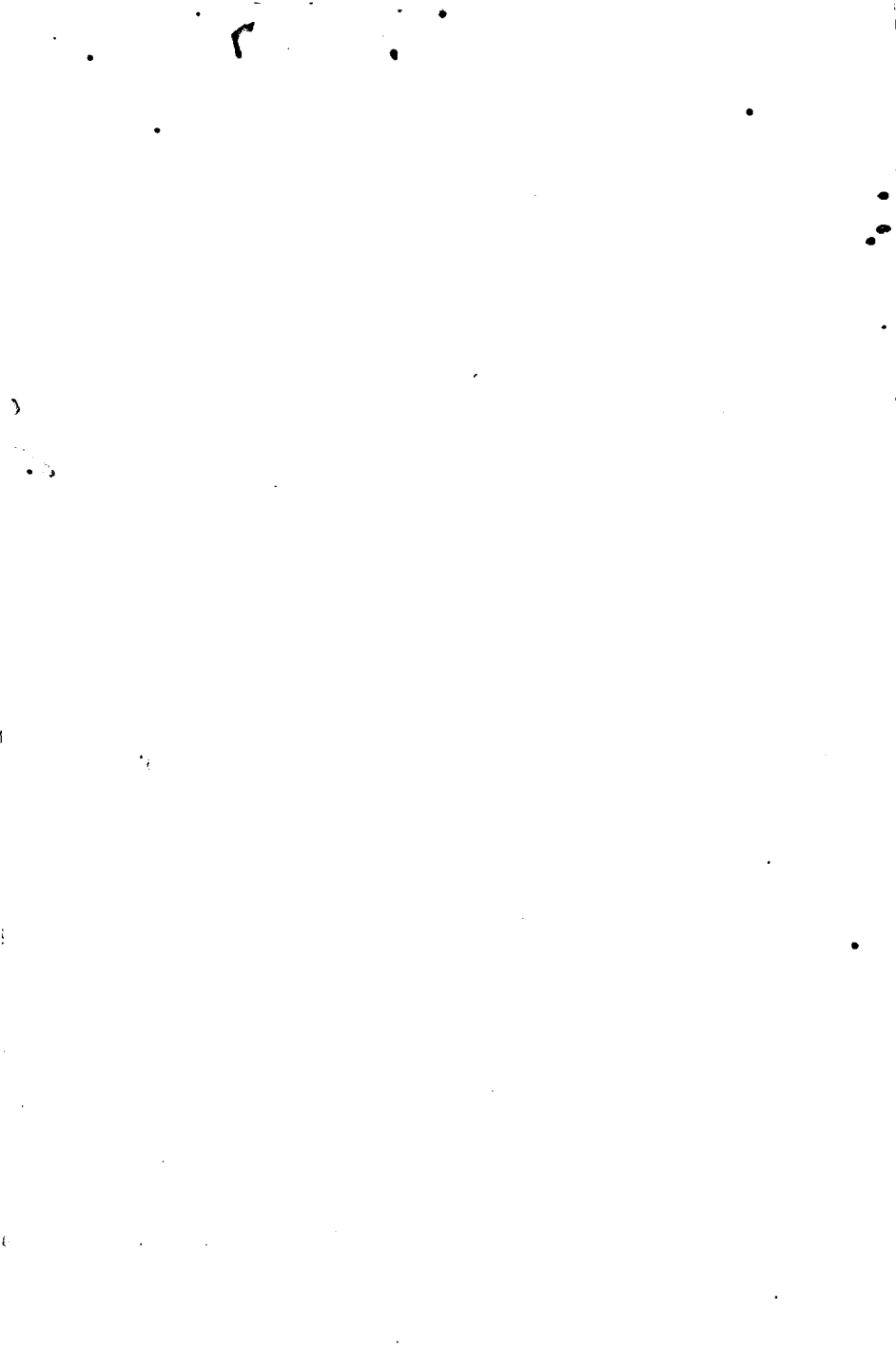
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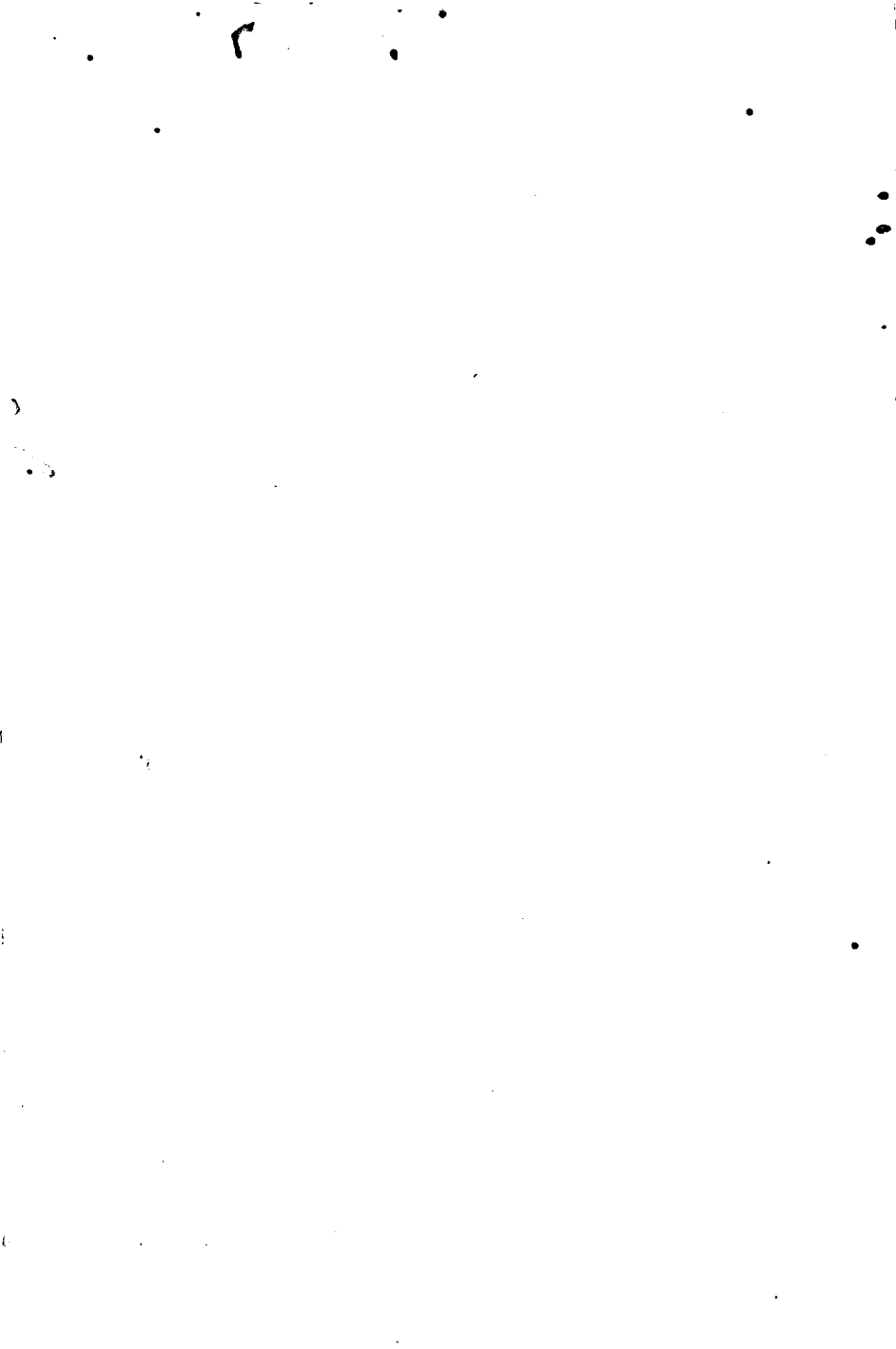


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To

DOROTHY THOMPSON

*whose knowledge and whose help  
made it possible for me  
to write about Ann*

*All the characters in this story are entirely fictitious, and no reference is intended to any actual person. And while it is believed that an entirely accurate account is given of prisons, settlement houses, and suffrage organizations, none of the institutions described refers to actual institutions.*

SINCLAIR LEWIS

## ANN VICKERS

### I

SLOW yellow river flowing, willows that gesture in tepid August airs, and four children playing at greatness, as, doubtless, great men themselves must play. Four children, sharp-voiced and innocent and eager, and blessedly unaware that compromise and weariness will come at forty-five.

The three boys, Ben, Dick, and Winthrop, having through all the past spring suffered from history lessons, sought to turn them to decent use by playing Queen Isabella and Columbus. There was dissension as to which of them should be Isabella. While they debated, there came into that willow grove, that little leaf-littered place holy to boyhood, a singing girl.

'Jiminy, there's Ann Vickers. She'll be Iserbella,' said Winthrop.

'Ah, no, gee, she'll hog the whole thing,' said Ben. 'But I guess she can play Iserbella better than anybody.'

'Ah, she can not! She's no good at baseball.'

'No, she ain't much good at baseball, but she threw a snowball at Reverend Tengbom.'

'Yes, that's so, she threw that snowball.'

The girl stopped before them, arms akimbo - a chunk of a girl, with sturdy shoulders and thin legs. Her one beauty, aside from the fresh clarity of her skin, was her eyes, dark, surprisingly large, and eager.

'Come on and play Iserbella 'n' Columbus,' demanded Winthrop.

'I can't,' said Ann Vickers. 'I'm playing Pedippus.'

'What the dickens is Pedippus?'

'He was an ole hermit. Maybe it was Pelippus. Anyway, he was an ole hermit. He was a great prince and then he left the royal palace because he saw it was wicked, and he

gave up all the joys of the flesh and he went and lived in the desert on – oh, on oatmeal and peanut butter and so on and so forth, in the desert, and prayed all the time.'

'That's a rotten game. Oatmeal!'

'But the wild beasts of the desert, they were all around him, catamounts and everything, and he tamed them and they used to come hear him preach. I'm going to go preach to them now! And enormous big bears!'

'Aw, come on play Iserbella first,' said Winthrop. 'I'll let you take my revolver while you're Iserbella – but I get it back – I get the revolver while I'm Columbus!'

He handed it over, and she inspected it judiciously. She had never had the famous weapon in her hand, though it was notorious through all of childland that Winthrop owned so remarkable a possession. It was a real revolver, a '22, and complete in all its parts, though it is true that the barrel was so full of rust that a toothpick could not have been inserted at the muzzle. Ann waved it, fascinated and a little nervous. To hold it made her feel heroic and active; it is to be feared that she lost immediately the chaste austerity of Pedippus.

'All right,' she said.

'You're Iserbella and I'm Columbus,' said Winthrop, 'and Ben is King Ferdinand, and Dick is a jealous courtesan. You see all the guys in the court are crabbing me, and you tell 'em to lay off and—'

Ann darted to a broken willow bough. She held it drooping over her head with her left hand – always her right clutched the enchanted revolver – and mincing back to them she demanded, 'Kneel down, my lieges. No, you Ferdinand, I guess you got to stand up, if you're my concert – no, I guess maybe you better kneel, too, just to make sure. Now prithee, Columbus, what can I do for you to-day?'

The kneeling Winthrop screamed, 'Your Majesty, I want to go discover America . . . Now you start crabbing, Dick.'

'Ah, gee, I don't know what to say . . . Don't listen to him, Queen, he's a crazy galoot. There ain't any America. All his ships will slide off the edge of the earth.'

'Who's running this, courtesan? I am! Certainly he can have three ships, if I have to give him half of my kingdom. What thinkest thou, concert? - you Ben, I mean you?'

'Who? Me? Oh, it's all right with me, Queen.'

'Then get thee to the ships.'

Moored to the river bank was an old sand barge. The four children raced to it, Ann flourishing the revolver. She led them all, fastest and most excited. At the barge, she cried, 'Now, I'm going to be Columbus!'

'You are *not*,' protested Winthrop. 'I'm Columbus! You can't be Iserbella *and* Columbus! And you're only a girl. You gimme that revolver!'

'I am, too, Columbus! I'm the best Columbus. So now! Why, you can't even tell me the names of Columbus's ships!'

'I can too!'

'Well, what were they?'

'Well, I can't just - Neither can you, smarty!'

'Oh, I can't, can't I!' crowed Ann. 'They were the *Pinto* and the *Santa Lucheea* and - and the *Armada*!'

'Gee, that's right. I guess she better be Columbus,' marvelled the dethroned King Ferdinand, and the great navigator led her faithful crew aboard the *Santa Lucia*, nor was the leap across that three feet of muddy water any delicate and maidenly exhibition.

Columbus took her station in the bow - as much as a double-ender scow possesses a bow - and, shading her eyes, looking over the thirty feet of creek, she cried, 'A great, terrible storm is coming, my men! Closehaul the mainsail! Reef all the other sails! My cats, how it thunders and lightens! Step lively, my brave men, and your commander will lend an hand!'

Between them they got down all the sails before the hurricane struck the gallant vessel. The hurricane (perhaps assisted by the crew, standing on one side of the barge and jumping up and down) threatened to capsize the unfortunate caravel, but the crew cheered nobly. They were encouraged, no doubt, by the example of their commander, who stood with her right

leg boldly thrust forward, one hand on her breast and the other holding out the revolver, while she observed, loudly, 'Bang, bang, bang!'

But the storm continued, viciously.

'Let's sing a chanty to show we have stout hearts!' commanded Columbus, and she led them in her favourite ballad:

'Jingle bells, jingle bells,  
Jingle all the way.  
Oh! What fun it is to ride,  
In a one-horse open sleigh!'

The storm gave up.

They were approaching Watling's Island now. Peering across the turbulent water, often broken by the leap of a pickerel, Ann perceived savage bands roaming the shore.

'See, yonder, among the palms and pagodas! Pesky redskins!' warned Columbus. 'We must prepare to sell our lives dearly!'

'That's right,' agreed her crew, gaping at the dread row of mullen weeds across the creek.

'What d'you kids think you're doing?'

The voice was perfectly strange.

They turned to see, standing on the bank, a new boy. Ann stared with lively admiration, for this was a hero out of a story book. Toward such mates as Ben and Winthrop, she had no awe; except in the arts of baseball and spitting, she knew herself as good a man as they. But the strange boy - perhaps two years older than herself - was a god, a warrior, a leader, a menace, a splendour: curly-headed, broad-shouldered, slim-waisted, smiling cynically, his nose thin and contemptuous.

'What d'you kids think you're doing?'

'We're playing Columbus. Want to play?' The crew were surprised at Ann's meekness.

'Nah! *Playing!*' The stranger leaped aboard - a clean leap where the others had panted and plumped. 'Let's see that gun.' He took the revolver from Columbus casually,

and worshipingly she yielded it. He snapped it open and looked into the barrel. 'It's no blame good. I'll throw it overboard.'

'Oh, please don't!' It was Ann who wailed, before Winthrop, the owner, could make warlike noises.

'All right, kid. Keep it. Who are you? What's your name? My name is Adolph Klebs. My dad and I just come to town. He's a shoemaker. He's a Socialist. We're going to settle here, if they don't run us out. They run us out of Lebanon. Haa! I wasn't scared of 'em! "You touch me and I'll kick you in the eye," that's what I told the policeman. He was scared to touch me. Well, come on, if we're going to play Columbus. I'll be Columbus. Gimme that gun again. Now you kids get busy and line the side of the boat. There's a whole slew of redskins coming off in canoes.'

And it was Adolph-Columbus who now observed, 'Bang, bang, bang!' as he introduced European culture to primitive Americans by shooting them down, and of all his followers none was more loyal, or noisy, than Ann Vickers.

She had never before encountered a male whom she felt to be her superior, and in surrender she had more joy than in her blithe and cocky supremacy of old.

In this town of Waubanakee, Illinois, a little south of the centre of the state, Ann Vickers's father was Superintendent of Schools, known always as 'Professor.' His position made him one of the local gentry, along with three doctors, two bank presidents, three lawyers (one of them justice of the peace), the proprietor of the Boston Store, and the Episcopal, Congregational, and Presbyterian ministers.

Physically, Waubanakee does not much enter Ann's story. Like most Americans who go from Main Street to Fifth Avenue or Michigan Avenue or Market Street, and unlike most Britons and Continentals from the provinces, after childhood she kept no touch with her native soil; never returned to it after the death of her parents; had no longing to acquire a manor there, as a climax to careers and grandeurs,



or, like an Anglo-Indian pro-consul, to be buried in the village cemetery.

Her mother died when she was but ten, her father a year after Ann left college, and she had no brothers or sisters. When she was middle-aged, Waubanakee was a memory, a little humorous, a little touching – a picture she had seen in youth, unreal, romantic, and lost.

Yet that small town and its ways, and all her father's principles of living, entered into everything she was to do in life. Sobriety, honest work, paying his debts, loyalty to his mate and to his friends, disdain of unearned rewards – he once refused a tiny legacy from an uncle whom he had despised – and a pride that would let him neither cringe nor bully, these were her father's code, and in a New York where spongers and sycophants and gaily lying people, pretty little people, little playing people, were not unknown even among social workers and scientists, that code haunted her, and she was not sorry or Freudian about it . . . and, though she laughed at herself, if she had not paid all her bills by the fourth of the month, she was uneasy.

She once heard Carl Van Doren say in a lecture that before he had left his native village of Hope, Illinois, he had met, in essence, everyone whom he was ever to meet. Ann agreed. The Swedish carpenter at Waubanakee, who talked of Swedenborg, differed only in accent from the Russian grand duke whom thirty years after she was to meet in New York and hear amiably flounder through a froth of metaphysics.

Yes, so deep was Waubanakee in her heart that all her life Ann caught herself naively classifying acquaintances as Good People and Bad People, as implicitly as had her Sunday School teacher in the Waubanakee Presbyterian Church. Here was a Charming Chap, witty, smiling, belonging to the best circles of New York, and never repaying the money he 'borrowed,' never keeping his dinner engagements. Well! To the little Ann Vickers of Waubanakee, who was never quite extinguished in that Great Reformer, Dr. Ann Vickers (Hon. LL.D.), this man was Bad – he was Bad just as the