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A Charles Jackson Diptych

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A Charles Jackson Diptych

BY JOHN W. CROWLEY

I. CHARLES JACKSON'S FRATERNITY NIGHTMARE: THE LOST WEEKEND AND A YEAR LOST AT SYRACUSE

IT IS NOT widely known that Charles Jackson, author of *The Lost Weekend* (1944), once attended Syracuse University. Although the official records for 1922–23 survive only on microfilm so faint as to be nearly indecipherable, it may still be discerned that he enrolled for six courses in the newly opened College of Business Administration: Business English, Stenography, Journalism, French, Political Science, and Economics.¹ Jackson dropped out after two semesters, however, and he never did finish college. Why he left Syracuse is unclear; but a story based on Jackson's freshman year became a twice-told tale, providing both the plot of his unpublished first novel and also a subplot in *The Lost Weekend*.

Charles Jackson came to Syracuse by way of Newark, New York, a small city in Wayne County, thirty miles east of Rochester. Jackson's childhood house remains there on Prospect Street, and his headstone stands, slightly a tilt, in the family plot at the local cemetery. The Jacksons moved to Newark from Summit, New Jersey, where Charles, the third of five children, had been born in 1903. When Jackson was twelve, his father abruptly deserted the family. The next year, 1916, brought another disaster: Charlie's only sister, Thelma, and his baby brother, Richard, were killed together in an auto wreck at a dangerous railroad crossing.

After Jackson's graduation from high school in 1921, he worked one year as a reporter for the local paper, the *Newark Courier*. Once he set out

1. I am grateful to University Registrar Peter DeBlois for providing me with copies of these records. Founded in 1919, the College of Business Administration offered four curricula: General Business, Secretarial Science, Journalism, and Commercial Teaching. Jackson probably intended to major in Journalism.

John W. Crowley is professor of English and director of the Humanities Doctoral Program at Syracuse University. Author or editor of fifteen books and 100 articles and reviews, he is best known as a scholar of William Dean Howells. He has also written often on alcohol-related topics. Crowley's anthology of alcoholic narratives from the 1840s, titled *Drunkard's Progress*, is forthcoming from the Johns Hopkins University Press.



Charles Jackson appears in the top row, second from the right, in this 1924 photograph from Syracuse University's yearbook, *The Onondagan*. Courtesy of Syracuse University Archives.

for Syracuse the following fall, Jackson never resettled in Newark; but his imagination reverted often to “Arcadia,” as he called the fictional version of his hometown.² In the *Arcadian Tales*, through the character of Don Birnam (an authorial alter ego also used in *The Lost Weekend*), Jackson exposed the narrowness and hypocrisy of his erstwhile neighbors, especially in regard to sex. It may also have been a sexual incident, something that transpired while Jackson was a fraternity pledge at Psi Upsilon,³ that motivated his early departure from the University.

2. Most of Jackson's *Arcadian Tales* have recently been reprinted in *The Sunnier Side*, ed. John W. Crowley (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996). My introduction to this volume gives a brief biographical sketch.

3. Jackson is listed as a Psi Upsilon pledge in the 1924 edition of the University's yearbook, *The Onondagan*; but like most of the other pledges, he was not present for the fraternity's group photograph. He does appear, however, among the editorial staff of *The Phoenix*, “a pictorial and literary magazine,” which had started publication in 1921.

The Syracuse chapter of Psi Upsilon was established in 1875, making it the fourth oldest fraternity on campus. Founded at Union College in 1833, Psi Upsilon could boast at the turn of the century of its distinguished membership: “A president of the United States, ten United States senators, five ministers to foreign powers, seven governors of states, sixteen judges of the highest state courts (three of them chief justices), nineteen



The Psi Upsilon Fraternity House, 1924, from Syracuse University's yearbook, *The Onondagan*. The house still stands on the corner of College Place and University Place. Photograph courtesy of Syracuse University Archives.

Although Jackson led an ostensibly heterosexual life—he married Rhoda Booth in 1938 and fathered two daughters—he was also homosexual.⁴ But Jackson remained closeted; and in this respect he resembled many other gay men of his generation, including such writers as John Cheever (b. 1912), who came out only at the end of his life after decades of turmoil, and William Inge (b. 1913), who never made peace with his homosexuality. Not coincidentally, perhaps, all these men were chronic alcoholics.

bishops of the Episcopal Church, many general officers in the Civil War, fifty or more college presidents and more than three hundred college professors; and others eminent in statesmanship, diplomacy, medicine, jurisprudence, letters, the arts and in all the walks of life." John Walter Saxe, "Psi Upsilon," in *Greek Letter Men of Syracuse*, ed. Will J. Maxwell (New York: College Book Co., 1901), 132.

4. Although some critics have assumed—because the fiction seems tellingly preoccupied with homosexuality—that Jackson was gay, the only direct biographical evidence appears in the reminiscences of a close friend, the wife of his publisher Roger Straus. See Dorothea Straus, "The Fan," *The Serif* 10 (Fall 1973): 16–38. This piece, which first appeared in a special Charles Jackson issue of *The Serif*, was reprinted in Straus's memoir, *Showcases* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974).

As I have argued elsewhere,⁵ the linkage of alcoholism and homosexuality was a tenet of psychoanalytic theory during the years when Jackson sought psychiatric treatment for his drinking problem. The now discredited belief that every alcoholic is, *au fond*, a “latent homosexual” underlies Jackson’s characterization of Don Birnam in *The Lost Weekend*.

Early in the novel, in a bravura passage, Don drunkenly recalls a train of events from his turbulent life that he hopes will make a story-line for the novel he is brainstorming (but not, of course, actually writing) on the bar stool:

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 . . .⁶

In the manuscript of the novel, originally titled “The Long Weekend,” this same passage reads in part: “Dorothy, the fraternity business, Dorothy again, Chicago, the Village & prohibition, Mrs. Scott, the *Rochambeau* (the *LaFayette*, *Bremen*, *Champlain*, *deGrasse*), the Norwegian woman, the homosexual interlude, excursions that were linked so peculiarly with drinking . . .”⁷

In the published text, the explicit conjunction of drinking and homosexuality was deleted, but it appeared later in the novel, when Don is shown to be as deeply in denial about his attraction to men as about his desire for alcohol. As the “foolish psychiatrist” pushes Birnam to confront his repressed homosexuality, Don divulges some painful details of

5. John W. Crowley, *The White Logic: Alcoholism and Gender in American Modernist Fiction* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994).

6. *The Lost Weekend* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1944), 17. Other quotations are documented in the text.

7. A partial manuscript and complete typescript of *The Lost Weekend* are in the Charles Jackson Papers, Dartmouth College Library.

the “fraternity business.” This, we learn, involved his “passionate hero-worship of an upperclassman during his very first month at college, a worship that led, like a fatal infatuation, to scandal and public disgrace, because no one had understood or got the story straight and no one had wanted to understand, least of all the upperclassman who emerged somehow as a hero, now, to the others—why, he would never know” (pp. 48–9).

A fuller account of what happened in the Kappa U house emerges only when Don bumps into one of the brothers—incredibly, the same person who years before took his abandoned place in the pledge class. It seems that an unfortunate freshman (Don) had developed a crush on Tracey Burke and sent him a “pretty passionate” letter. Burke, who “got fed up” with the freshman’s untoward attentions, showed the incriminating love note to the Senior Council. “Well,” the alumnus declares, “they couldn’t have that sort of thing in a fraternity, so they kicked him out” (p. 88). As Don listens to this stranger’s account of his own past, he is scorched by chagrin. The only balm, he thinks, is to “go home and drink himself blind in five minutes” (p. 89).

That Don Birnam’s fraternity nightmare—or something close to it—was an autobiographical incident cannot be proved beyond doubt. Charles Jackson, after all, was a skillful writer, and he liked to experiment with narratives that appeared to be “real.”⁸ But Jackson’s recurrence to this particular story and the emotional intensity of its telling and retelling suggest that he was drawing on his own experience at Syracuse.

The entire homosexual subplot, in fact, predated composition of *The Lost Weekend*. Max Wylie, who hired Jackson in 1935 to write soap operas for CBS radio, remembered that their friendship had been cemented “when I read his unpublished (and still unpublished) novel (about his first semester at Syracuse U., the only ‘formal’ education he ever had. Or ever needed.)” Although this was “not a good novel,” in Wylie’s judgment, it contained “some great pages.”⁹

“Native Moment,” probably dating from the early 1930s, is the homo-

8. See, for example, the title story of *The Sunnier Side*, in which the author purports to speak in his own voice about the fine (and sometimes invisible) line between fiction and fact.

9. Max Wylie, “Charles Reginald Jackson,” *The Serif* 10 (Fall 1973): 29–30. It is notable that several key passages in *The Lost Weekend* that deal with homosexuality, including references to the fraternity nightmare, do not appear in the extant typescript; they must have been added at a later stage, as the novel was nearing publication. In making these revisions, Jackson apparently cannibalized his unpublished novel.

sexual subplot writ large. Although the novel is set at “State University,” Jackson’s model was obviously Syracuse University. Several familiar buildings are easily recognizable, including Crouse College, the Hall of Languages, and Psi Upsilon. The title page of the typescript bears an epigraph from Walt Whitman’s “Starting From Paumonok”:

What do you seek so pensive and silent?
What do you need camarado?
Dear son do you think it is love?¹⁰

The poet’s piercing questions are aimed, in effect, at Phil Williams, the character based on Jackson himself. The particulars of Phil’s fraternity nightmare jibe with those of Don Birnam’s, except that Phil’s homosexual offense is physical rather than merely epistolary.

A native freshman from a rural New York village, Phil adulates a suavely cynical upperclassman: a hard-drinking and sexually predatory ne’er-do-well, who has been expelled from college but who loiters in his old fraternity house, playing the piano and cadging loans from the brothers. That Phil, who has a steady girl back home, does not understand the attraction to be homoerotic only sharpens the sadistic *frisson* for Tracey Burke (the name remained the same in *The Lost Weekend*) in traducing the pledge’s conspicuous affection. Tracey leads him on to make a compromising sexual overture and then betrays him to the fraternity’s Senior Council. Poor Phil, who never comprehends either his own actions or Tracey’s treachery, endures an agony of violated innocence.

As a tale of homosexual initiation, albeit an inadvertent and harrowing one, “Native Moment” was well before its time in American literature; and it is uncertain whether Jackson ever tried to get it published.¹¹ The novel is remarkable for its complex treatment of male-male intimacy. At

10. *Leaves of Grass*, Comprehensive Reader’s Edition, ed. Harold W. Blodgett and Sculley Bradley (New York: New York University Press, 1965), p. 20. The title of Jackson’s novel is also drawn from Whitman, whose “Native Moments” celebrates the poet’s immersion in “loose delights . . . the midnight orgies of young men”: “Native moments—when you come upon me—ah you are here now, / Give me now libidinous joys only, / Give me the drench of my passions, give me life coarse and rank . . .” (p. 109).

11. In addition to *The Lost Weekend*, other early fiction did retrace the theme of “Native Moment.” Jackson’s first published story, “Palm Sunday,” which appeared in *Partisan Review* in 1939, involved the traumatic seduction of a boy by a homosexual musician. Although the retrospective adult narrator of this story is never named, Jackson identified him as Don Birnam when he collected it for *The Sunnier Side*. Jackson’s second novel, *The Fall of Valor* (1946), concerned the unrequited homosexual attraction of a married, middle-aged, college professor to a young Marine officer.

the same time he suffers for the love that dare not speak its name—in this case, even to the lover!—Phil Williams enjoys far more positive relationships with two other men: a fellow fraternity pledge and an inspiring young English teacher. With these men, as with his hometown girl (who comes to campus for the prom), Phil's mind and spirit are fully engaged, not his bodily passions. The novel seems to ask whether the young man would not be better off for the complete sublimation of his sexuality, but it also implies that Phil must ultimately recognize his homosexual desire if he is truly to know himself.

Whatever emotional resolution Jackson may have attained in writing “Native Moment,” he continued to look back in horror upon his Syracuse year. In *The Lost Weekend*, Don Birnam has a phantasmagoric dream in which he joins a rabid mob in pursuit of his own guilty self, who is hiding at the scene of his humiliation, the Kappa U house. Don fears a lynching—but, then, he has already *been* lynched by the fraternity council—and he also dreads being trampled by the horde as it charges across campus:

The great buildings of the campus were lost in the clouds of dust that went up from the thousands of running feet. The Liberal Arts and Fine Arts colleges, the Hall of Languages, the Library—dimly he was aware that the crowd flowed past them somewhere in the dust-yellow gloom. They became more and more obscured and were left behind. Above the dull thunder of trampling, he heard a bell in the chapel ringing, the alarum-bell. (pp. 163–4)

The apocalyptic campus landscape suddenly gives way to a comforting vision. Don spies a means to his rescue: his brother Wick, the same brother who in waking life has desperately tried to save Don from his drinking, clutches a tree or a post around which the crowd harmlessly parts. If Don can only reach him! “They touched hands. In another instant they were together, face to face. The din and fury roared around them but they were met, and suddenly Wick showed none of the buffeting he had taken against the mob . . . he smiled—and in that moment the dream was over” (pp. 164–5).

In sharp contrast to the spurious brotherhood of Kappa U, Don Birnam is saved by an act of authentic brotherly love. “Oh he might have known from the start,” Don exults, “that Wick would turn up, Wick would appear somehow in just this way, Wick of all people in the world would not let it happen” (p. 164). Jackson must have savored the irony

that the model for Wick Birnam—Frederick Jackson, the younger brother who had undoubtedly saved Charlie’s life in 1936 by committing him to Bellevue Hospital for alcoholism treatment—was also homosexual.¹²

II. CHARLES JACKSON’S LOST SCRIPT FOR TELEVISION:
THE PROBLEM CHILD AND
THE NATIONAL COUNCIL ON ALCOHOLISM

The Lost Weekend made Charles Jackson famous (if not quite rich) overnight. The title entered the American vernacular, and the author became so completely identified with the subject of alcoholism that none of his other books on other themes ever enjoyed the same degree of popularity. It was unfortunate that Jackson failed to capitalize on his initial success by doing the promised (but unwritten) sequel to *The Lost Weekend*—a novel that, as he announced in 1944, would concern “the regeneration of an alcoholic.”¹³

Although his published work never did, in fact, recur to the matter of drinking, Jackson did write once again about alcoholism: in a short play intended for an unaired television program in 1954. The typescript of *The Problem Child* (alternatively titled *Nuisance Value*) was recently discovered at Syracuse University among the papers of Marty Mann, founding director of the National Council on Alcoholism. *The Problem Child* was commissioned as a sample script for *Fork in the Road*, a proposed series of live, half-hour dramas intended to promote Mann’s revisionary ideas about alcoholism.

Born in 1904 into a wealthy Chicago family—her father was general manager of Marshall Field—Marty Mann attended toney schools, made her social debut, married well, and then swan dived into the gutter. After divorcing her husband, who turned out to be a drunk, she drank her own way down and out. When she was still capable of holding a job, Mann gained some experience in marketing and public relations that would later serve her well. On advice of her psychiatrist, Mann read *Alcoholics Anonymous* upon its publication in 1939. (Founded in 1935, AA, the organization, was still in its formative stage.) Mann attended AA meetings in New York and became the first female member to maintain sobriety. Five years later, just months after *The Lost Weekend* had appeared, she announced the formation of the National Committee for Education on

12. Frederick Jackson was unabashedly gay throughout his adult life—to a degree that seems at times to have scandalized his far more discreet brother.

13. *Current Biography* 1944, ed. Anna Rothe (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1945), 326.

Alcoholism, a voluntary agency modeled on the National Association for Mental Health and the American Cancer Society.

Along with Alcoholics Anonymous and the Yale Center for Studies of Alcohol, of which it was initially one branch, the National Committee, later renamed the National Council on Alcoholism, constituted the so-called Alcoholism Movement that revolutionized public opinion about problem drinking during the mid-twentieth century. The aim of these organizations was to banish the idea of “inebriation,” which had prevailed for over a century under the aegis of the temperance and prohibition crusades. In the old Victorian view, now dismissed as scientifically outdated and inhumanely moralistic, “alcoholics were considered to be miscreants who chose willfully and willingly to involve themselves in the excesses of drinking.” The NCA was dedicated, on the contrary, to propagating “the concept that alcoholism is a disease and a major public health problem.”¹⁴

The linchpin of the Alcoholism Movement’s new “disease” concept was a defining distinction between the alcoholic and the nonalcoholic: a distinction that depended, as the rejected paradigm of “inebriation” had not, on locating the site of addiction in the subject rather than the substance; that is, in the drinker rather than the drink. Alcoholics, purportedly different in kind from “normal” (or even “heavy”) drinkers, were thought to be innately susceptible to “alcoholism”; they could not, therefore, be held individually accountable either for their “disease” or for their recovery. Since, for the true alcoholic, drinking to excess was *never* a matter of will (or willfulness), alcoholism was properly regarded as a medical rather than a moral issue; and helping alcoholics to get well reasonably became a collective, national endeavor—a public health imperative—if only because alcoholism entailed such ruinous social and economic costs.

As she traveled far and wide during the 1940s, Mann tirelessly reiterated this message, exploiting every medium of publicity at her command. Due largely to her heroic efforts, opinion dramatically shifted toward a more sympathetic and medicalized understanding. Within twenty years, the disease model became the new common sense about alcoholism.

For Mann, the NCA’s objective was not merely to liberate slaves to the bottle, but also to remake their public image. Although she herself had experienced what AA termed a “low bottom,” Mann insisted that the vast majority of an estimated four million American alcoholics did not by

14. These formative ideas, quoted here from a typescript titled “Mrs. Marty Mann,” were ubiquitous in the literature churned out by the NCA. The Marty Mann Papers are located in the Syracuse University Library’s Department of Special Collections.

any means fit the temperance stereotype of the skid-row derelict. The typical alcoholic—this was especially true of women—was less likely to be sprawled in the street than tucked behind the lace curtains of middle-class respectability. Before compassion for the suffering alcoholic could hope to supplant condemnation of the drunken miscreant, the public needed to know that the “disease” could strike close to home.

Depicting the ordinariness of alcoholism—the banality of its evil, so to speak—was one major purpose of *Fork in the Road*, which gave promise, through television’s nascent power, of communicating with more people in a season than Mann had been able to reach in a barnstorming decade of speeches, articles, and radio interviews. “For a long time we have felt a great need for a truly finished television product to be produced on alcoholism,” wrote Yvelin Gardner, associate director of the NCA, to Harry B. Carroll, president of the Gracar Incorporated and the originator of the proposed series. “[W]ith the various resources which have developed in recent years, with the growing public knowledge, and the feeling today that there is truly ‘hope and help’ available for the alcoholic, the time is now certainly ripe for such a production.”¹⁵ Mann later pledged complete cooperation from the NCA, “acting as technical and story consultant to each show, and providing background material and editing wherever necessary.”¹⁶

Attempting to line up sample episodes for *Fork in the Road*, the producer approached Audrey Wood, a literary agent with a large stable of talent: “It has been suggested that qualified writers of such scripts and dialogue would include Gore Vidal, Keith Winter, Carson Mc Collough [sic] and Bill Inge.”¹⁷ In a promotional document, Gracar later claimed that among “the authors preparing the stories” were William Inge, Charles Jackson, Tennessee Williams, and Gore Vidal.¹⁸ There is no evidence that the latter two ever finished, or even started, scripts for *Fork in the Road*; but William Inge did submit *Max* early in September 1954, about the same time Jackson delivered *The Problem Child*.¹⁹ These tele-

15. Yvelin Gardner to Harry B. Carroll, 28 June 1954. In his letter of 14 September 1954 to John L. Norris, medical director at Kodak (a potential sponsor), Gardner noted that the immediate model for *Fork in the Road* was *Medic*, a program “dealing with general medial problems,” which first aired during the fall 1954 season.

16. Marty Mann to Harry B. Carroll, 23 July 1954.

17. Harry B. Carroll to Audrey Wood, 22 July 1954.

18. “*Fork in the Road*,” a six-page memo from Gracar Incorporated, received by the NCA on 26 August 1954.

19. In addition to the original typescript of *Max*, which was never published, the *Fork in*

plays, along with *The Lost One* by Abel Kandel, made up the package that was ultimately—and, it seems, unsuccessfully—pitched to potential corporate sponsors.

Although the producer's promotional memo declared that *Fork in the Road* would neither preach prohibition nor attempt "to 'educate' the public on the ever-widening subject of alcoholism," the NCA consultants clearly had other ideas.²⁰ For them the series had an unabashedly didactic purpose, and scripts were expected to advance the vital mission of setting the public straight about alcoholism. How well did *The Problem Child* conform to NCA expectations?

In a cover letter accompanying the script, Jackson confidently predicted that Marty Mann, whom he knew through AA, would "understand it and respond to it and perhaps even like it. About the sponsor, though, is another matter."²¹ Given its focus on "a peculiarly subtle kind of alcoholic," a pampered and sophisticated "fortyish" lady, the teleplay likely *did* appeal to Mann, who shared Grace Dana's moneyed background and who must have recognized the originality of Jackson's conception. For in 1954, when female alcoholics were still largely invisible, there was virtually no precedent for such a character.²² As Jackson sensed, his script may have been too much for the comfort of possible sponsors, unprepared to embrace the idea of a drunken but intriguing woman, capable of "guile and duplicity" but meant nonetheless to "engage and hold our deepest sympathy and concern."²³

the Road file contains a carbon copy of Inge's *Spring Holiday*, another unpublished short play about drinking from the early 1950s.

20. In the copy of this memo sent to the NCA, the phrase, "No attempt will be made to 'educate' the public," is underscored, and Marty Mann's incredulity is signified in the margin: "?!?"

21. Charles Jackson to Marty Mann, 13 September 1954.

22. As I have noted in *The White Logic*, alcoholism was gendered "male" within the Victorian and modernist paradigms. The female alcoholic was hardly imaginable, except as a drunken whore, until the middle of this century. Hence the shock value of Marty Mann's frank and public statements about her drinking throughout the 1940s. (Once introduced as a "former lady alcoholic," she retorted that she was "still a lady!") During the 1950s, stories of other alcoholic women began to appear. The key text in this regard is the actress Lillian Roth's confessional *I'll Cry Tomorrow*, which was a best-seller during the same year in which *Fork in the Road* was proposed, and which reappeared in 1955 as a successful movie, with Susan Hayward in the coveted lead role. In another landmark book from this period—Thomas Randall's novel, *The Twelfth Step* (1957)—one of the major characters is an alcoholic suburban housewife not unlike Jackson's Grace Dana.

23. I am quoting Jackson's headnote to *The Problem Child*, of which a carbon copy typescript exists in the *Fork in the Road* file.

The Problem Child turns on Grace Dana's alcoholic narcissism: an egotism so sublime as to be nearly comic. As the play opens, we see Grace, already the veteran of a failed marriage and a broken engagement, in the act of alienating Smith Weston, her earnest man of the moment, who begs her to take the barbiturates (Nembutal) he has obtained in order to curb her drinking. As she insouciantly swills gin, Grace teases and torments Weston, coaxing his devotion as she accuses him of failing to love her. Correctly, Smith perceives that Grace, much like a problem child, thrives on the trouble she causes for others, including the son she has shuffled off to prep school so that she can drink unmolested. She would not drink at all, Smith supposes, "if you knew we didn't care so much, if we were utterly indifferent to the way you are ruining your life. I actually believe our caring is one of the things that makes you do it, makes you feel important. Sounds crazy but it's true—your nuisance-value seems to give you stature. Or so you think. It's the only way you can make yourself feel you matter."

To command attention, Grace not only keeps drinking, but she also contemplates self-destruction. Once Smith has dumped all the bottles he can find and left the apartment, Grace goes on the town for a bar-hopping spree and winds up, in a despondent mood, on the 59th Street Bridge, contemplating suicide. But she is so worried about spoiling her new dress that she cannot bring herself to jump! Then she remembers the pills: an overdose would be so much tidier than drowning; also far more potent a means of inflicting pain and remorse on her survivors. The disadvantage of killing herself, however, is that Grace would not be around to bask in all the consternation on her account. So she finds a better way: a *faked* suicide. After flushing the pills down the toilet and composing a "suicide" note, she merely passes out on the sofa, as usual, from liquor.

What is most interesting about Grace Dana is how much of this character was drawn from her author; for she is Jackson in drag, as it were: a cross-gendered representation of his own alcoholic tendencies toward emotional manipulation and theatrical self-indulgence. The incident in the teleplay was based, indeed, on his own penchant for suicidal threats.

A drug addict as well as an alcoholic, Jackson persistently used Seconal during the time—roughly the fifteen years from 1936 to 1951—that he abstained from alcohol; and he occasionally went off on drug jags. During one such binge, in March 1946, he left his family's farmhouse in New Hampshire and checked into a New York hotel, from which he was eventually rescued by his wife Rhoda and his brother "Boom" (as Frederick was known within the family). While Jackson recuperated in a hospital, Rhoda vented her despair to Boom:



Charles Jackson, 1940s. Photograph by Paul Cordes, here published courtesy of Kate Winthrop Jackson.

But the dreadful thing is that I have no feeling of missing Charlie at all. Nor have the kids. He has been such an irritant and problem for so long it seems much more like home with him away. . . .

If I go on feeling this way, I shall write Wertham [a psychiatrist] about it. If he's building Charlie up to a resumption of what he (Wertham) thinks existed before, it isn't fair. Because I can't

face the same Charlie we've had for the last year or so, even without any pill problem. I can't live with such egocentricity, such unreasonableness, such perverted sense of values.

Later that evening, Rhoda appended this "dreadful letter," telling Boom that she had just had a depressing call from Charlie:

If only he hadn't picked today when I was feeling so hopeless about us! For while he sounded fine and top-of-the-world so I really needn't have worried, it only made me think "God damn it, can he only think of himself always." If only he'd say once that he was sorry for what he put the kids and me through, maybe I'd feel better. And what he'd put everyone else through. But it's only his concern—he suffered, he'll never put himself through it again. Not that he said that—of course he doesn't talk like that. But it's implicit in all his actions.²⁴

Here are the tangled emotions that informed Jackson's portrayal of Grace Dana and her cruel treatment of Smith Weston: the consuming selfishness of the addict, whose desperate cries for attention serve only to repel those who might otherwise give their love freely.

In September 1952, when Jackson was periodically drinking as well as drugging, he plunged into so deep a depression that his psychiatrist was encouraging him to "go on a long bender just to save himself."²⁵ Instead Jackson took an overdose of sedatives, leaving a farewell note for his wife. A similar episode, early in 1954, was played out before house guests: Roger Straus, Jackson's loyal and long-suffering publisher, and his wife Dorothea, who later recalled the event with devastating candor:

We had been witness to a long drunken evening and were at last in bed when we heard the loud strains of *Liebestod* [from Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*] drifting up the stairwell, followed by a knock at our door and Charlie's soft, blurred voice, "I must talk to you. I am about to kill myself." My husband, up at once, called out. "I'll be right there!" But I did not move. For the first time, I had had enough. I no longer believed in Charlie's suicide attempts. And the appropriate background music, in spite of its intrinsic beauty, perhaps because of it, sounded as tinny and tawdry

24. Rhoda Jackson to Frederick Jackson, 10 April [1946], Frederick Jackson Papers, Dartmouth College Library. Quotations from the correspondence of Charles Jackson are printed with the permission of Sarah Jackson Piper and Kate Winthrop Jackson.

25. Rhoda Jackson to Frederick Jackson, 3 September [1952].

as a juke box in a penny arcade. I lay, wakeful, listening to my husband's calm, reasoning voice. It was soon joined by Rhoda's pleading and over all floated the *Liebestrod*, soaring in its unearthly beauty, sullied by the sham drama in the library below. Then there was a knock on the door again, and Charlie stood in my room, swaying and angry, "Why are you the only one not downstairs? Do you want me to kill myself? Is that it?"

Furious but unresisting, I got up and joined the others. We begged, scolded, reasoned. I still did not believe in the threat of suicide, but there was a danger in the agitated, ugly person of Charles Jackson brandishing the bottle of sleeping pills as though it were a revolver. A shocking casualty seemed to have taken place already. It was light before he finally dropped the pills and we all mounted to bed.

The next morning Dorothea Straus peeked into Jackson's bedroom, to find him peacefully asleep, lightly snoring, "clad in pink Dr. Denton pajamas, primly buttoned up the front, with feet, like those worn by children downstairs on Christmas morning to see the tree."²⁶

During the summer of 1953, Jackson had received treatment at a rehabilitation center and joined Alcoholics Anonymous; and although it took some months for sobriety to take hold, he was actually on the road to recovery at the time of this incident. By the fall of 1954, when he wrote *The Problem Child*, he was enjoying an all too transient burst of good health and creative facility. Rhoda now could write to her brother-in-law of Charlie's serenity and steady work habits. "Do come up as soon as you can," she urged Boom, "because I want you to see him while he's like this. There have been some bad years (and I don't guarantee there won't be more) but right now he really is happy. And it's an affirmation I think you need as badly as I needed it." He seemed to be "reaching back to his old values," she thought. "Charlie really has taken stock of himself this summer and I think is beginning to find himself again. It isn't perfect yet by any means—and our relationship isn't ironed out. But oh it's so much easier than it has been for so many years that I almost sing to myself."²⁷

The Problem Child was evidently a by-product of Jackson's stocktaking—a result of the kind of searching and fearless moral inventory that constitutes the "Fourth Step" of Alcoholics Anonymous. Through his unsparing anatomy of Grace Dana, Jackson was exorcising his own alcoholic

26. Dorothea Straus, "The Fan," 21–22.

27. Rhoda Jackson to Frederick Jackson, 18 October [1954].

childishness, which psychoanalysis had taught him to perceive also as a sign of homosexual “effeminacy.” Straus, too, made this connection in her remembrance of Jackson’s menacing and willful bouts of self-destructiveness: “The alcoholic and the homosexual at these times strutted exhibitionistically before the footlights, the husband, the father and friend having made an exit, seemingly never to reappear.”²⁸

In his later years, Jackson became increasingly absent to family and friends as he lost the healthy distance he once had attained from the part of himself that inspired Grace Dana. At the end of *The Problem Child*, she has passed out from gin, fully expecting to awake the next morning and to revel in the uproar caused by her phony suicide note. When Jackson died in September 1968, he had swallowed the pills that Grace Dana discards. It remains uncertain whether the overdose was intentional.²⁹

SERIES: THE FORK IN THE ROAD
SCRIPT NO. X: THE PROBLEM CHILD
(ALTERNATE TITLE: NUISANCE VALUE)

Note: Apart from its interest as a character study of a peculiarly subtle kind of alcoholic, this script is, for all practical purposes, a one-man show—or one-woman show—a tour-de-force requiring the abilities of an intelligent and attractive actress, fortyish, who is able to indicate guile and duplicity throughout and at the same time engage and hold our deepest sympathy and concern. C. J.

Traveling camera shot of upper East Side in Manhattan, as background to the opening music and brief narration. Camera finally focuses on fashionable residential section near 59th Street Bridge, coming to rest on one of those smart, black-front, white-trimmed, reclaimed tenements that are a feature of Sutton Place:

NARRATOR. The lure of the daydream has charms for us all—it is a pas-time idle and harmless enough—but when the interior life of the daydream becomes more real to us than the reality of the everyday world, then we are headed for trouble. This is the story of Grace Dana, just such a fantasy-ridden woman—or child . . .

(Facade of Sutton Place apartment building fades out to reveal interior of Mrs. Dana’s small but attractive apartment, with a large picture window looking out on the East River. Room is furnished in good modern style à la Pahlmann: white rugs, tweed-upholstered sofa and chairs, indirect lighting, some recessed bookshelves with

28. Straus, “The Fan,” 21.

29. Editor’s note: “The Problem Child” is printed with the permission of Sarah Jackson Piper and Kate Winthrop Jackson. Minor corrections in spelling and format have been made to improve its readability.

an occasional small piece of sculpture on top, and on the walls a few prints by Dufy and Paul Klee; the only "anachronistic" note in the decoration is an old-fashioned small hassock covered with flowered carpeting, with a shining black button in the middle—a souvenir of Grace Dana's grandmother's house in Harrisburg, of a million years ago when everything was so wonderful . . .

Camera reveals two characters: the first is GRACE DANA, an extraordinarily neat, petite, attractive woman of about forty. She has a good figure, lovely ankles, fine hands. Her hairdo is perfect, with nothing out of place; her makeup just right; she is wearing an extremely plain but chic black dress. We discover her sitting on the love sofa, holding in one hand an old-fashioned glass half full of a colorless liquid which, from the opened bottle of Gordon's Gin on the coffee table in front of her, we deduce to be, of course, gin. She is looking upward with a kind of enigmatic smile at her visitor, who is: SMITH WESTON, also forty or so, a good-looking serious man of obvious intelligence and distinction who stands facing her on the other side of the coffee table. On a modern chair next to him his top coat and hat have been thrown down casually. From a side pocket he takes a small bottle four or five inches high, with a white cap, stuffed with a wad of cotton near the top, the rest filled with capsules. He places it on the coffee table near the gin bottle, and speaks, friendly but stern.)

SMITH: Doctor Harvey gave me this prescription today. If you'll use them properly, Grace, you can get over this. Temporarily, of course—but over it enough so that we can discuss the thing soberly, later. (*Glancing at his wrist watch*) It's two o'clock. If you'll take a couple of these now—and that's a stiff dose—it will give you at least three hours sleep. I'll phone before I leave the office. If you wake and want another drink, take a capsule instead. If there's no answer when I call, I'll know you are still sleeping. In which case I'll let myself in about nine and spend the evening here. Every time you wake up, just take another pill. It won't kill you. And it may see you through all of tonight and tomorrow and maybe even the next day and the day after as well—I hope. Now, is that fair enough?

GRACE. (*not looking at the bottle; speaking in her softest, her most intimate and helpless voice*) Of course you're a much nicer person than I am, Smith darling. Don't you know that by now? Why bother with me any longer?

SMITH. (*a touch of asperity, impatience*) Stop being such a child! You can't keep on getting away with it year after year, Grace, hanging onto it, using it as an excuse, just because you have some cockeyed idea that you're star-crossed, ill-fated, God knows what. That's just being romantic! . . .

GRACE. (*smiles as if she has some deeply private secret, and is not unwilling to let him know that she has; then picks up the half-glass of straight gin, and looks him squarely in the eye in a disarming counterfeit of candor*) May I?

SMITH. *May* you! Does it make any difference what *I* care or think? You'd drink that stuff if I weren't here, wouldn't you? Then why ask me?

GRACE. Because—well, I know you don't want me to. I'm trying to be, shall we say, polite.

SMITH. Of course I don't want you to. And you like even that—like my not wanting you to! Really, sometimes I think—

GRACE. What?

SMITH.—That you wouldn't drink at all, you'd stop altogether, if you knew we didn't care so much, if we were utterly indifferent to the way you are ruining your life. I actually believe our caring is one of the things that makes you do it, makes you feel important. Sounds crazy but it's true—your nuisance-value seems to give you stature. Or so you think. It's the only way you can make yourself feel you matter.

GRACE. (*holding the glass, smiling slyly*) Darling, you wouldn't deprive me of that last shred of ego, would you?

SMITH. Then you do admit it.

GRACE. (*innocent as all hell*) I didn't say a thing. Nothing at all . . .

SMITH. (*sitting down opposite her, leaning forward intently, his open hands outspread as if in appeal*) Look, Grace. why can't you be honest? You're killing yourself, you know that. You let one husband go because this—this stuff was more important to you than he was. It's come to be the most important thing in your life. You let Harry go for the same reason.

GRACE. (*her sudden humility seems genuine enough*) I let them go? They walked out on me, both of them . . .

SMITH. (*brutal; but this is no time for evasions*) Can you blame them?

GRACE. (*tilts the glass, drains it without a quiver, then sets it back on the coffee table beside the pill bottle. She says quietly, as if savoring the idea*) No. No, I guess I can't. Who wants to live with a problem?

SMITH. There, you see? (*He gets up, stands looking down at her*) But to hell with them. Never mind about Harry and Stan, or even me. What about yourself? What counts is *you*: Grace Dana! Do you want—do *you* like living with a problem?

GRACE. *Demure*. No . . .

SMITH. Stop lying, Grace. Be honest for a change. Because you do, of course. You do like it! Your being a constant worry to us all is the only thing you have left. It gives you—

GRACE. Importance . . .

SMITH. Correct. I'm glad to hear you say it yourself.

GRACE. (*histrionically*) Haven't you told me enough times? My god,

you've told me and told me till I—I'm—(*Stirs restlessly, avoiding his glance; hesitates, then boldly reaches for the bottle*) If you don't mind, I'm going to refresh my drink. (*Laughs lightly, a tinkling laugh*) Quaint expression, that. Because of course it isn't the *drink* that we refresh. (*Smiling up at him*) Can I make you one, too? For old times' sake?

SMITH. (*exasperated*) Drink it. I can't tell you what to do.

GRACE. (*very feminine*) There's one thing you haven't told me, Smith—or tell me no longer . . .

SMITH. What's that?

GRACE. (*quietly*) That you love me.

SMITH. But you know that!

GRACE. (*sharply, as if hurt*) Oh do I? It's always "if we didn't care" and "our caring" and "a worry to us"! Who's "we," for God's sake?

SMITH. The people who love you.

GRACE. What about you! You, Smith Weston! You and me!

SMITH. (*gazing down at her intently, trying to reach through to her*) Really, Grace! What the hell do you think I'm here for? Would I be here at all if I *didn't* care?

GRACE. (*as if not hearing, takes a long drink, then holds the glass cupped just below her chin in her two hands*) You have never asked me to marry you . . .

SMITH. If you'd give up this stuff, I'd marry you at the drop of a hat.

GRACE. (*as if in surprise*) Why, I've gone on the wagon many times, and you've never so much as said . . .

SMITH. (*interrupting, with great seriousness*) I don't mean the wagon! I mean give it up for good and all!

GRACE. (*fondling the glass*) Maybe I will, for you . . .

SMITH. That's not good enough. You'd have to do it on your own, for nobody but yourself, or it wouldn't count. If you gave up drinking for my sake, you'd only resent the hell out of me whenever you wanted to drink again—which wouldn't be long.

GRACE. You don't give me much credit for will power, do you? . . .

SMITH. Not when the bottle means more to you than I do or anybody else, including your own son. And not only liquor, but all the trouble you cause us. We ring up all day long, and you won't even answer the phone. You like to know that we are worried, that people are calling you, calling each other, to ask what goes; trying to get hold of a new doctor, or begging the janitor downstairs for a key to your flat so that we can get in and see whether or not you're all right. And when we do get in, what do we find? I wish I had a dollar for every time I've come into this room and

found you lying unconscious on that sofa, reeking of stale gin. I've stood here looking down at you, torn between pity and disgust, while you slept on, and on. Finally you'd open your eyes and tell me with a sleepy smile, "I knew you would come, Smith darling, I knew you wouldn't let me down." But what you really mean by that is: "There, now I can begin all over again." Really, sometimes I find myself almost thinking—

GRACE. (*glancing away*) Don't tell me, like my father and mother—or Harry, or Stan—that you'd sooner see me dead. Because I'm going to drink this drink whether or no. I need it and I'm going to. There, isn't that being honest enough for you? (*She finishes the drink in the glass*).

SMITH. Don't you think it's about time you got on to yourself, Grace? You're forty years old.

GRACE. You needn't be unkind . . .

SMITH. You've got so much to live for. People love you, Grace.

GRACE. Who, for instance?

SMITH. You've got a son at Lawrenceville. Easter week he didn't want to come home. Doesn't it make you think?

GRACE. (*throwing this off*) Benjie's growing up. I can't hang on to him forever. He has a life of his own.

SMITH. At thirteen? He's still a little boy.

GRACE. (*leaning forward, pouring gin from the bottle into the glass*) Besides, this apartment is too small. Where would I put him?

SMITH. Two years ago you had a place at East Hampton, plenty big enough. He didn't want to come home then, either—and that was two years ago. A kid of eleven at the time! Why? You know why, don't you? Don't you?

GRACE. (*takes a drink; then airily*) Of course if you're going to nag . . .

SMITH. (*impatient gesture; then he reaches down, picks up the small bottle of pills on the coffee table, and sets it back again with a sharp rap on the glass surface of the table, as if to call her attention to the medicine*) (*Note: For dramatic purposes, the more this bottle of pills can be kept within camera range at all times in this scene, the better.*) Will you take one or two of these instead of going on with that drink?

GRACE. What are they?

SMITH. Nembutal tablets. I believe the prescription called for sixty of them—that's enough to last you quite awhile, to see you through this.

GRACE. (*quietly righteous*) You know I can't take barbiturates.

SMITH. Why can't you?

GRACE. They're drugs.

SMITH. I—beg your pardon?

GRACE. Well they are . . .

SMITH. (*controlling himself with an effort*) Short of going to LeRoy or the Regent—or Bellevue—they're a temporary stop-gap to see you through if you use them carefully. Will you, Grace? For my sake?

GRACE. (*acquiescing, but with a teasing, enigmatic smile*) You're the doctor . . .

SMITH. I'm afraid I am. Sorry to have to tell you this, Grace dear, but—Doctor Harvey won't see you any more. He told me today. Neither will Doctor Wallace nor Doctor Mayer.

GRACE. (*hurt surprise*) Why not? Aren't they interested in—in—

SMITH. In what?

GRACE. Oh, not me! Cases . . .

SMITH. (*brusque, but he has to be*) They're tired of it. Just as one doctor begins to get somewhere, you switch to another. That's the way it's been for years back. It's almost as if you were afraid somebody would—sorry but I'm going to say this, Grace—get on to you, get on to your secret or problem, whatever it is. So you try to keep one jump ahead of them. Isn't that right?

GRACE. (*leans forward abruptly, with a show of anger*) Look here! That will be just about enough of that!

SMITH. (*turns toward the chair, takes up his loose-fitting Burberry topcoat, gets into it, puts on his soft hat; then, on an impulse*)—(but it can hardly be impulse when this is what he came for)—(*He reaches down and takes the glass from her hand*). Now, will I be all kinds of an inhuman brute if I pour this down the drain?

GRACE. Just as you like, my dear. I can always make another, after all . . .

SMITH. Not if I empty the bottles as well . . .

(*He moves out of camera range, obviously on his way to the bathroom or kitchenette. Grace Dana sits alone on the sofa, a figure of extreme self-composure, neat, petite, demure; she all but twiddles her thumbs as she waits with supreme confidence for the moment when she can be alone. Throughout there is a half-smile on her pretty face, a smile of superiority which seems to say: these people simply do not understand . . . Smith Weston comes back into camera range; he is stuffing a new unopened gin bottle into the left pocket of his top coat.*)

SMITH. Know where I found this one? Bottom of the broom closet, artfully draped with the strands of a mop.

GRACE. (*indicating the half-full bottle on the coffee table*) Why don't you take this one too, while you're at it?

SMITH. (*doing so*) I will. Thanks.

GRACE. You're welcome . . .

SMITH. Now take a nap, Grace. A long, long nap. You've got the where-with-all, in that pill bottle, and I shan't bother you till after nine o'clock.

GRACE. (*giving him her coldest smile*) You realize, don't you, that you've left practically enough Nembutal to kill me? To put me out for good and all?

SMITH. Isn't it sort of six of one and half a dozen of the other?

(*Grace Dana tilts her nose into the air and refuses to look at him or answer; Smith Weston gives her one last glance, shakes his head with affectionate concern, and turns and goes. We hear the door close off-scene. The door has barely shut when Grace rises to her feet; the camera follows her as she crosses the room quickly and silently, and hooks the chain into its slot at the door. [A useless caution—he won't be back for hours, hours.] She comes back into the room, stands in the center of a white carpet with its deep soft pile and stretches luxuriously, her arms outspread, feeling a rich sensation of contentment with herself, really of love. She glances at the gold mounted square clock on the modern mantle, the kind of clock that runs by atmospheric pressures, without winding. She speaks aloud to herself, fondly, caressingly.*)

GRACE. Seven hours all to myself—why, it's like money in the bank! . . .

(*Moving lightly she makes a little tour of the room, touching, with the faintest brush of her fingertips, her favorite objects: a Brancusi fish, a glass-enclosed radio and gramophone, a rough but poetic head of a girl in quartz on one of the book shelves, the brightly-jacketed novels beneath, an abstract painting. She comes to rest in front of the small carpeted hassock, and sits down on it huddling herself in her arms in the attitude of a little girl.*)

GRACE. I love my little old hassock, I dearly love it. It takes me back to my grandmother's house in Harrisburg—Oh, a million years ago when everything was so wonderful, when there were no problems or anything, and—and no liquor . . . (*Smoothing down her dress over her hips and thighs*) I love my nice legs and slim ankles and these simple black pumps. And Lordy, I simply love the fact that the telephone is not at the moment ringing—and when it does begin to ring, I will not be here to answer it or even hear it. (*She raises a hand to her face to stifle a small giggle*) I can see Smith—Oh, how well I can see him! Half an hour from now he'll begin pacing the office, wondering what I'm up to, wondering whether it will be all right to phone—or should he wait till six or seven or eight . . . And I love First Avenue and Second Avenue, literally littered with Bars & Grills, Bars & Grills . . . (*She laughs outright, aloud, delighted with the expression*) "Literally littered" is good—Oh, marvelous . . .

(She gets up, steps to her small bedroom, from which she emerges presently in a short broadtail jacket; with a tiny black and white hat with a half-veil, black gloves in her hand and black faille purse with a large gold clasp. She glances into the purse to see that she has lipstick, key, money, then turns toward the door.)

DISSOLVES TO: *Semi-dark interior of a cheap Bar & Grill on First Avenue, with a shiny bar, beer taps, rows of bottles stacked along the mirror beyond. The middle-aged, aproned bartender PADDY is polishing glasses as GRACE DANA moves into camera range and rests her gloved hand on the surface of the bar.*

GRACE. *(voice low and cordial, really intimate)* Hello, Paddy old darling . . .

PADDY. *(feigning surprise)* Why if it isn't Mrs. Dana! And how are you this fine afternoon, Mrs. Dana?

GRACE. Double martini, please, very dry. No olive, Paddy.

PADDY. I remember. A jiffy, Mrs. Dana. Jiffy . . . *(As Paddy mixes the drink, she removes her gloves, and pushes the veil upward from the bridge of her nose with a forefinger; she glances down the length of the bar with aloof superiority as if she wouldn't have and never could have any part of this place. Paddy slides the martini toward her.)*

PADDY. Well where you been keeping yourself, Mrs. Dana—if I may presume.

GRACE. *(smiling benignly)* Now Paddy, don't begin that again. I was in only a few days ago and you know it.

PADDY. Well now, so you were. *(Shrugs and goes back to his duties.)*

FADE-OUT

FADE-IN: *Close-up of the surface of the bar, showing dainty hand of GRACE DANA, and an empty martini glass surrounded by several wet rings—indicating that several drinks have been consumed and some time has elapsed. Camera moves back to medium shot which includes the bartender and GRACE DANA.*

PADDY. Time for one on the house, Mrs. Dana.

GRACE. *(pulling on her gloves, tucking her purse under her arm)* No thanks, Paddy dear. I know when I've had my limit. That's one thing I do know. Never let it be said that I—that—Oh, skip it . . . T-Ta. See you anon . . . *(With the greatest self composure—almost rigid, in fact; very much the lady—she turns and moves off.)*

FADE-OUT

FADE-IN: *Another bar, very much the same, with the bartender, GUS, looking very like PADDY. He raises his eyebrows as if in surprise.*

GUS. Well well well, look whom we have here . . .

GRACE. (*stepping up to and leaning on the bar with cozy familiarity; smiling in a friendly but rather conspiratorial fashion*) Oh stop, Gus. I'm one of your best customers and you always pretend to forget it. Now make me a double martini and lay off the blarney . . .

(*Juke box begins to play current tune somewhere in back of saloon. GRACE DANA turns her head and listens for a moment distastefully, her nose wrinkling up. As GUS sets new drink before her, she turns toward bar again and says*)

GRACE. Why do they always have to have those hideous juke boxes in these places? Such vulgar colors and such revolting tunes . . . (*Laughs lightly*) But you know something, Gus? Tell you a little secret . . . (*Beckons him closer with a finger*). I love this place, love all these places, love the anonymity of them, love not running into all of those hypocritical friends of mine. Oh it's not the drink, Gus, I swear to you, it's not the drink at all. Matter of fact I don't much like the taste of it. But I do love what it does to me, and I love, simply beyond words, Gus darling, the haven, the refuge, of a Bar & Grill . . . *À votre santé* . . . (*Takes up the cocktail glass between a dainty thumb and forefinger and drinks a toast to Gus, who gazes at her meanwhile, nodding sympathetically . . .*)

FADE-OUT

FADE-IN: *Another bar; this time the bartender is called JERRY. He is speaking as we fade in.*

JERRY. Where you been, Mrs. Dana, off in Bermuda or somewhere?

GRACE. Nope. You couldn't be wronger, Jerry dear. Tasmania, or maybe it was Labrador. The same, Jerry. My usual.

JERRY. Coming up, Mrs. Dana. (*He starts mixing drink as camera fades out.*)

FADE-IN: *Sidewalk of the 59th Street Bridge, with GRACE DANA in foreground resting her arms on the railing and occasionally looking down at the flowing river below. It is dark now. We hear the rumble and roar of heavy traffic on the bridge off-scene. Beyond we see the glittering lights of hundreds of Manhattan office buildings and apartments. There is an occasional hoot or whistle of tug boats and such as they pass below. Camera direction is up to the discretion of the director here, but the following soliloquy or monologue scene, typical of the alcoholic at this stage of intoxication, is a most important one and must be played subtly, with complete credibility—no hamming or overacting by the actress.*

GRACE. . . . Why don't people ever stop and look at things, really look at the beauty of the city around them, and places, and people, and each other—and really appreciate them? . . . But no, they never have any time,

they're too busy, too selfishly preoccupied with their own egotistical lives . . . They don't even begin to *suspect* the wonderful possibilities of life, and what it is to feel like this—like this—the way I'm feeling now . . . Oh, it's marvelous! I'm alone in the midst of all this busy world. I'm like a little girl again—fourteen, or twelve, or ten—younger than Benjie. I'm loved, I'm promising, without a care in the world, not a single care—and there's no one to nag me, saying "You must do this" and "You've got to do that" and "You ought to take care of yourself, think of somebody else for a change." Phooey! Think of somebody else? But nobody else exists! (*Takes a handkerchief from her bag and dabs at her eyes, tearfully*) It's too much, too much, Oh far too much for one who knows and sees . . . I can't bear it, all this beauty, this glittering tragedy of the city and people and life. I will never be able to bear it, never in this world. It's all so futile, so wasteful, this rat race, this blind alley, of being a grown-up—a so-called adult . . . (*Stands up on tiptoe, bends her head, tilts her head downward, and gazes directly into the dark river flowing far below*) What a thrilling feeling it would be if I went over and down, down . . . Who would care? Nobody! And neither would I. It would be like a fulfillment, a coming into my own at last. *This* is what I have been meant to do, all along, ever since I began to grow up and then made such a bloody mess of it all. This is what I am here for—Oh, not here on this bridge, but here on earth! This is what it is all about and now I know—or will find out . . . (*She reaches up to the back of her neck, unclasps the small string of pearls, puts them in her purse, then furtively slides the purse down till it rests on the sidewalk*) Maybe I should save my jacket too—It's Hattie's best broadtail . . . (*She removes the jacket, lays it folded over the rail of the bridge*) This new black dress—such good crepe, such smart lines—and Smith has never even noticed it was new. What a shame to get it all wet! . . . (*Suddenly, in spite of herself, she begins to laugh*) Well I'll be darned! You fool, you. You fool! If you care what happens to that dress, then what the hell right do you have thinking, even for a second, of—of—(*She leans against the iron railing and laughs and laughs, deliciously, almost silently; then she turns around and rests her elbows and upper arms on the high railing of the bridge, facing the camera directly*) I guess that witty Dorothy Parker—that wickedly witty Dorothy Parker—said it for good and all:

"Razors pain you;
Rivers are damp;
Acids stain you;
And drugs cause cramp.

Guns aren't lawful;
Nooses give;
Gas smells awful;
You might as well live."³⁰

"Rivers are damp" is good—Oh marvelous! Wait till I tell Smith; he'll die laughing—simply die! . . . (*Suddenly serious; frowning sternly*) But no! He'd never appreciate the joke at all, he wouldn't even crack a smile. The old stuffed-shirt, he'd only give forth some righteous pronouncement like "Look here, you need a guardian . . ." Holier-than-thou, that's what he is. That's what they all are—holier-than-thou . . . (*She starts, remembering*) Smith! That bottle of pills he left—the pills! *There's the answer! That's the way to do it!* . . . What a marvelous irony that it should be Smith's fault, that the blame will be his—that he deliberately and knowingly placed in my hands himself—the means, the way out! My God, he even called it "the where-with-all!" Little did he know—lit-tle did he know what the ultimate meaning of that clever phrase would be! But he'll know, he'll know eventually, all right all right—I'll see to that! . . . (*Bends down and picks up the purse, tucks it under her arm, gets into the broadtail jacket, adjusts her half-veil meticulously, then starts off with grim but somehow amused determination*).

FADE-OUT

FADE-IN: *Brightly-lighted interior of a small liquor store on first avenue. Behind the counter, besides the row upon row of bottles, is the youngish clerk. On the counter before him are two square bottles still with their tissue paper around them: obviously quarts of gin. He takes up a paper bag from below the counter, whips it open, and puts in first one bottle and then the other. He pushes the heavy bag forward toward the camera.*

CLERK. Can't I send it over for you, Mrs. Dana?

GRACE DANA'S VOICE. No thank you, George.

CLERK. Pretty heavy . . .

GRACE. I can manage very nicely. (*Her hands reach forward into camera range and pick up the package*) Good day . . .

CLERK. Good night . . .

30. The poem "Resume," by Dorothy Parker, copyright 1926, 1928, renewed 1954, ©1956 by Dorothy Parker, from *The Portable Dorothy Parker*, by Dorothy Parker, Introduction by Brendan Gill. Used by permission of Viking Penguin, a division of Penguin Books U.S.A., Inc.

FADE-OUT

FADE-IN: Interior of Grace Dana's apartment, almost totally dark. Hall door opens, GRACE DANA comes in, switches on the lights. The telephone has been ringing on and off, on and off, since this scene began, and continues ringing—ring, pause, ring, pause, ring, pause, and so on. GRACE DANA pays no attention to the ringing of the phone; she does not even seem to hear it. She tosses her tiny hat on top of the gramophone, her jacket and gloves and purse into a chair, kicks off her pumps, and starts toward the kitchenette with her parcel. Camera swings to show her standing just inside the kitchenette. She takes out both bottles of gin, opens one, pours a full glass for herself, then sets the bottle inside the painted tin marked sugar on the shelf above the sink. Opens icebox, removes the enameled vegetable compartment, lays the second bottle horizontally in the bottom, and stows it back into the Frigidaire. Telephone keeps on ringing. She takes a long drink from the glass, then yawns sleepily; then turns and comes back into the living room, carrying her glass. She sits down on the tweed covered sofa and her gaze rests on the pill bottle. The ringing telephone finally stirs her attention:

GRACE. Go ahead and ring! Let them call—let them all call! That's their affair, not mine. I'm not even here, folks, dear ones, kind hearts and loving friends—I'm well away, I'm out of this world! . . . (Phone suddenly stops ringing, and for a second or two she seems slightly miffed) Oh! So you don't care, is that it! You've lost interest already! Well, so have I . . . (Her eyes light on the pill bottle; she stares at it fascinated. She picks it up and holds it close to her, fondly) Damn Smith! Damn him! What the hell is he trying to do to me! —But I guess I'm grateful, after all. Little does he know, that he handed me, with his own lily white hands, the solution to the whole, whole thing . . . (Telephone begins to ring again, on and on and on. She smiles, lifts up her glass and drains it to the bottom. She is now very sleepy; she gives a loud full yawn, then gets up in something of a daze and goes back to the kitchenette. We see her pouring another drink and we hear her say) One last drink and then I'll lay me down and have a good sleep—oh, the longest deepest sleep that anybody has ever had yet . . . (Returns to living room and stretches out on the sofa. Her eyes wander, fascinated, to the pill bottle) The last. The last ever . . . Now let them call up all day and all night if they want to, let them ring their fool heads off, let them rant and rave and tear their hair about stopping drinking! I'll stop, all right; and for good . . . (She reaches back over her shoulder to a book shelf and takes out a small writing case, opens it, removes a sheet of paper and pen, and leaning down to the surface of the coffee table, she writes a note of farewell, which the camera closes in to reveal to us, so that we read) "So sorry,

darling, thank you for being so sweet, but I had to do it, forgive me. Grace.” (*Settling back with a sigh and a smug smile of satisfaction*) That will fix him . . . the turning of the knife in the wound . . . He’ll never get over it. (*Sitting up abruptly; a new idea*) But no, Smith will recognize it for what it is: theatrical, corny, cheap . . . Much more effective—oh, far more wounding to him, more aggressive and final—is to leave no word at all—nothing. The empty pill bottle will speak volumes, simply shriek at him . . . I can see him sitting here a few hours from now, helpless, distraught, while doctors are called, questions asked, an inquest arranged, Benjie notified at Lawrenceville, my father and mother too, and all the inquisitive curiosity-seeking friends coming and going, while the phone rings on, and on, and on—reminding them . . . And that ringing, that bell, will be like—will be my last words . . .

(*She takes up the pill bottle, unscrews the small white cap, picks out the cotton, and carefully pours the capsules onto the coffee table. Almost lovingly, then, she counts them, separating them two by two with a finger—her eyes getting sleepier meanwhile and her head all but nodding drowsily. Then, dream-like, she looks up absently and seems to listen—as if already hearing the things that will be said about her after she is gone.*)

VOICE. Poor Grace, poor darling, if only we had done something . . .

VOICE. If only we had another chance, we would make it up to her—not criticize and nag her to death. We should have given more fully of our time, our understanding, our love . . .

SMITH’S VOICE. She was such a child, more sensitive than most people, ill-equipped for life. We hounded her to this in our blindness.

GRACE. (*suddenly coming out of her daydream of self-pity with an idea*) Hold everything there, Grace! Because look: while all this is going on, while everybody is weeping and wailing and making a fuss, you won’t be here. You will never see it or hear it, you won’t be around to appreciate it. So what’s the sense, when it will all be wasted? . . .

(*A new idea, now: she frowns, then smiles, secretly, with childlike guile. She glances at the gold and glass atom-clock on the mantle; it is eight-thirty. She finishes her drink. Carefully, one by one, she collects all the scattered capsules on the glass surface of the coffee table, and drops them back into the bottle. Then, as if the bottle of pills were the most fragile and precious object in the world, she takes it up in her two hands, and moves, weaving slightly, sleepily, across the rug toward the bathroom, the camera following. She switches on the overhead light, looks at herself in the mirror, and smiles mysteriously. She is seen to bend down and apparently lift the toilet seat (out of camera range); she unscrews the cap of the bottle, holds the bottle at arm’s length, turns it upside down, and lets the pills fall into the water.*)

She flushes the toilet, smiles to herself in the mirror again, half asleep, switches off the light and turns back into the living room. She lies on the couch. She puts the empty bottle in plain sight on the coffee table, with the “suicide” note in full view beside her. She leans back among the pillows and yawns loudly. Through blurred eyes, now, she gazes at the empty pill bottle and smiles; and finally her eyes close, her breathing gets heavier and deeper, and in a second or two she is sound asleep—passed out, if you like . . .)