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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 radio. 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. "I must be in lousy condition to get so worked up over--over nothing," he said. "Or do I 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 light-headed, 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 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 great 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 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--" Don 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 Mrs. 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. 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 tragic 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. 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 awaking 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.

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