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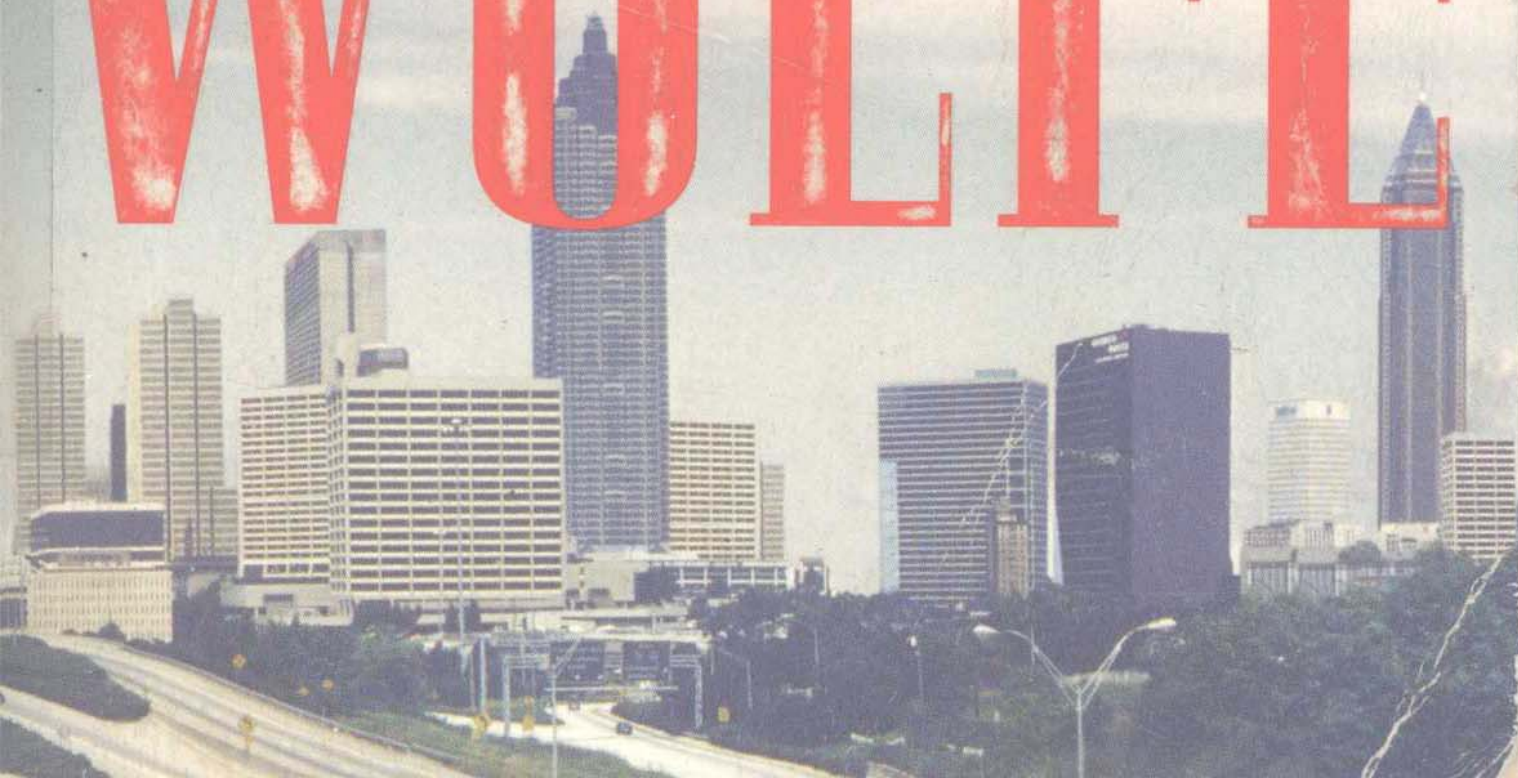
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TOM

A Man in Full

WOLFE



WOLFE

A Man in Full

A Novel



BANTAM BOOKS

New York Toronto London Sydney Auckland

This edition contains the complete text of the hardcover edition.
NOT ONE WORD HAS BEEN OMITTED.

A MAN IN FULL

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This novel's story and characters are fictitious. Certain long-established institutions, agencies, and public offices are mentioned, but the characters involved in them are wholly imaginary. One institution, the Santa Rita jail, is dealt with anachronistically. The jail was demolished not by the last major earthquake in the San Francisco Bay Area but shortly before it.

Quotations from Epictetus are drawn from The Stoic and Epicurean Philosophers, edited by Whitney J. Oates (1940).

Several chapters of this novel have been published, in slightly different form, in Rolling Stone and Men's Journal.

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**MORE PRAISE FOR
A MAN IN FULL**

"RIGHT NOW, NO WRITER—REPORTER OR NOVELIST—IS GETTING IT ON PAPER BETTER THAN TOM WOLFE." —*Newsweek*

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“*A Man in Full* is bound to take the nation by storm. . . . If Wolfe’s previous novel, 1987’s *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, is ever knocked off its pedestal as America’s finest work of contemporary fiction, *A Man in Full* will be what does it.”

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The Pump House Gang (1968)

The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test (1968)

Radical Chic & Mau-Mauing the Flak Catchers (1970)

The Painted Word (1975)

Mauve Gloves & Madmen, Clutter & Vine (1976)

The Right Stuff (1979)

In Our Time (1980)

From Bauhaus to Our House (1981)

The Bonfire of the Vanities (1987)

*With immense admiration
the author dedicates
A Man in Full
to PAUL MCHUGH
whose brilliance, comradeship,
and unfailing kindness saved the day.
This book would not exist
had it not been for you, dear friend.*

*And the author wants to express
a gratitude beyond measure to
MACK AND MARY TAYLOR
who opened his eyes
to the wonders of Atlanta
and the Georgia plantation country
and gave him the run
of their vast storehouse of knowledge and insights,
all with a hospitality he will never forget.*

The author bows deeply to

JANN WENNER

the generous genius

*who walked this book along until it found its feet,
just as he did The Right Stuff, The Bonfire of the Vanities,
and Ambush at Fort Bragg.*

KAILEY WONG

*whose eye for the telling details of contemporary American life
is unsurpassed and whose help, once more, has been invaluable.*

TOMMY PHIPPS

*whose walks on the beach with the author never failed to generate
the necessary new approach and the joie de vivre to try it.*

GEORGE AND NAN MCVEY

*who provided the denouement,
not to mention decades of treasured friendship.*

COUNSELOR EDDIE HAYES

*who stepped out of his starring role in Act III
whenever the author needed him, which was often.
You were there on the darkest night, Counselor!*

The author embraces

SHEILA, ALEXANDRA, AND TOMMY

whose love has made it all worthwhile.

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A M a n i n F u l l

Prologue

Cap'm Charlie

CHARLIE CROKER, ASTRIDE HIS FAVORITE TENNESSEE WALKING horse, pulled his shoulders back to make sure he was erect in the saddle and took a deep breath . . . Ahhhh, that was the ticket . . . He loved the way his mighty chest rose and fell beneath his khaki shirt and imagined that everyone in the hunting party noticed how powerfully built he was. Everybody; not just his seven guests but also his six black retainers and his young wife, who was on a horse behind him near the teams of La Mancha mules that pulled the buckboard and the kennel wagon. For good measure, he flexed and fanned out the biggest muscles of his back, the latissimi dorsi, in a Charlie Croker version of a peacock or a turkey preening. His wife, Serena, was only twenty-eight, whereas he had just turned sixty and was bald on top and had only a swath of curly gray hair on the sides and in back. He seldom passed up an opportunity to remind her of what a sturdy cord—no, what a veritable *cable*—kept him connected to the rude animal vitality of his youth.

By now they were already a good mile away from the Big House and deep into the plantation's seemingly endless fields of broom sedge. This late in February, this far south in Georgia, the sun was strong enough by 8 a.m. to make the ground

mist lift like wisps of smoke and create a heavenly green glow in the pine forests and light up the sedge with a tawny gold. Charlie took another deep breath . . . *Ahhhhhh* . . . the husky aroma of the grass . . . the resinous air of the pines . . . the heavy, fleshy odor of all his animals, the horses, the mules, the dogs . . . Somehow nothing reminded him so instantly of how far he had come in his sixty years on this earth as the smell of the animals. Turpentine Plantation! Twenty-nine thousand acres of prime southwest Georgia forest, fields, and swamp! And all of it, every square inch of it, every beast that moved on it, all fifty-nine horses, all twenty-two mules, all forty dogs, all thirty-six buildings that stood upon it, plus a mile-long asphalt landing strip, complete with jet-fuel pumps and a hangar—all of it was his, Cap'm Charlie Croker's, to do with as he chose, which was: to shoot quail.

His spirits thus buoyed, he turned to his shooting partner, a stout brick-faced man named Inman Armholster, who was abreast of him on another of his walking horses, and said:

"Inman, I'm gonna—"

But Inman, with a typical Inman Armholster bluster, cut him off and insisted on resuming a pretty boring disquisition concerning the upcoming mayoral race in Atlanta: "Listen, Charlie, I know Jordan's got charm and party manners and he talks white and all that, but that doesn't"—*dud'n*—"mean he's any friend of . . ."

Charlie continued to look at him, but he tuned out. Soon he was aware only of the deep, rumbling timbre of Inman's voice, which had been smoke-cured the classic Southern way, by decades of Camel cigarettes, unfiltered. He was an odd-looking duck, Inman was. He was in his mid-fifties but still had a head of thick black hair, which began low on his forehead and was slicked back over his small round skull. Everything about Inman was round. He seemed to be made of a series of balls piled one atop the other. His buttery cheeks and jowls seemed to rest, without benefit of a neck, upon the two balls of fat that comprised his chest, which in turn rested upon a great swollen paunch. Even his arms and legs, which looked much too short, appeared to be made of spherical parts. The down-filled vest he wore over his hunting khakis only made him look that much rounder. Nevertheless, this ruddy pudgy was chairman of Armaxco Chemical and about as influential a businessman

"—gon' say Fleet's too young, too brash, too quick to play the race card. Am I right?"

So he went, "Ummmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm."

Charlie was beginning to dislike this conversation, on every level. For a start, you didn't go out on a beautiful Saturday morning like this on the next to last weekend of the quail season and talk politics, especially not Atlanta politics. Charlie liked to think he went out shooting quail at Turpmtine just the way the most famous master of Turpmtine, a Confederate Civil War hero named Austin Roberdeau Wheat, had done it a hundred years ago; and a hundred years ago nobody on a quail hunt at Turpmtine would have been out in the sedge talking about an Atlanta whose candidates for mayor were both black. But then Charlie was honest with himself. There was more. There was . . . Fleet. Charlie had had his own dealings with André Fleet, and not all that long ago, either, and he didn't feel like being reminded of them now or, for that matter, later.

"Inman, I'm gonna tell you something I may regret later on, but I'm gonna tell you anyway, ahead a time."

"This morning," said Charlie, "I'm only gonna shoot the bobs." *Morning* came out close to *moanin'*, just as *something* had come out *sump'm*. When he was here at Turpmtine, he liked to shed Atlanta, even in his voice. He liked to feel earthy, Down Home, elemental; which is to say, he was no longer merely a real estate developer, he was . . . a man.

"Only gon' shoot the bobs, hunh," said Inman. "With *that*?"

He gestured toward Charlie's .410-gauge shotgun, which was in a leather scabbard strapped to his saddle. The spread of bird shot a .410 fired was smaller than any other shotgun's, and with quail the only way you could tell a bob from a hen was by a patch of white on the throat of a bird that wasn't much more than eight inches long to start with.

"Yep," said Charlie, grinning, "and remember, I told you ahead a time."

"Yeah? I'll tell you what," said Inman. "I'll betcha you can't. I'll betcha a hundred dollars."

"What kinda odds you gon' give me?"

"*Odds*? You're the one who brought it up! You're the one staking out the bragging rights! You know, there's an old saying, Charlie: 'When the tailgate drops, the bullshit stops.'"

"All right," said Charlie, "a hundred dollars on the first covey, even Stephen." He leaned over and extended his hand, and the two of them shook on the bet.

Immediately he regretted it. *Money on the line*. A certain deep worry came bubbling up into his brain. PlannersBanc! Croker Concourse! Debt! A mountain of it! But real estate developers like him learned to live with debt, didn't they . . . It was a normal condition of your existence, wasn't it . . . You just naturally grew gills for breathing it, didn't you . . . So he took another deep breath to drive the spurt of panic back down again and flexed his big back muscles once more.

Charlie was proud of his entire physique, his massive neck, his broad shoulders, his prodigious forearms; but above all he was proud of his back. His employees here at Turpmtine called him Cap'm Charlie, after a Lake Seminole fishing-boat captain from a hundred years ago with the same name, Charlie Croker, a sort of Pecos Bill figure with curly blond hair who, according to local legend, had accomplished daring feats of strength. There was a song about him, which some of the old folks knew by heart. It went: "Charlie Croker was a man in full. He had a back like a Jersey bull. Didn't like okra, didn't like pears. He liked a gal that had no hairs. Charlie Croker! Charlie Croker! Charlie Croker!" Whether or not there had actually existed such a figure, Charlie had never been able to find out. But he loved the idea, and he often said to himself what he was saying to himself at this moment: "Yes! I got

a back like a Jersey bull!" In his day he had been a star on the Georgia Tech football team. Football had left him with a banged-up right knee, that had turned arthritic about three years ago. He didn't associate that with age, however. It was an honorable wound of war. One of the beauties of a Tennessee walking horse was that its gait spared you from having to post, to pump up and down at the knees when the horse trotted. He wasn't sure he could take posting on this chilly February morning.

Up ahead, his hunting guide and dog trainer, Moseby, was riding yet another of his walking horses. Moseby signaled the dogs with a curious, low-pitched, drawn-out whistle he somehow produced from deep in his throat. Charlie could just make out one of his two prize pointers, King's Whipple and Duke's Knob, ranging through the golden sea of sedge, trying to get wind of quail coveys.

The two shooters, Charlie and Inman, rode on in silence for a while, listening to the creaking of the wagons and the clip-clopping of the mules and the snorts of the horses of the out-riders and waiting for some signal from Moseby. One wagon was a rolling dog kennel containing cages for three more pairs of pointers to take turns in the ceaseless roaming of the sedge, plus a pair of golden retrievers that had been born in the same litter and were known as Ronald and Roland. A team of La Mancha mules, adorned in brass-knobbed yokes and studded harnessing, pulled the wagon, and two of Charlie's dog handlers, both of them black, attired in thornproof yellow overalls, drove them. The other was the buckboard, an ancient wooden thing rebuilt with shock absorbers and pneumatic tires and upholstered with rich tan leather, like a Mercedes-Benz's. Two more of Charlie's black employees, wearing the yellow overalls, drove the La Manchas that pulled the buckboard and served food and drink from an Igloo cooler built into the back. Sitting on the leather seats were Inman's wife, Ellen, who was close to his age and didn't ride anymore, and Betty and Halbert Morrissey and Thurston and Cindy Stannard, four more of Charlie's weekend guests who didn't ride or shoot. Charlie himself wouldn't have been caught dead confined to a buckboard during a quail shoot, but he liked having an audience. Off to the side were two black employees on horseback, wearing the yellow overalls, whose main job was to hold the horses of the