



# THE LOST WEEKEND

A NOVEL

"A masterpiece of  
psychological precision."

—*The New York Times*  
*Book Review*

## CHARLES JACKSON

With an Introduction by Blake Bailey

## THE LOST WEEKEND

Charles Jackson was born in 1903 and raised in the township of Arcadia, New York, in the Finger Lakes region, where much of his fiction is set. After a youth marred by tuberculosis and alcoholism, Jackson achieved international fame with his first novel, *The Lost Weekend* (1944), which was adapted into a classic movie by Billy Wilder and Charles Brackett. Over the next nine years, Jackson published two more novels and two story collections, while continuing to struggle with alcohol and drug addiction. In 1967, after a fourteen-year silence, he returned to the best-seller lists with a novel about a nymphomaniac, *A Second-Hand Life*, but the following year he died of an overdose at the Hotel Chelsea in Manhattan.

Blake Bailey is the author of *Farther & Wilder: The Lost Weekends and Literary Dreams of Charles Jackson*. His other books include *A Tragic Honesty: The Life and Work of Richard Yates*, finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award, and *Cheever: A Life*, winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award, the Francis Parkman Prize, and finalist for the Pulitzer and James Tait Black Memorial Prize. He edited a two-volume edition of Cheever's work for The Library of America, and in 2010 received an Award in Literature from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He lives in Virginia with his wife and daughter.

*The Fall of Valor*

*The Outer Edges*

*The Sunnier Side: Twelve Arcadian Tales*

*Earthly Creatures*

*A Second-Hand Life*

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*With an Introduction by Blake Bailey*



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And can you, by no drift of circumstance,  

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Get from him why he puts on this confusion,  
Grating so harshly all his days of quiet  
With turbulent and dangerous lunacy?

—*Hamlet*, III, 1.



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*The Lost Weekend*—a novel about five disastrous days in the life of Don Birnam—was written in the early 1940s, a time when alcoholism was widely regarded as a moral failing rather than a disease. The publisher, Stanley Rinehart, realized the book would need all the clinical validation it could get, and sent advance copies to medical schools around the country. Dr. Morris Fishbein, editor of *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, claimed that the novel captured “the very soul of the dipsomaniac” (“I found myself at the end ... full of sympathy and a desire to help”), while another specialist, Dr. Herbert L. Nossen, called it “expert and wonderful—the work of a courageous man.”

Fiction writers also tended to be enthusiastic. Sinclair Lewis, who knew whereof he spoke, found *The Lost Weekend* brilliant on every level—“the only unflinching story of an alcoholic that I have ever read”—and subsequently made a point of mentioning Charles Jackson as one of the few American writers who showed promise of greatness. Another alcoholic writer, however, seemed almost traumatized by the novel: William Seabrook, nowadays forgotten, was then well known as the author of *Asylum* (1935), the record of his incarceration at a mental hospital in Westchester County. “Here’s my honest reaction to *The Lost Weekend* by Charles Jackson which I read word by word to the end with increasing pain and anguish,” he wrote Jackson’s publisher.

*I hate the goddam book almost as much as I hate my own inflamed conscience. “There go I but for the grace of God” and all that stuff, in that horrible, hopeless, cumulative nightmare this guy’s devil-guided pen (or portable) has evoked [sic].*

*I’ve suffered as a drunk but not like that and hope to Christ I never will. It’s the only book that ever scared me. It should be soberly read by every white-collar souse in America. If it doesn’t scare the liver, lights and daylight out of him as it did me, it means the poor bastard has softening of the brain and is already sunk....*

As it happened, Seabrook was then in the midst of a final alcoholic relapse; twenty months later he’d kill himself with an overdose of sleeping pills, though friends claimed it wasn’t a matter of deliberate suicide so much as “another drastic attempt to accomplish what he had tried, vainly, all his life to do—to get away from himself.” Jackson would have understood only too well.

Nor was Jackson surprised by his novel’s stunning success, since, as he put it, “Almost everybody has somebody in their family who’s a drunk but who’s worth worrying about.” Within five years, *The Lost Weekend* sold almost half a million copies in various editions and was translated into fourteen languages, syndicated by King Features as a comic strip, and added to the prestigious Modern Library. Its critical reception was no less impressive. “Charles Jackson has made the most compelling gift to the literature of addiction since Dr. Quincey,” Philip Wylie wrote in *The New York Times*. The trailer for the classic movie summarized the matter nicely: “Famous critics called it ... ‘Powerful ...’ ‘Terrifying .

‘Unforgettable ...’ ‘Superb ...’ ‘Brilliant ...’ AND NOW PARAMOUNT DARES TO OPEN ... THE STRANGE AND SAVAGE PAGES OF ... *The Lost Weekend*.”

The movie, released less than two years after the novel, almost swept the Oscars—winning Best Picture, Director, and Screenplay, as well as Best Actor for Ray Milland, a Welshman hitherto known as a competent light comedian for supporting roles. A near teetotaler, Milland had been coached in the ways of drunkenness by the novel’s author—a balding, impeccably groomed middle-aged man whose weird combination of wistfulness and zest put the actor in the mind of “a bright, erratic problem child.” At the time, Jackson was working at MGM on a screenwriting assignment and was bemused to find himself the most popular man in Hollywood. Everyone, it seemed, had read his book and experienced an almost Seabrook-like shock of recognition, regarding Jackson (as one journalist put it) “in the manner of a returned war hero ... of a man who had been through hellfire and emerged bloodshot but unbowed. By then Jackson had been sober for almost a decade and was appalled by how readily people identified him with his narcissistic, crypto-homosexual, writer-manqué protagonist. “One third of the history is based on what I have experienced myself,” he told Louella Parsons and others, “about one third on the experiences of a very good friend whose drinking career I followed very closely, and the other third is pure invention.”

In fact, *The Lost Weekend* is autobiographical in almost every particular, though ultimately it’s a little misleading to confuse Don Birnam with his creator. Whereas it’s Don’s curse to see his own alcoholic self-deceptions objectively, before he can quite enjoy them, Jackson the novelist had managed to remove himself once further—that is, by objectifying both the deluded *and* self-knowing Don. The first is the artist-hero of Don’s never-to-be-written masterpiece, “In a Glass”—the brooding, dissolute apotheosis of the boy who, twenty years before, had stared into his bathroom mirror in hope that poetry-writing had wrought some telltale change, some outward sign of his cherished superiority (“Clods”), now preserved only by alcohol: “Suppose the clear vision in the bathroom mirror could fade (as in some tragic movie) and be replaced by this image over the bar. Suppose that lad— Suppose time could be all mixed up so that the child of twenty years ago could look into the bathroom mirror and see himself reflected at thirty-three, as he saw himself now. What would he think, that boy? As Don excitedly considers the possibilities—gloating over the clever multivalence of his title “In a Glass” (the whiskey glass, the mirrors past and present)—for a moment he becomes not only the hero but the author, too, of this “classic of form and content,” a kindred of Poe and Keats and Chatterton at whom his boy-self would have “noded in happy recognition.”

But of course the book doesn’t exist, could *never* exist, and Don catches himself yet again—smiling tipsily, fatuously, into a barroom mirror. This, again, is the Don who is both tragic clown and audience (“staring back at the performer in silent contempt and ridicule”), who hovering above is the triumphant novelist—Jackson—and hence the implicit irony of Don’s self-loathing diatribe:

*“In a Glass”—who would ever want to read a novel about a punk and a drunk! Everybody knew a couple or a dozen; they were not to be taken seriously; nuisances and trouble-makers, nothing more; like queers and fairies, people were belly-sick of them; whatever ailed them, that was their funeral; who cared?—life presented a thousand things more important to be written about than misfits and failures... Like all his attempts at fiction it would be as personal as a letter—painful to those who knew him, of no interest to those who didn’t; ... so narcissistic that*

*its final effect would be that of the mirrored room which gives back the same image times without count, or the old Post Toastie box of his boyhood with the fascinating picture of a woman and child holding a Post Toastie box with a picture of a woman and child holding a Post Toastie box with a picture of a woman and child holding ...*

And yet Jackson—producer of that evocative Post Toastie box—has written just such a novel as “In a Glass,” and here we are reading it.

But of course the author understood that there was more to addiction than narcissistic escapism; indeed, many addicts (especially among the comfortable middle class) *begin* life, at least, as peculiarly lovable, promising human beings—all too aware, later, of the heartbreak they cause. “[W]hy were so many brilliant men alcoholic?” Don muses. “And from there, the next [question] was: Why did you drink?” Naturally Don can give any number of answers—and does—while understanding, too, that answers don’t matter “in the face of the one fact you drank and it was killing you. Why? Because alcohol was something you couldn’t handle. It had you licked.” This is the epiphanic “bottom” to which the addict must descend before seeking help—and yet Don keeps drinking. One thinks of the tippler in *The Little Prince*, who drinks because he is ashamed and is ashamed because he drinks—an insidious cycle of remorse that can either save or destroy the alcoholic: that is, either shame him into stopping once and for all, or goad him into further escape and final destruction. Not for nothing *Macbeth* invoked again and again in the novel, the original title of which was “Present Fear” from Act I, Scene 3: “Present fears / Are less than horrible imaginings...” Thus Don (named for the “Great Birnam Wood”) constantly weighs his remorse over past misdeeds with his fear of what lies ahead—the “horrible imaginings” of a future that is, after all, only logical in light of the past:

*Obviously there was the will in him to destroy himself; part of him was bent on self-destruction—he’d be the last to deny it. But obviously, too, part was not, part held back and expressed its disapproval in remorse and shame.... But the foolish psychiatrist knew so much less about it than the poet, the poet who said to another doctor, Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased.... Raze out the written troubles of the brain?, the poet who answered, Therein the patient must minister to himself....*

Only Don can save himself, and yet (as poor William Seabrook and other fellow sufferers are apt to foresee) he almost certainly won’t. In the early chapters there’s a kind of black picaresque comedy to Don’s misadventures, grading subtly into tragedy until the climactic horror of his delirium tremens—which serves, superbly, both to recall the comedy and foretell Don’s ultimate self-destruction, as his wheeling, drunken bat-self murders (and seen gruesomely to copulate with) the passive mouse: “The more it squeezed, the wider and higher rose the wings, like tiny filthy umbrellas, grey-wet with slime. Under the single spread of wings the two furry forms lay exposed to his stare, cuddled together as under a cosy canopy, indistinguishable one from the other, except that now the mouse began to bleed. Tiny drops of bright blood spurted down the wall; and from the bed he heard the faint miles-distant shrieks of dying.” This, then, is the consummation of Don’s narcissism—subject and object merging in death—though at the novel’s end we leave him alive if not very well (“Why do they make such a fuss?”), preparing for another binge.

Don Birnam remains the definitive portrait of an alcoholic in American literature—the tragicomic combination of Hamlet and Mr. Toad, according to *Time*, which in 1963 reprinted the book as part of its paperback “Reading Program” of contemporary classics. The editors of *Time* were pleased to mention that Jackson himself was doing just fine: a devoted family man (the married father of two daughters) and chairman of the Alcoholics Anonymous chapter in New Brunswick, New Jersey—a man who now freely admitted that he was indeed Don Birnam, and hence his many hospitalizations for drug- and alcohol-related collapses in the twenty years since his famous first novel had been published. To be sure, he could afford to be candid by then; very few people had any idea who Jackson was, and even those happy few tended to muddle the matter. “I have become so used to having people say ‘We love your movie’ instead of ‘We read your book,’ ” said Jackson, “that now I merely say ‘Thanks.’ ”

*The Lost Weekend*, after all, is something of an anomaly: a great novel that also resulted in a great (or near-great) movie—somewhat to the author’s woe, as there are far more moviegoers than readers of literary fiction; the upshot, oddly enough, is that the movie has all but supplanted the novel as a cultural artifact (and never mind the five other books Jackson published in his lifetime). For his part Jackson never stopped fighting against his later obscurity, and finally was even willing to sacrifice his hard-won sobriety in order to resume writing, which he’d found all but impossible without the stimulus of drugs or alcohol. A recurrence of tuberculosis resulted in the removal of his right lung in 1963, and while recuperating at Will Rogers Hospital in Saranac Lake, Jackson was given medication that not only reduced his pain but restored his creative impulse. By 1967 he was back on the *Time* best-seller list with a novel about a nymphomaniac, *A Second-Hand Life*, and was eager to resume work on his long-awaited “Birnam saga,” the first volume of which was to be titled *Farther and Wilder*. According to his editor at Macmillan, Robert Markel, Jackson had finished at least three hundred pages of this magnum opus when, in 1968, he took a fatal overdose of Seconal at the Hotel Chelsea, where he’d been living with a Czechoslovakian factory worker named Stanley Zednik.

He died, of course, as “the author of *The Lost Weekend*,” the way he’d been invariably identified throughout his career, no matter what he wrote. Within two years, however, even his most famous novel went out of print, its main subject no longer a matter of such luridly salable sensationalism—due in part to its own influence as “the *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* of alcoholism,” as Walter Winchell called it. “[S]ince the publication of Charles Jackson’s somber novel about an alcoholic,” *Life* magazine had reported in 1946, “an unprecedented amount of attention has been paid to the drinking of alcohol and the problems arising therefrom.” Jackson’s insights were widely cited by such organizations as AA, the National Council on Alcoholism, and the Rutgers Center of Alcohol Studies (where Jackson’s devoted wife, Rhoda, worked for almost fifteen years), until at last the American Medical Association was roused to recognize alcoholism, officially, as a treatable disease.

Jackson, who’d spent so many years “on the circuit” giving talks for AA, would have been pleased by the ongoing shift in public perception, if perhaps a little exasperated where his own work was concerned: “I’m a writer first of all, and a non-drinker second,” he insisted again and again, to little avail. This was a man who’d written arguably the first serious American novel whose foremost subject is homosexuality, *The Fall of Valor* (1946), as well as

a short story collection, *The Sunnier Side* (1950), that was acclaimed as the midcentury equivalent of *Winesburg, Ohio*. That said, his greatest book is undoubtedly *The Lost Weekend*, and it deserves to be rediscovered foremost as a work of art. Among writers, to be sure, its most boisterous advocates tend to be famous drinkers, too—but then, who better to attest to its enduring power? “Marvelous and horrifying ... the best fictional account of alcoholism I have ever read,” said Kingsley Amis, a supreme authority in such matters. Let the reader be assured, then, that this is a work of canonical importance, for every conceivable reason.

# The Star



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 “The barometer of his emotional nature was set for a spell of riot.”

These words, on the printed page, had the unsettling effect no doubt intended, but with difference. At once he put the book aside: closed it, with his fingers still between the pages, dropped his arm over the edge of the chair and let it hang, the book somewhere near the floor. This in case he wanted to look at it again. But he did not need to. Already he knew the sentence by heart: he might have written it himself. Indeed, it was with a sense of familiarity, of recognition, that his mind had first read through and accepted that sentence only a moment before; and now, as he relaxed his fingers' grip and dropped the book to the floor, he said aloud to himself: “That's me, all right.” The book hit the rug with a soft thump and the Scottie looked up from its basket. “You heard me, Mac,” he called out. “That's what I said!” He glared at the sleepy dog and added, loudly, burlesquing his fear and his delight: “It's *me* they're talking about. Me!”

He had been alone for nearly an hour. When Wick left, they had had one of their familiar and painful scenes, a scene in which he played dumb, as usual, leaving to his brother the burden of talking around the subject and avoiding any specific mention of what was on both their minds.

Wick had stood in the open door and looked back and said, “I wish you'd change your mind and come with us, this afternoon.”

From the deep chair he smiled at his younger brother. “I know you do,” he said, “but I can't. I'll be much better off here.” He was aware that he was acting and looking like a romantic invalid and he tried to curb this.

The brother came back in and closed the door. “Listen. We've had the tickets such a long while. And Helen'll be disappointed and I'll be disappointed. You know she's only going because of you.”

“I'll hear it on the radio.”

“Today's Thursday, not Saturday.”

“Oh yes. I forgot.”

“And you look all right,” his brother went on. “Nobody would think there was a thing wrong with you—it's all in your imagination. You look perfectly all right.”

“Wick, I could never sit through it. I'd spoil it for you and Helen and I'd be miserable myself.” Unintentionally he made the pathetic, the disarming admission: “Wick, I've only just recovered—it's only been three days. I couldn't *concentrate*.”

The brother looked at him searchingly, almost sadly, he thought. “I wouldn't keep asking you, Don, if I didn't think it would do you good. It would do you so much good.”

He smiled again, hanging onto his patience for dear life. “I'd run into someone I know and I can't see anybody.”

“You wouldn't see anybody.”

“Oh yes I would. And besides there's Helen. I can't have even her see me.”

“Helen's seen you like this dozens of times.”

“There—you see? I do show it.”

“You're exaggerating all this, Don, and just indulging yourself. Listen, Don. If I'm willing to take off the rest of the week, to take you away for a long weekend in the country—just the two of us and Mac—I should think you could do this one thing for me. *Please* come with us.”

He looked at the Scottie curled up in its basket, absently watching the two brothers. After a long pause, while he gathered his breath and his brother regarded him in that worried, puzzled way, he said: "I don't mean to be stubborn but I'm not exaggerating and I'm not really indulging myself. Please try to understand. One more day and I'll be all right, but not today—I can't go out now and I certainly can't go sit through *Tristan*. Tonight, when we get together in the car and drive away, fine. But not now.—Wick, I'd go to pieces if I went out now."

"How?" the brother asked. "And anyway, I'd be with you."

He shook his head. "Wick, won't you please go and forget about me? I can't see why you want me to go when you know I don't want to."

"You know why I want you to go," the brother said. "I mean," he added quickly, "I just don't want you to be alone when you're feeling like this."

"I'll be all right," he said, pretending not to notice the slip. He sighed, already fatigued with the familiar argument, but he believed he could keep it up forever if only it ended finally, with his brother leaving him alone. "Will you *stop* worrying about me?"

"All right"—and he saw, with relief, that Wick had reached the point where he was afraid of pressing him too far and even now pretended to be pacified. "I'll tell Helen you didn't feel well enough. Will you be ready when I come back?"

"Yes," he said. "I'm ready now. I feel much better since I shaved and dressed." The shaving and dressing was probably what had precipitated this whole tiresome thing, it had given Wick ideas, but he couldn't take it back now.

Wick didn't seem to have noticed. "Mrs. Foley will be in about three o'clock to clean up a little. I've left a dollar on the radio in case you want her to get you anything."

"I won't want anything."

"What are you going to do—you're not going out, are you?"

"Oh no, I'm not going out." He smiled, and added, "You don't believe me, do you?"

The brother looked away. "I just thought maybe you'd be taking Mac out."

"No. Mrs. Foley can, if he wants to go out."

"All right," the brother said again. "I'll have the car sent over and we can get going by six thirty at the latest. It may be cold down there; after all, it's October; but a weekend in the country will do you a lot of good. Both of us."

Don smiled again. "Thursday to Monday—that's pretty long for a 'weekend.' "

"That's all right, the longer the better. And listen,"—Wick was working it up for his benefit, trying to act enthusiastic, trying to show he had forgotten the tiresome pleading and was convinced that he would stay where he was, safe and sound—"let's not come back till Tuesday, or even Wednesday. Well, Tuesday—I can arrange it all right with the office."

"Sounds wonderful, Wick. Hear that, Mac?" He laughed. "One of those *long* weekends in the country, that you read about!"

"I'll be late," Wick said, turning. "Goodbye."

"Give my love to Helen."

"You're sure there isn't anything you want?"

"Thanks, Wick, I don't want anything. Have a good time."

"You'll surely be here?"

"Here?"



“When I come back.”

“Of course I’ll be here!” He was reproachful, hurt, and his brother turned at once toward the door.

“Goodbye.”

“Goodbye. Give my love to Helen!”

The door was closed; and he smiled to himself as he realized what an effort it had cost Wick not to look back once more. He smiled because he was relieved to be alone again and because he knew so much more about this whole thing than his brother did. Poor Wick, he thought, and at once he began to feel better. “Well, Mac,” he said aloud, “it seems that we’re going to the country.” He got up and went over to look at the dollar bill lying on the radiator. Then he came back and sat down again in the big chair.

There was a small Longines traveling clock on the ledge of the bookshelf at his elbow and it said 1:32. He picked it up and wound it, remembering the generous Dutchman who had given it to him that winter in Gstaad and how the Dutchman’s feelings had been hurt because he hadn’t got around to thanking him for two days. He set it back on the shelf and looked about the room.

Now that he was alone, with five hours staring him in the face, he began to sense the first pricks of panic; then knew at once it was something he only imagined. “What to do, Mac, what to do?” The dog opened its eyes, lifted its head from the cushion, and relapsed into sleep again. “I get it,” he said. “Bored!” He spoke up sharply, not even thinking of the dog now. “What the hell have *you* got to be bored with!” His eye fell on the gramophone. He walked over to it and lifted the cover. The last record of a Beethoven sonata was on, the *Waldstein*. He turned the switch and set it going; but before the record was halfway through its jubilant energy and hammering clanging rhythm oppressed him, and he reached to shut it off. As he lifted the arm of the pickup, the trembling of his hand caused the needle to scrape across the record with a strident squawk that brought the Scottie to its feet. “Relax, dog,” he said, and came back to his chair.

The time had to be filled, he couldn’t just sit here. On the bookshelf at his elbow was a collection of monographs on modern painters. He leaned forward to examine the titles, then chose the Utrillo. He pulled the book down and spread it open on his lap. There were a few colored reproductions but these were scarcely more colorful than the black-and-whites. He thumbed through the drab pages, stopping now and again to linger over some scene of a deserted melancholy street, or a little grey lane hemmed in by sad plaster walls, and a feeling of almost intolerable loneliness came over him. Even the village squares or the open places in front of churches had this loneliness, this desertion, as if everyone had gone off for the day to attend some brilliant fair, leaving the town desolate and empty behind. In imagination, in memory, he stood in just such a little street now, as he had when he was a child—sundown, after supper, on a summer evening, standing alone in the quiet street and listening to a steam calliope playing far away on the edge of the town, at the fairgrounds, before the evening performance of the circus. He closed the book and put it back on the shelf, remembering that moment so clearly and well that tears of pity came to his eyes—for the child, for himself, for the painter, he did not know whom.

“I must be in lousy condition to get so worked up over—over nothing,” he said. “Or do you want to?” He addressed the waking dog. “Do I, Mac? *You* tell me.” He stared at the dog.

“Well?” The dog stared back. “Am I indulging myself, as your pr-r-r-roud master said”—trilling the “r” like an actor—“am I putting it on, is it all my imagination? Or if not mine, whose?” There’s a thought for today, he said to himself. He stood up. “Mac, you’re exaggerating, nobody would think there was a thing wrong with you! You look perfectly all right! And when I say you look all right, then, God damn it, you *feel* all right, do you hear?” He was having fun now, but even as he reached the pitch of his enjoyment he tired of it, and so did the dog. Who’s loony now, he said to himself apathetically, as he sat down again.

His fingers touched the edge of a small book tucked in beside the cushion of the chair. He pulled it out and looked at the title. It was a copy of James Joyce’s *Dubliners* his brother had been reading. He opened it and began to read at random, articulating the words very carefully in a whisper, paying elaborate attention to the form of each word but none to what he was reading. It was like the time, on similar occasions, when, keyed-up, desperate, he went out in search of a French movie, and sat in some airless movie-house all afternoon concentrating on the rapid French being spoken from the screen, because he believed a few hours of such concentration, even though he didn’t listen to the sense, had a steadying effect. So he read now for some minutes, thinking that he might even read the book right through and then through again before his brother came back. Wouldn’t that surprise him? he said to himself with a smile, while his lips formed other words: *The barometer of his emotional nature was set for a spell of riot*. The smile faded, he stared and read again.

The burden, the oppression was gone. He felt positively lightheaded, joyous. The words had released him from the acute sense of suspense he now realized he had been under since his brother left. This is what he had been waiting for, what he had probably known all along in the back of his mind was bound to happen. It was as though a light-switch had been snapped on or a door sprung open, showing him the way. He dropped the book; and after he had exhorted the dog, saying, “It’s *me* they’re talking about. Me”—he shrugged, his hands spread open, palms up, in a wide gesture, and said: “Why am I such a fool? Why resist or wait?” He looked around, his eyebrows raised to his imaginary audience, like a comedian—an audience where he himself was every one of the several hundred people staring back at the performer in silent contempt and ridicule. He knew he was thus looking at himself. For his own benefit he exaggerated the action and voice, clowning because of his embarrassment. “I leave it to you, gentlemen, Mac, all,” he said aloud; “call me ham if you like but—there’s the part! What can one do about it?”

He dropped the role and stood up. He went to the radio and picked up the dollar bill. “Control! Control, Mac,” he said. “There’s plenty of time.” He lifted his coat from the back of a chair. “All afternoon,” he added. “Time to go out and plenty of time to get back. Plenty of time.” The Scottie watched him from its basket. He buttoned his coat and went into the kitchen to see if water had been put down for the dog.

On the kitchen table was an envelope addressed to Mrs. Foley. He picked it up and held it to the light. He tore it open and fingered through four five-dollar bills. “*Twenty*, my God,” he said. “Why twenty?” It must be Mrs. Foley’s pay for the month. She came two afternoons a week to pick up and often at noon to take the dog out. He put the bills in his pocket, wadded the empty envelope into a ball and threw it out the window.

He heard the wadded-up envelope rattle along the fire-escape and he stood a moment longer looking absently out at the blank brick wall opposite. Suddenly he thought of Wick-

He would be at the opera now. Helen would be there too, sitting beside him in the green nearly dark house (she's only going because of you). The two of them would be looking at the brilliantly lighted sailing-ship scene that was the first act, and now and again one of them would lean toward the other and whisper something about the performance. Not about him; they wouldn't be talking about him now. Chiefly because he was the only thing on their minds and neither wanted the other to know it. Helen would be wondering if he really wasn't feeling well, or was he off again; and Wick would be wondering if Helen had accepted the excuse. She didn't give a damn for the opera under any conditions and he certainly didn't care under these. He would be staring at the stage, half-turned toward Helen to catch her next whispered comment, and thinking: "If he isn't there when I go back; if he's gone out—" Doc felt sorry for the distraction he knew he was causing them, and yet he couldn't help smiling too. He was taking their minds off the performance a hundred times more than if he had been sitting there between them and talking loudly against the music.

On his way out he went into the bathroom to see how he looked. "During the next few days," he said, as he straightened his tie, "I'll probably be looking into this mirror more often than is good for mortal man." He winked. "That's how well I know *myself*. However." Before he left, he looked back at the dog. "Don't you worry, Mac—don't you wuddy—about Mr. Foley's money. I'll be back in time to hand it to her myself," he said, "in person. Just in case anybody should ask." Then he slammed the door, tried it again to see if the lock had caught, and went down the stairs.

East 55th Street was cool, even for October. He thought of running back for a topcoat, but time was precious; and besides, his destination and haven lay just around the corner.

When the drink was set before him, he felt better. He did not drink it immediately. No matter that he had it, he did not need to. Instead, he permitted himself the luxury of ignoring it for a while; he lit a cigarette, took some envelopes out of his pocket and unfolded and glanced through an old letter, put them away again and began to hum, quietly. Gradually he worked up a subtle and elaborate pretense of ennui: stared at himself in the dark mirror of the bar, as if lost in thought; fingered his glass, turning it round and round or sliding it slowly back and forth in the wet of the counter; shifted from one foot to the other: glanced at a couple of strangers standing farther down the bar and watched them for a moment or two, critically aloof, and, as he thought, aristocratic; and when he finally did get around to raising the glass to his lips, it was with an air of boredom that said, Oh well, I suppose I might as well drink it, now that I've ordered it.

He thought again of Wick and Helen. Funny relationship. Closer than if they had been lifelong friends; but not because of any real affinity or interest in each other. In fact, each was the kind of person that the other did not care for at all. The only thing that held them together was him, of course. Aside from himself, they had no common meeting ground. And he was able, by his bad behavior no less than his good, to bind them closer than if they had been brother and sister. How they were one, when things were going well with him. How they were united even more, when he was on the loose. If they could see him now. Perhaps they knew only too well what he was doing at this very moment. Hell, why wouldn't they? It had happened so many times....

Gloria sidled up and put a hand on his shoulder. Imperceptibly he pulled away, careful not to offend her but cold enough so that she wouldn't get any ideas in her head. Gloria was

something new here and he didn't like it at all. Why in thunder should a 2nd Avenue bar-and-grill attempt a "hostess," for God's sake? He didn't like acting snooty about her in front of Sam; and then again he thought it was well that they should be reminded he didn't care for this sort of thing. He was fond of this bar but just the same he was different from most people who came here and they knew it. Gloria was not more than twenty, blonde, not thin, dressed in a brown satin dress that shone like copper. She always asked for a cigarette, so now he placed his pack on the counter with the hope that that would take care of her.

"Hello-o-o," she said. "Where you been? I haven't seen you for days and days." She took a cigarette. "Been away?"

"Yes."

"You look awful nice. That a new suit?"

He didn't answer.

"My, we aren't very chummy today. What's the matter?"

"As a matter of fact," he said, "I was—thinking."

"Okay, that's all right," she said. "I'll come back and have a drink with you later, maybe. Huh?"

"Swell."

She moved down the bar and began talking to the other two men.

His drink was finished and he had not felt it at all. It had been so much water. Funny that he hadn't noticed even the faintest small tingle. He only felt relaxed, for the first time in days—so relaxed that it was almost fatigue. He nodded to Sam and another rye was set before him.

It was true, what he had said about thinking. Ordinarily he enjoyed talking to Sam by the hour—they were old friends; at times he thought of Sam as one of the persons he was fonder of in all the world—but today he didn't feel like talking. He was suddenly very low, all spirit gone. He downed the drink almost at once and asked for another. While Sam opened a new bottle, he looked at his face in the mirror over the bar.

It was an interesting face, no question about it. The mirror was just dark enough so that he seemed to be seeing a stranger rather than himself. Completely objective, he looked at the face in the glass and began to study it so intently that he was almost surprised to see his expression change under his gaze to one of searching concern.

The face showed all of its thirty-three years, but no more. The forehead was good, the eyes dark, big, and deep-set. The nostrils of the longish aquiline nose flared slightly—they were good too; gave the face a keen look, like a thoroughbred. The mustache was just big and black enough; had it been a little larger, he might have been looking into the tragically interesting face of Edgar Allan Poe. The mouth was full and wide, it wore a discontented, unhappy expression—interestingly so. He liked the two deep lines that ran down either side of the mouth from just above the nostrils, half-encircling the set bitter half-smile. He liked too the three horizontal lines of his forehead—not really horizontal, for above his right eye they tilted upward to avoid the perpetually raised right-eyebrow, so fixed there by habit that he was never able to bring it down to the level of the other without frowning. He picked up the glass Sam set before him and began to drink.

He remembered a girl who sat behind him in 1st-year Latin class, a talkative girl, the kind who was always wondering what she looked like when she was asleep—things like that. She

said to him once, “Faces are interesting, you know it? I was thinking about yours the other day and do you know what I decided? I decided that if someone should ask me what your habitual expression was, I’d say, ‘Animation.’ ” She had paused for the effect, though there was no doubting her honesty. “Even in repose your face looks animated. You always look so alive, and curious—inquisitive, I guess I mean.” He had been far from embarrassed, of course. When she asked him to describe what her habitual expression was, he had made up something, he didn’t know what, already lost in thought for what she had said. Animation was it. You could hardly call that face in the mirror “animated, alive.” It was set in an expression of studied disillusion which not even the new drink could shake.

He glanced at his watch. Mrs. Foley would be arriving in a quarter of an hour. Time for one more drink—two at the outside. He shoved the glass toward Sam and stared at himself over the bar again.

Mirrors seemed to have taken up a hell of a lot of time in his life. He thought of one now—the mirror in the bathroom, years ago, back home. When he was a kid—fourteen, fifteen—writing a poem every night before he went to sleep, starting and finishing it at one sitting even though it might be two or three o’clock, that bathroom mirror had come to mean more to him than his own bed. Nights when he had finished a poem, what could have been more natural, more necessary and urgent, than to go and look at himself to see if he had changed? Here at this desk, this night, one of life’s important moments had occurred. Humbly, almost unaware, certainly innocent, he had sat there and been the instrument by which a poem was transmitted to paper. He was awed and truly humble, for all that he must look in the mirror to see if the experience registered in his face. Often tears came genuinely to his eyes. How had it come about—why should it have been *he*? He asked himself in humility and gratitude. He read the poem in fear and read it again. *Now* it was fine; would it be so tomorrow? He raised his eyes from the scrawled re-written sheets and listened to the night. No sound whatever; and he thought of his brothers sleeping in the adjoining rooms, his mother downstairs. They had slept, all unaware of what had happened in this room, this night, at this desk. Scornful and proud, “Clods” he muttered; but proper appreciation of such a moment was beyond them, of course, even if they should know. He forgot them at once—though he did not forget to the extent of going down the hall at his usual heedless pace. He tiptoed listening breathless for any sound of stir in the dark bedrooms (too often he had been surprised at three in the morning by a waking brother, who reported at the breakfast table that Don had had his light on all night long; and the recriminations that followed then—the bitter reminders of how he mooned at his desk when he ought to be asleep like a normal boy, the savage scoldings for running up huge light-bills—how shameful these were and humiliating, in view of the poem that justified all this, did they but know). In the bathroom he snapped on the light and confronted himself in the glass. The large childish eyes stared back, eager and searching; the cheeks were flushed, the mouth half-open in suspense. He studied every feature of that alert countenance, so wide awake that it seemed it would never sleep again. Surely there would be some sign, some mark, some tiny line or change denoting a new maturity, perhaps? He scanned the forehead, the mouth, the staring eyes, in vain. The face looked back at him as clear, as heartbreakingly youthful, as before.

He was moved and amused as he recalled that moment—a moment that had been repeated dozens and dozens of times in all his long adolescence. He picked up the glass and drank it

the bottom. A fancy came to him. Suppose the clear vision in the bathroom mirror could fall (as in some trick movie) and be replaced by this image over the bar. Suppose that lad— Suppose time could be all mixed up so that the child of twenty years ago could look into the bathroom mirror and see himself reflected at thirty-three, as he saw himself now. What would he think, that boy? Would he have accepted it—is this what he dreamed of becoming? Would he accept it for a moment? In his emotion and embarrassment he glanced away and signaled to Sam to pour him another.

The men at the end of the bar had gone. Gloria sat at a table in the back, filing her nails. He watched her, indifferent about her now; then fearing that she might see him looking and take it as an invitation to come forward again, he turned back to the bar, automatically picking up the new drink that had been set before him.

Or wait—of *course* he would accept it! It was all crystal clear, like a revelation (suddenly he was feeling brighter, more alert and clear mentally, than he ever had in his life). That kid could he have seen this face, the man of today, certainly would have accepted it—he would have loved it! The idol of the boy had been Poe and Keats, Byron, Dowson, Chatterton—a the gifted miserable and reckless men who had burned themselves out in tragic brilliance early and with finality. Not for him the normal happy genius living to a ripe old age (genius indeed! How could a genius be happy, normal—above all, long-lived?), acclaimed by all (acclaimed in his lifetime?), enjoying honor, love, obedience, troops of friends (“I must not look to have”). The romantic boy would have been satisfied, he would have responded with all his ardent youthful soul. There was a poetic justice in those disillusioned eyes and the boy would have known it and nodded in happy recognition.

In the next instant came disgust (self-disgust and scorn; self-reproach for inflating the image of himself out of all proportion to the miserable truth); and in the very next, the brilliant idea. Oh, brilliant! As it swept over him and took possession of his excited brain—so feverishly alert that it seemed his perceptions could, at this moment, grasp any problem in the world—he fidgeted in suspense, shifted from one foot to the other, and made an effort to calm himself. Now wait a moment, just let me order another drink and think this out slowly—it’s coming too fast....

A story of that boy and this man—a long short story—a classic of form and content—*Death in Venice*, artistically only, not in any other way—the title: “In a Glass.” What else could it be?—the glass of the title meaning at first the whisky glass he was drinking from, out of which grew the multitude of fancies; then the idea blurring and merging gradually, subtly with the glass of the mirror till finally the title comes to mean in the reader’s mind only the glass over the bar through which the protagonist looks back on his youth. “In a Glass”—would begin with a man standing in a 2nd Avenue bar on just such an October afternoon as this, just such a man as he, drinking a glass of whisky, several glasses, and looking at his reflection in the mirror over the bar. Thoughts poured in a rush, details, incidents, names, ideas, ideas. At this moment, if he were able to write fast enough, he could set it down in all its final perfection, right down without a change or correction needed later, from the brilliant opening to the last beautiful note of wise and grave irony. The things between—the things! ... The wrench (the lost lonely abandonment) when his father left home and left him—*but anything, practically anything out of childhood, climaxed by the poetry-writing and the episode of the bathroom mirror; then on to Dorothy, the fraternity nightmare, Dorothy again*

leaving home, the Village and prohibition, Mrs. Scott, the *Rochambeau* (the *Bremen*, *LaFayette*, *Champlain*, *de Grasse*); the TB years in Davos; the long affair with Anna; the drinking; Juan les-Pins (the weekend there that lasted two months, the hundred dollars a day); the pawnshops; the drinking, the unaccountable things you did, the people you got mixed up with; the summer in Provincetown, the winter on the farm; the books begun and dropped; the unfinished short-stories; the drinking the drinking the drinking; the foolish psychiatrist—the foolish foolish psychiatrist; down to Helen, the good Helen he always knew he would marry and now knew he never would, Helen who was always right, who would sit through *Tristan* this afternoon resisting it, refusing to be carried away or taken in, seeing it and hearing it straight off for what it was as he would only be able to see it and hear it after several years of irrational idolatry first... Whole sentences sprang to his mind in dazzling succession, perfectly formed, ready to be put down. Where was a pencil, paper? He downed his drink.

The time. Four o'clock. Mrs. Foley would be there now but to hell with that! This was more important. But caution, slow. Good thing there was no paper handy, no chance to begin impulsively what later must be composed—when, tonight maybe, certainly tomorrow—with all the calm and wise control needed for such an undertaking. A *tour de force*? Critics would call it that, they'd be bound to, but what the hell was the matter with a *tour de force* for Christ's sake that the term should have come to be a sneer? Didn't it mean a brilliant performance and is "brilliance" something to snoot at? His mind raced on. But how about "A Glass Through a Glass Darkly"?—or "Through a Glass Darkly"? No, it had been done to death; trite every lady-writer in the land had used it at one time or another, or if they hadn't, it was a wonder. "In a Glass" was perfect—he saw stacks of copies in bookshop windows, piled up like tricky pyramids (he would drop in and address the bookseller with some prepared witticisms like, "I appreciate the compliment you pay my book by piling it up in the window like a staple that should be in every home; but couldn't you add a card saying 'Send in ten wrapped and get a free illustrated life of the author?'"—hell, that was too long for wit, he'd have to cut it down), he glanced over people's shoulders in the subway and smiled to himself as he heard one girl say to another "I can't make head or tail of this"—(she had something if she meant "tale"), he read with amusement an embarrassed letter from his mother regretting the fact that he hadn't published a book she could show the neighbors and why didn't he write something that had "human interest"? With a careful glance about him he picked up his glass and offered a silent rueful toast to human interest, and drank.

Suddenly, sickeningly, the whole thing was so much eyewash. How could he have been seduced, fooled, into dreaming up such a ridiculous piece; in perpetrating, even in his imagination, anything so pat, so contrived, so cheap, so phoney, so adolescent, so (crowning offense) sentimental? Euphoria! Faithless muse! What crimes are committed in thy—*The* was a line he might use; and oh, another: the ending!—the ending sprang to his mind clear and true as if he had seen it in print. The hero, after the long procession of motley scenes from his past life (would the line stretch out to the crack of doom?)—the hero decides to walk out of the bar and somewhere, somehow, that very day—not for himself, of course: for Helen—commit suicide. The tag: "It would give her a lifelong romance." Perfect; but now—more perfect still—was the line that came next, the *new* ending: the little simple line set in a paragraph all by itself beneath the other, on the last page:

“But he knew he wouldn’t.”

How much it said, that line; how much it told about himself. How it disarmed the reader about the hero and still more the author—as if the author had stepped in between the page and the reader and said, “You see? I didn’t die, after all. I went home and wrote down what you have just been reading. And Helen—what of her? Did we marry, you ask?” Shrug. “What can tell? ...”

“Sam, I’ll have one more rye.” To celebrate, he said under his breath. To celebrate what?—and a fit of boredom, of ennui so staggering descended upon him with such suddenness that he was scarcely able to stand. He wanted to put his head down on the counter, in the wet air, all, and weep: tears, idle tears, I know damned well what they mean—for he was seeing himself with unbearable clarity again and he could beat his fists together and curse the double vision of his that enabled him, forced him, to see too much—though all the while, all the long time he had been at the bar, he knew that to the casual spectator he had changed so little, moved by not so much as a hair or had a thought more troubling than the price of his drink. Cloudy the place, who was drinking now with him, in him, inside him, instead of him, he loved and hated himself and that Sam, and groped to think of it again, clearly like before. To live and praise God in blessed mediocrity (Tonio! spiritual brother!), to be *at home* in the world—how with bitter passion he envied that and them, people like Sam here, pouring the rye. Can they imagine the planning of a story like that, the planning alone, much less the writing? Can they imagine how, being able to plan it, being able to master the plan and the writing, can they understand how you would fail—fail merely by failing to write it at all—why, how? The answer was nowhere, the drink was everything. What a blessing the money in his pocket, he must get more, much more for the feast of drink ahead. Ignorant Sam, a sweaty man, how far from thy homeland hast thou come, from thy fair Irish county to this dark whisky-smelling mirrored cheap quiet lovely haven! Surely the most beautiful light in all the world was the light on the bricks out there, under the L, the patches of gold edged in black shadow, a street paved with golden bricks truly, with beams of light slanting upward fairer and purer than rays of sun through cathedral glass. Why should Cezanne have painted the blue monotonous hills and fields of France, let him paint *this* for Christ’s sake! Or me—let me do it—for he knew now just how it could be done, and downed his drink in an inspired impulse to rush out and spend all his money on painting materials and try. He ordered another drink and drank it and looked again, to fix the scene and the light in his mind: the gold was gone, the rays out, the bricks red and black with neon night.

Gloria was there, her hand on his shoulder. He turned, startled.

“Why don’t you come sit down and eat something with me? I’m going to eat now.”

“Why? What’s the time?”

“Quarter past.”

“Five?”

“Six.”

“I’ve got a—dinner engagement. Sorry.” In a moment he was gone, in panic to be home before Wick.

At the corner he stopped in the liquor store to buy a pint. He pretended to deliberate a moment, considering the various brands, knowing all the while he would buy the bottle that was just under a dollar as he always did, no matter how much money he had in his pocket.



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