Mr. Young is back with a powerful and moving story which is the biography of one Will Brown, who was — in the words of his omnipresent biographer — a sad mortal with the soul of a poet and the calloused palms of a day laborer ...

Milton Inglorious

by ROBERT F. YOUNG

Schmaley, the little town where Will Brown was born, had as its economic nucleus an industrial institution known to the townsfolk as "The Shop." In its front office Will's father worked as bookkeeper for the handsome (in those days) sum of $31.75 per week, and every Christmas he received from Mr. Howis, the President and General Manager, a crisp new $10 bill. Will's father, the townsfolk frequently said, had it made.

But enough of Will's father: this is the Biography of Will. It can be argued, perhaps, that it is not within my province to write it, but it cannot be argued that I am not qualified to do so. I was present at his birth; it was dawn: I heard his first shrill scream. Thereafter, I observed him all his life.

When he was ten, his mother noticed what long fingers he had and decided he should become a pianist. So he began taking lessons from Miss Horliss, an old-maid music teacher with a tic in her left eye. Every Saturday afternoon she came to the house where Will lived and sat beside him on the piano bench for one solid hour and listened to him play Czerny on the upright piano his mother had talked his father into buying, and for one solid hour she carped and carped and carped. Maybe if she hadn't carped so much, Will would have gone on to become a famous virtuoso, although this is doubtful. As matters turned out, he told his mother, after three miserable months, that he wanted to quit. He was astonished when she dismissed Miss Horliss the very next Saturday. Will didn't understand his mother very well; as a matter of fact, he didn't understand her at all. His earlier pianistic endeavors had repeatedly conjured up in her mind a thrilling vision in which she saw herself sitting at a massive grand piano in a huge concert hall holding her long fingers aloft for a suspenseful moment and then bringing them down upon the gleaming keyboard and sending series upon series of exquisite notes soaring over the awed audience like flights of silvery birds; but his mother was nothing if she was not mercurial, and recently the original vision had been supplanted by a second, similar to the first in all respects save three: she was standing instead of sitting, the grand piano was gone, and the silvery birds were flying out of her mouth.

Freed, Will went on to less exacting pursuits. That same year, he discovered juveniles and romped enthusiastically through the Hardy Boy Books, the X Bar X Boy Books, the Radio Boy Books, The Ralph Henry Barbour Books for Boys, and just about every other Boy Book he could lay his hands on. Charged with such fare, he conceived the idea of becoming a writer himself, and that summer he resurrected a loose-leaf notebook left over from the fourth grade and began writing nights in his room. He wrote stories about honorable halfbacks, keen-eyed boy detectives, big dirigibles and, later on when he happened upon *War Birds*, stories about spectacular WWI dog fights. However, despite their diversity, his stories shared a common fault: he never finished any of them. Near the end of August his Muse deserted him, and he decided he didn't want to be a writer after all, that he'd grow up to be something else.

His career might have ended then and there had not outside pressure been brought to bear on him as he grew older. He was a quiet boy, and people thought that because he seldom said very much he was profound, and this putative profundity together with his long fingers led a large number of his friends and relatives, including his mother (especially his mother), to encourage him to become a Great Writer. As a result, after he entered seventh grade he lured his Muse back into his room up under the eaves and set sail once more upon the Sea of Words. He copies parts of Zane Grey's *Tappan's Burro* and worked them into a story of his own, which he didn't quite finish, and penned several other pieces, which he didn't quite finish either. His father, despite a determined campaign launched by his mother and carried out daily at the breakfast, dinner and supper table, refused to buy him a typewriter, pointing meaningfully whenever

Mr. Young is back with a powerful and moving story which is the biography of one Will Brown. who was — in the words of his omnipresent biographer — a sad mortal with the soul of a poet and the calloused palms of a day laborer ...

Milton Inglorious

by ROBERT F. YOUNG

Schmaley, the little town where Will Brown was born, had as its economic nucleus an industrial institution known to the townsfolk as "The Shop." In its front office Will's father worked as bookkeeper for the handsome (in those days) sum of $31.75 per week, and every Christmas he received from Mr. Howis, the President and General Manager, a crisp new $10 bill. Will's

father, the townsfolk frequently said, had it made.

But enough of Will's father: this is the Biography of Will. It can be argued, perhaps, that it is not within my province to write it, but it cannot be argued that I am not qualified to do so. I was present at his birth; it was dawn: I heard his first shrill scream. Thereafter, I observed him all his life. When he was ten, his mother noticed what long fingers he had and decided he should become a pianist. So he began taking lessons from Miss Horliss, an old-maid music teacher with a tic in her left eye. Every Saturday afternoon she came to the house where Will lived and sat beside him on the piano bench for one solid hour and

listened to him play Czerny on the upright piano his mother had talked his father into buying, and for one solid hour she carped and carped and carped. Maybe if she hadn't carped so much, Will would have gone on to become a famous virtuoso, although this is doubtful. As matters turned out, he told his mother, after three miserable months, that he wanted to quit. He was astonished when she dismissed Miss Horliss the very next Saturday. Will didn't understand his mother very well; as a matter of fact, he didn't understand her at all. His earlier pianistic endeavors had repeatedly conjured up in her mind a thrilling vision in which she saw herself sitting at a massive grand

piano in a huge concert hall holding her long fingers aloft for a suspenseful moment and then bringing them down upon the gleaming keyboard and sending series upon series of exquisite notes soaring over the awed audience like flights of silvery birds; but his mother was nothing if she was not mercurial, and recently the original vision had been supplanted by a second, similar to the first in all respects save three: she was standing instead of sitting, the grand piano was gone, and the silvery birds were flying out of her mouth.

Freed, Will went on to less exacting pursuits. That same year, he discovered juveniles and romped enthusiastically through the Hardy Boy Books, the X Bar

X Boy Books, the Radio Boy Books, The Ralph Henry Barbour Books for Boys, and just about every other Boy Book he could lay his hands on. Charged with such fare, he conceived the idea of becoming a writer himself, and that summer he resurrected a loose-leaf notebook left over from the fourth grade and began writing nights in his room. He wrote stories about honorable halfbacks, keen-eyed boy detectives, big dirigibles and, later on when he happened upon *War Birds*, stories about spectacular WWI dog fights. However, despite their diversity, his stories shared a common fault: he never finished any of them. Near the end of August his Muse deserted him, and he decided he didn't

want to be a writer after all, that he'd grow up to be something else.

His career might have ended then and there had not outside pressure been brought to bear on him as he grew older. He was a quiet boy, and people thought that because he seldom said very much he was profound, and this putative profundity together with his long fingers led a large number of his friends and relatives, including his mother (especially his mother), to encourage him to become a Great Writer. As a result, after he entered seventh grade he lured his Muse back into his room up under the eaves and set sail once more upon the Sea of Words. He copies parts of Zane Grey's *Tappan's Burro* and

worked them into a story of his own, which he didn't quite finish, and penned several other pieces, which he didn't quite finish either. His father, despite a determined campaign launched by his mother and carried out daily at the breakfast, dinner and supper table, refused to buy him a typewriter, pointing meaningfully whenever the subject was broached at the upright piano standing silently in the living room. Thus handicapped, Will understandably lost interest in his chosen Profession, and finally quit. This time, however, his Muse didn't desert him: she hung around, just in case.

Will's high school years roughly paralleled Hitler's acting out of *Mein*

Kampf, but Will was only vaguely aware that such a book or such a personage existed. He was too busy correlating the sacred lies his teachers told him with the holy half-truths contained in his schoolbooks. One thing, though — he began to notice girls. In fact, he even fell in love with one, although he didn't tell anybody, especially her. He worshiped her from afar and thought her pure and holy, like Elaine in the *Idylls of the King*; consequently he was considerably shaken up when she gave birth to a premature baby in the girl's room and was expelled from school. A quantity of his distress can be attributed to his having made her the heroine of a story

he'd written in his room up under the eaves. The story was entitled *Footlights*. The hero was a struggling young playwright living in the garret of a cheap metropolitan rooming house, and the heroine was a free-lance model who lived across the hall. One night, "Peter" was slaving over a script, turning his room blue with cigarette smoke, when suddenly the free-lance model crossed the hall, entered and said, "Say, are you running a saloon by any chance?" a remark clearly intended to convey both to Peter and to the reader the information that the cigarette smoke his room was blue with was turning her room blue too. Like her prototype, she was rather tall, rather slender, rather blond, and had a

small pert nose. Unfortunately we never get to know much more about her, because three paragraphs later the story peters out.

When he graduated in the late 30's, Will still hadn't decided what he wanted to become. His mother wanted him to go to college, study journalism and become a Roving Reporter; his father wanted him to go to work in the Shop. Will couldn't see going to college till he decided what he wanted to become, and he considered himself much too young to start work in the Shop. There was a summer resort not far from Schmaley, and while ostensibly making up his mind what he was going to do, come fall, he spent his summer vacation swimming

and looking for girls. Inevitably he found one — a plump pretty blonde named Rose. He fell in love with her instantly.

She lived in Natalia, a small community some twenty-five miles distant from Schmaley by car but some seventy-five by bus. Thus after she and her parents returned home, the only practicable way Will could date her was by learning how to drive, acquiring his license and borrowing his father's Ford. For a long time she regarded him as a drip, but she put up with him between the dates she had with other boys and eventually (to her astonishment) she fell in love with him. One night when they were parking by an October woods, she took his left hand and cupped it over her

right breast, it having become apparent to her by then that if she waited for him to make the first move she would be an old woman with gray hair and with her teeth falling out by the time he got up enough nerve. Will was both thrilled and horrified, and immediately he thought she was a whore. Whore or not, he still loved her, but the trouble was, he could no longer conduct his love-making on a high and noble plane, because if he did he would be sure to lose her. He was tortured for days as to what to do, and when he finally came to a decision and impetuously acted upon it, the result was disastrous, for his knowledge of coitus derived solely from the definition of it contained in his desk dictionary. His

unsuccessful attempt at it roughly coincided with Hitler's successful invasion of Poland.

Understandably enough, Rose was irked by her lover's lack of sex education. Self-educated in such matters herself by the sleazy novels she rented at 2¢ a day from the Natalia Pharmacy, she revealed to Will the source of her secret information and, generous girl that she was, offered to loan him the instructive novel she was at present perusing. Will, however, declined. He had already resolved never to defile this immaculate creature again, for the experience had revealed to him that physically at least the Act was as much of a mystery to her as it was to him. Ergo, she could not

possibly be a whore, and ergo (since for him there existed no intermediate ground), she must be a virgin. Thereafter, he kept his love-making on the same lofty plane as before and resolutely ignored her sometimes frenzied attempts to lower it to an earthy level.

He continued to date her during the months that followed, not every night, but as often as his allowance and the availability of his father's Ford allowed. Meanwhile his father kept after him to go work in the Shop, which, after limping through the Depression, had fully recuperated and was galloping healthily along the economic trail. Finally the old man, to show that he

meant business, cut off Will's allowance and (despite his mother's protestations) hid the car keys.

The month was May. Will shut himself in his room with the intention of writing two stories, one for the *Saturday Evening Post* and the other for *Collier's*. But by the time he got to page 3 of story number 1 he began having second thoughts. Granted, he could knock out the two pieces in as many days, but a week, maybe even two, might elapse before the checks for them came through, and meanwhile he would be carless and unable to date Rose. Besides, he didn't have a typewriter. If the Shop pawed at him with a long left, but he parried it deftly and went to work in the Schmaley

canning factory. Not long afterward, he could be seen driving through the streets of Schmaley in a second-hand Buick, followed by a cloud of burned oil.

His anticlimactic courtship of Rose endured for another month. Then one Saturday night late in June a strange thing happened: instead of driving over to Natalia and taking Rose to a movie, as was his custom, he drove downtown instead, parked his Buick and stood on the street corner all evening talking with the canning-factory gang and smoking cigarettes. A week later, he visited a whorehouse and lost his virginity. After that, you couldn't keep him away from whorehouses. He even got to know the madam of his favorite one by name. Big

Butt Betsy Buttinski. "Hi, Betsy," he would say to her when she let him and the other fellows in. And she'd answer, "Hi, Will." He never went to see Rose again, and she never wrote to ask him what had gone wrong.

The Schmaley Canning Factory operated from late May to mid-November. This provided the

workers with a sort of annual semisabbatical during which, thanks to the New Deal, they were able to draw semiwages in the form of unemployment insurance checks. Such an arrangement was ideal for a struggling young artist like Will; indeed, it was as though FDR had recognized his talent from afar and had decided to subsidize him. He

decided, however — after an aborted attempt at a novel — to defer writing for the time being and to take up the piano again. That way, he would have two professions at his fingertips instead of only one.

Spurning Czerny, he went on to far more difficult compositions. In fact, he began at the top, or somewhere near it, perhaps with the intention of working his way down. He spent his first semisabbatical (to the despair of his mother, who now wanted him to become a floorwalker in a department store, and the disgust of his father, who hadn't spoken to him since spring) working on Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*, and very nearly mastered it. He would

practice all afternoon and well into evening, and then he would go downtown and have a few beers, either at Henry's Grill or the Peacock cafe. Afterward, he would go home and sleep till noon. To conserve expenses, he didn't renew the license on his Buick till after he got called back to work. Once he had the Buick back on the road, he immediately renewed old acquaintances at Big Butt Betsy's and other similar establishments. On his next semisabbatical he tried his luck with Rachmaninoff's *Prelude in C Sharp Minor* (one of my favorite compositions, incidentally), and was well on his way toward mastering it when the Japs bombed Pearl Harbor. By the time his

draft number came up, he could play the prelude most of the way through, with only a minimum of mistakes.

For a while Will toyed with the idea of joining the Air Corps and becoming an aviator and engaging in dog fights with members of the *Luftwaffe*; in the end, however, he quite sensibly abandoned the idea and let the draft do with him as it would. In due course he was assigned to a port battalion that, after a prolonged spell of stateside duty, wound up on Bougainville. The island had been secured long ago, but it was said there were still Japs back in the hills. If there were, Will never saw any. The port battalion's duties consisted of unloading cargo from Liberty and

Victory ships. In many instances the cargo was beer, and it was only natural that the unloaders should drink some of it while they were unloading it, and it was only natural that Will, who operated a DUKW between the ships and the cargo area, should drink some of it too. Also, it was only natural that he should cache a case of it now and then. Understandably, these were busy years for me, but I still managed to keep track of him despite my multitudinous chores: When he wasn't unloading cargo ships and/or drinking beer, he spent his time attending movies. He fell madly in love with Esther Williams and pinned a big pinup of her behind his bunk, and when *Bathing Beauty* came to Bougainville,

he saw it seventeen times, following it from outfit to outfit like a faithful hound. Sometimes he had to hitchhike half the length of the island, and sometimes he had to sit through the picture in a pouring rain. No man ever loved a woman as devotedly as Will loved Esther Willhams.

His mother mentioned in one of her infrequent V-mail letters that his old girl friend had got married. Rose. He'd forgot all about her, but he felt sorry for himself for a few weeks anyway. Toward the close of the war his port battalion was transferred to Luzon. When the *Enola Gay* dropped the big egg on Hiroshima, he was shacking up with a Filipino whore who had

promised to go steady with him if he would pay her ten pesos per week, bring her a pack of Americano cigarettes every other day and deliver to her bamboo doorstep once each month three cases of American beer. When the war officially ended, he was sleeping off a *Paniqui*-whiskey drunk occasioned by his discovery that his Malaysian bedmate was "going steady" with six other swains, two of them from his own platoon.

His outfit's last tour of duty took place in Nagoya, Japan. There, it was gradually deactivated, but not before Will fell in love again. This time, the girl was a taxi dancer who worked in the

Night Cabaret. Her name was Kojijiu and she was small and dainty, with a plump pretty face and sparkling brown eyes. The second time Will danced with her he asked her to marry him. She said Yes. But his orders were cut before he had a chance to request official permission, leaving him no recourse but to say good-by to her with the promise that he would come back to Japan for her as soon as he got situated in the States.

By the time he reached stateside he had his immediate future all figured out: first, he would become a Famous Writer; then he would buy a private yacht and go back to Nagoya for Kojijiu. During the cross-country trip on the troop train he repeatedly visualized the yacht, with him

standing on the bridge smoking a pipe and wearing a snow-white commodore's cap, sailing into Ise Bay, and Kojijiu, clad in a fauve komono, standing on one of the piers waving to him. By then, of course, he would be able to speak Japanese fluently, and when he walked down the gangplank and she came running to meet him, he would tell her nonchalantly in her own language that he had come back expressly for her, and afterward in some quiet cafe he would show her the magazine with his latest story in it or maybe even give her an autographed copy of his First Novel. After they arrived back in the states, man and wife, he would buy a big porticoed house on a high hill, and he and she

would settle down to a harmonious life together with him writing mornings and reading afternoons (the way some of the English novelists did) and her strumming ancestral melodies on a samisen (in his mind the melodies sounded like Chinese wind chimes), and the two of them spending carefree evenings on the portico drinking tall, cool mint juleps.

He was separated in January of '46. He hitchhiked home so he could buy a typewriter with his travel money, but on the way he blew every cent of it and part of his separation pay to boot in gin mills and on whores. His mother said he looked thin, and his father said he looked hard. He was surprised at how his room up under the eaves had shrunk,

amazed at the smallness of his boyhood desk. No matter: he sold his Buick, which all this time had waited faithfully for him in the garage, for $15, bought a used Royal and started teaching himself touch typing. He learned rapidly (it paid to have long fingers), and in less than a month's time he was ready to begin writing. He set to work at once on his first postwar story, a romance about a young girl who lived on the topmost floor of a twenty-story metropolitan apartment building and a boy named Peter who ran the elevator. But for some unfathomable reason he became bogged down before he'd even got to page 3, and had to start all over again. Again he became bogged down, this time in the

middle of page 2. He realized then what was wrong: he'd started out cold. What he needed to do was warm up first. So he began drawing books out of the Schmaley Public Library and reading them with a professional eye, copying down words he didn't know the meanings of and looking them up in his prewar abridged Webster's. Between books, he wrote long letters to Kojijiu, and she wrote long letters back, employing a translator because she didn't consider her own English worthy of the written word. But the translator formalized everything she said to a degree where her letters seemed cold and distant —

the sort of thing a female bank teller

might write to one of her favorite depositors.

Will's mother was curious about his New Girl and begged him to tell her about Kojijiu, but he refused. When he brought Kojijiu to America in his yacht, then he would tell her — not before. He was reading four novels a week now, sometimes five, and he had become a common sight in the carrels of the Schmaley Public Library. He would take out two books at a time, go home and read till about ten o'clock, and then go downtown and hang out in Henry's Grill or the Peacock Cafe till closing time, drinking whiskies with beer chasers and once in a while, gin-and-orange. Then he would go home and sleep till noon the

next day and begin reading again about 2 p.m. If he didn't have to go to the library for more books, he would read straight through till ten, taking time out only for supper. Then he would revisit Henry's or the Peacock, or both.

He maintained this rigorous regimen till June; then, perceiving that becoming a Famous Writer was going to take a little longer than he'd thought, he got his old job back in the Schmaley Canning Factory. His father, who all this while had been importuning him to come to work in the Shop, was furious. Undaunted, Will bought a prewar Ford on time and set out to renew old acquaintances. But to his chagrin the establishments he had once so blithely

taken for granted were closed, and Big Butt Betsy was dying of uterine cancer. His correspondence with Kojijiu had by this time dwindled to a letter a month, and now it ceased altogether, seemingly of its own accord. Poor Will found himself without a girl. Such a situation could not endure for long and didn't. He found a new girl almost immediately, in the stringbean shed where he worked. His job was dumping crates of string beans into a hopper, whence they emerged onto a conveyor belt that bore them between two rows of seated female employees armed with paring knives. One of these employees had snapping black eyes and wore a red bandanna handkerchief over her black hair, and

every so often she'd glance sideways at Will and their eyes would touch, igniting a brief spark, invisible to all save them, midway between her place at the belt and his at the hopper.

Inevitably these electric *oeillades* resulted in more intimate exchanges, and Will learned that her name was Lela. He'd heard from some of the fellows that she was an easy lay, but looking into the dark and liquid depths of her eyes, he knew that such could not possibly be the case. Besides, her older sister Sarah was a postulant in a convent. On their first date, he took Lela to a movie and straight home afterward. On their second, third, fourth and fifth. On their , sixth, he asked her to marry him. She

said Yes. Not that she had any such intentions, but being engaged to him would elevate her in the eyes of her other boy friends by showing them that she could matriculate any time she wanted to from an easy back-seat lay to a respectable housewife.

Elated, Will went home and wrote a story about her. And him. It was entitled *Pianissimo*. In it, he was a struggling young composer living in a cheap metropolitan rooming house and she was a tyronic girl reporter who lived across the hall. One night when "Peter" was sitting at his secondhand studio-piano slaving over a piano concerto tentatively entitled *Rapture in Blue*, the girl reporter crossed the hall, entered his

room and said, "Say, are you running a honky-tonk by any chance?" It was Will's intention to read the story to Lela on their next date, but he didn't quite finish it in time. Anyway, it would have struck a somewhat discordant note, for their next date deviated radically from its platonic predecessors.

Lela's parents were less stodgy than Will's and liked to do the town on Saturday night. Sometimes they didn't get home till three or four in the morning. On the Saturday night in question they didn't get home till five, which was a good thing for their peace of mind. Lela had asked Will in after the movie and had slyly put before him some hard cider she'd found in the cellar. In less than half

an hour Will was smashed and so was she, and when she took off all of her clothes and ran upstairs, he ran after her. The scene of their subsequent activities was her sister Sarah's bedroom, and when Will asked Lela later why she had chosen Sarah's bedroom instead of her own, she said it was more fun doing it in a nun's bed. By that time they were doing it again, and the remark relegated itself to Will's unconscious. It was four when he slipped out of the house, got in his car and drove home.

Three months later, Lela informed him she was going to have a baby. It never occurred to him to ask her whether the baby might be someone else's, and she couldn't have told him in any case,

because she didn't know. But she knew one thing: whether Will was the real father or not, he represented her one and only road to respectable housewifehood.

They were married that fall. A week after the wedding, Will got laid off. His first impulse was to sit down at his typewriter and dash off a couple of short stories so that he and Lela would have something to live on besides unemployment insurance while he was writing a Best Seller. But Lela, who also had got laid off, insisted that they rent an apartment instead of living with her folks or his. Obviously, even with both of them drawing unemployment insurance and with a theoretical nest egg in the bank, the setup he'd had in mind

wouldn't work, especially when the doctor and the hospital bills came due. Again the Shop pawed at him with a long left, and although he successfully parried it, the right that followed floored him. When his father told him there was an opening in the punch-press room, he took it. Five months later, Lela suffered a miscarriage.

Working in the Shop wasn't so bad after all. Will had every evening and every weekend free, and so there was plenty of time for him to write. In the second year of their marriage Lela got a job in a dress factory that had recently moved into town, and not long afterward they bought a house of their own and moved out of the flat they'd been renting

above Garson's Grocery Store. It was a pleasant little house, standing on the outskirts of town. They remodeled it from top to bottom and bought all new furniture. Will cut the lawn twice each week and put in a small kitchen garden in the back yard. Understandably, with so much of his spare time taken up, he had very little opportunity to sit down at his typewriter. The remodeling didn't go on forever, of course, and he didn't have to mow the lawn or keep up a garden during the cold months, but somehow whenever he got home evenings there was always some chore awaiting him, or some place he had to go, such as bowling or shopping. During the week he'd keep promising himself that

Saturday morning he'd sit down and bang out a novelette and sell it to *Collier's* or the *Post*, but every Friday night he'd go out and get stoned, and Saturday morning he'd sleep till noon and half the day would be shot, and so he'd shoot the rest of it and get stoned again. Invariably, by the time Sunday came, the only literary pursuit he was up to was reading the Sunday paper, and even this put a strain on his debilitated intellect.

Nevertheless, he never wholly abandoned his Chosen Profession, and he made it a point to keep himself well-informed and intellectually stimulated at all times so that when the Call came he would be ready. Every month he read *The Reader's Digest* from cover to

cover, and each year he faithfully renewed his subscription to *The Writer's Digest*. He kept up with the Best Sellers and read all the book reviews he could get his hands on. And he wasn't entirely inactive in his own right, either. He began writing for TV even before he and Lela bought their first set. But alas! — the time element reared its ugly head again, and while he was able to get his first script well underway, he never managed to finish it. Lela had vowed never to have another baby, and she never did. Without children to support and with both herself and Will working, they enjoyed a reasonably high standard of living — a standard that grew progressively higher

as their take-home pays increased. Eventually they became discontented with their pleasant little house and built a posh (*poshlust*?) ranchstyle five miles out of town. They took out a fifteen-year mortgage, which kept their payments reasonably low and enabled them to trade cars every three years without undue financial strain, even with Will's drinking. He drank every day now. Every weekend he'd get smashed: in gin mills, at picnics, home — wherever he happened to be. Weekday evenings he'd hang out either in Henry's or the Peacock. Occasionally at first, and then at more and more frequent intervals, he would half turn from the bar and stare for long periods of time toward

whatever table I happened to be sitting at, as though he were aware of my presence. There were times of course when he wasn't quite up to going out, and on these occasions he would sit in the living room, a six-pack at his elbow, and watch TV. Lela watched too, munching potato chips. She didn't drink herself. She wouldn't touch the stuff with a ten-foot pole, she said. She'd touched it once, and look at her now. And if that weren't enough, look at Will. Will let her rave. Lord, what he could have been if it hadn't been for her! What he had in mind, of course, was a Famous Writer. He would picture himself standing in a bookstore autographing copies of his novels for droves of pretty girls, only

sometimes — usually toward midnight when the six-pack was almost gone — instead of picturing himself standing in a bookstore, the cynosure of a frieze of girls, he would picture himself sitting at a massive grand piano in Carnegie Hall, his long fingers poised to strike the first thunderous notes of *Rachmaninoff s Prelude in C Sharp Minor*.

The years continued to pass. In the early 60's, Will's father retired from the Shop, sold the house and moved with Will's mother to Florida. Not long afterward, Lela's parents pulled up stakes also and moved to the Big Green Graveyard in the South. Lela's sister Sarah was serving in a mission somewhere in Africa. She never wrote

to Lela, and Lela never wrote to her.

More years passed. Lela had an affair with the insurance man and one with the dress-factory maintenance man, to mention just a few. Meanwhile Will continued to drink. Once, shortly after Christmas while he was fumbling through the contents of the hall closet in search of a bottle he'd cached some time ago, he came upon a large, dust-covered cardboard box. He opened it hopefully, but all it contained was a dusty typewriter. Disappointed, he shoved the box back into the shadows and went on searching. That was on Sunday. He didn't remember the incident till Tuesday at work. He wasn't quite as sick then as he'd been on Monday, but he was sick

enough.

His mind seized upon the typewriter and clung to it for dear life, and that evening as soon as he got home he dragged the box out of the closet, removed the machine and carried it reverently into the room just off the kitchen that, years ago, he'd set aside for writing but which had subsequently become the repository for household items no longer fit to use but not quite banged-up enough to throw away — in a word, antiques. After clearing a space in the middle of the floor, he dragged a dusty desk out of the shadows and set the typewriter on it. "As of this moment," he announced in a voice loud enough for Lela to hear, "this room is to be known

and respected as my Office!" In the kitchen, Lela snickered. Let's see now — what would he need? Typing paper, of course. A new ribbon, pencils. A notebook to jot down ideas in. An up-to-date desk dictionary. Paper clips, carbon paper, envelopes, stamps. The stamps would have to wait till tomorrow, but he could get all the rest at Lessandro's Drug Store tonight. Immediately following supper he got into his overcoat and galoshes and told Lela he was going into town for supplies. ("You mean you're out of hootch already?" she called after him.) He was surprised at how cold it had got, and he let the LTD warm up for a while. Then he backed it out of the garage and re-closed the automatic

overhead door. The highway was coated with ice, and he took it easy. Real easy. He decided to have a quick one, before picking up his supplies, and parked as close as he could get to the Peacock and went in and told George to bring him the usual. The number of cars parked outside should have apprised him that the place was packed, but it hadn't, and he was surprised at all the customers. How come? he asked George. It wasn't New Year's Eve yet. "They're the gang from Hall & Haley's," George explained. (Hall & Haley's was an electronics company that had recently located in Schmaley.) "They were so busy over Christmas they couldn't take time out for their office party. So they're

having it now."

The festive mood was infectious, and Will decided to have one more before picking up his supplies. Maybe he could soak up a little inspiration, latch onto some ideas. He got his eyes on a tall blonde standing at the far wing of the bar. She must have felt him looking at her, because right away she looked back. She smiled. Will ordered another drink.

In the morning he didn't recognize the room. He turned on his side to ask Lela what was wrong. Lela had dyed her hair blond. She'd also thinned down a little and lost a few years. Not very many, but a few. Horrified, Will slipped out of bed. He found his clothes and dressed in the gray dawnlight. His overcoat was

draped over a chair. He put it on. Had he been wearing galoshes? He couldn't remember. Soundlessly he opened the door and stepped into a strange hallway. After walking its length, he came to a flight of stairs and descended them. It wasn't until he reached the street and saw the building from the outside that he recognized it. It was the Hotel Schmaley. His LTD was parked at the curb, directly before the entrance. It was the only car on the street and it stood out like a sore thumb. Fortunately, there were no passers-by. He became aware of how cold it was: his fingers went dead white when he gripped the door handle. He got in, found his keys above the sunvisor and started her up. The

steering wheel sent sharp shards of cold into the palms of his hands. God God! — didn't he have gloves? At length he found a pair in his overcoat pocket and put them on. After checking to see whether anyone was coming, he U-turned and headed for home. Then he remembered that he couldn't go home — not at this hour, not looking like this; sick, half dead, ridden with palpable guilt. He rolled down the window to clear his mind. The LTD fishtailed and he realized — remembered —how icy the road was. He needed a drink — he'd never make it without one. Abruptly a photograph appeared on his retinal screen. It showed an overcoated man emerging from a liquor store cradling a

brown paper bag in his left arm. Not good enough — he had to do better than that. Maybe it wasn't a photograph, maybe it was one of a series of frames. Maybe the projector was jammed. He seized it with desperate mental fingers and shook it. He shook it again, harder. Abruptly it started up and the overcoated man emerged the rest of the way out of the liquor store, crossed the sidewalk to a familiar car parked at the curb and cached the bag in the glove compartment. Will braked, forgetting the condition of the road, and the LTD turned almost completely around. Happily, no cars were coming. Pulling onto the snowy shoulder, he opened the glove compartment. The bag was still

there. He tore it apart with gloved, half-frozen hands, revealing an unopened fifth of Seagram's Seven. He unscrewed the cap and took a long pull. Another. A fit of shuddering seized him; after it subsided he leaned the fifth against his right hip and pulled back onto the highway. He crept along at 15 mph, elaborately making room for the occasional cars he met. Gradually the gray crepuscular light acquired a pinkish tinge. He had things pretty well figured out by this time. He would tell Lela that he'd come home drunk around midnight and fallen asleep in the car, but first he would have to get into the garage without her hearing him. When he came to the house, he eased into the driveway,

praying that the creaking of the hard-packed snow beneath the treads wouldn't betray him. The garage door rolled back dutifully; he drove in and closed it behind him. He expelled his breath. It was dark in the garage, and cold. Tomb-cold. He turned the car heater all the way up, but he didn't close the window. He took another long pull of Seagram's, thought back to last night, to the blonde; he could remember picking her up now, but he couldn't remember her name, couldn't even remember whether she'd been a good lay. He giggled, leaned his head hack against the headrest. He couldn't go in yet; he had to wait till Lela came out and found him fast asleep, otherwise she'd suspect the truth. He

took another pull and closed his eyes, the motor purring soporifically under the hood, heat from the heater escaping through the open window and intermingling with the fumes from the exhaust. (Should he close the window? he wondered. No, it would take longer that way.) He stirred on the seat, half opened his eyes; there was still time to flee the gathering darkness, still time to escape into the arms of the bright new day. He made a half-hearted effort to straighten up on the seat, then fell back exhausted and closed his eyes again. He was wise to bright new days — they were merely yesterdays made up to look like tomorrows: old whores dressed in young girls' clothing. *Lies. All my life*

I've lived on lies, he thought, *the ones I fed myself and the ones fed to me by the world. I lie here gorged with lies: Here lies Will—*

He laughs: it is my cue. Black-cowled, I leave the wings and step upon the darkened stage. I pause briefly above this poor sad mortal with the soul of a poet and the calloused palms of a day laborer; then, kneeling, I gently kiss his cheek.

Will's literary remains comprise twenty-two short stories (unfinished), one television script (also unfinished), and a novel that consists of a completed first chapter and part of the opening sentence of a second. The last was written when he was quite young and can

be construed as an attempt — the only one he ever made — at realism. Its literary merits may be dubious, but it is fatidic to an uncanny degree. It follows verbatim:

The Hollow Man

Chapter I

He could remember the shop-men walking home with black dinner buckets in blue winter twilights and nooning in the sun on street corners near the Shop when the first spring days came round; he could remember them in summer too, carrying the same eternal black buckets, home in the long light evenings and to work in the first grayness of dawn; in summer and in autumn, with the leaves drifting down, and the trees they never saw turning red and gold and russet, and then the first winds coming in over the town from the flatlands in the west, and the first flakes of falling snow sifting sporadically out of graying skies. He

could remember them and their eternal black buckets, and he hated them: the dull men, the unimaginative men, the robot men; the clay men who bought their houses on time and saved money for dubious tomorrows because they were afraid to live today.

It was impossible to remember them without remembering the bars they stopped in Friday nights when they got their pay: dingy Connor's Grill just across the street from the employee's entrance; the rundown taproom of the Hotel Ashton; Fred Bartow's Bar & Grill just up the street, with its pot-bellied iron stove, its smell of stale beer and rotten hamburg and rancid fish-fry grease. The milieus for the brief

moments when they murdered the reality that clung to their shoulders like a gray leech, when they pretended that life for them wasn't always going to be a time clock punched in the morning and a time clock punched afternoons; a couple of beers with the boys on Friday nights; the back yard garden in spring; a pipe on the front porch in summer and raking leaves in fall—

He could remember these timeclock men, these card-punchers; these Friday night shot-and-a-beer men; these kitchen-garden enthusiasts who couldn't wait for spring, and yet who, when spring came, spent it the same way they had spent winter: over lathes and grinders; in ill-ventilated paint rooms; in foundries, by

hot cupolas. These timeclock, card-punching men walking around dead and not knowing it; dead before they were thirty; zombies, walking, working, spading, raking, carrying dinner buckets back and forth to work. . . . And he could remember himself saying, "Never. Not for me. I'd rather be dead than carry a black bucket every day, back and forth, back and forth, back and forth to work; two sandwiches, a dill pickle and a slice of apple pie. Not for me. Never." Not for him. Ever. Darkness came early in the street between the Shop and Connor's Grill. Even in spring, it came early. It lent the illusion that, even when you drank only one beer, you were tying on a good one before taking your pay home. It

was gloomy in Connor's — it was always gloomy in Connor's — and the gloom mingled with the tobacco smoke and became a sort of dirty murk, a murk in which dull men talked and sometimes showed off how much money they had in their pay envelopes.

He knew how much money he had in his. All of it, less the dime he'd laid down for the beer he'd been sipping while remembering. He didn't want to show it off. Not even with the overtime included; he was ashamed to show it off. And yet he knew that if he got drunk he would show it off, become just like the rest of them, the shopmen, the cardpunchers; and then he'd go home, drunk till the moment he stepped in the

house and then, suddenly, terribly sober, ready to cry because he couldn't dress up and go out on the town and stand on the corner like he used to and brag about how you'd never see him lugging a black dinner bucket back and forth every day, back and forth, back and forth to work.

Not him. Ever.

He finished his beer and started for the door. "Hey, Pete," the bartender called after him, "you forgot your bucket."

He stopped, his hand resting on the knob of the door. Then, meekly, he went back and got it.

Chapter II

It was raining when the