Babylon Revisited

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

Fitzgerald was born in St. Paul, Minnesota and spent most of his childhood in Buffalo, New York. When he was fifteen, his parents sent him to school in New Jersey, where he met a teacher who encouraged him to develop his talent for writing stories. Fitzgerald went on to study at Princeton, where he pursued his passion for writing so wholeheartedly that his grades suffered, and he eventually dropped out to enlist in the army. Though the war ended before Fitzgerald was deployed, he met Zelda Sayre, whom he would later marry, while he was posted in Alabama. In 1919 he published *This Side of Paradise*, which became an overnight success. The couple moved to Paris in 1924, where Scott Fitzgerald supported his family primarily by selling short stories like "Babylon Revisited" to popular magazines. By 1931, Zelda had begun to suffer from mental illness. The Fitzgeralds returned to the United States, where Zelda was in and out of hospitals from 1936 onward. From 1936 until the end of his life in 1940, Scott Fitzgerald spent much of his time in Hollywood, struggling with alcoholism and trying (largely unsuccessfully) to write screenplays. He died of a heart attack.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The period from 1920-1929 is often called the "roaring twenties," in part because it was a time of economic prosperity following the first World War. During this time, the United States emerged as the leader in world finance, prompting a wave of newly wealthy Americans to move overseas to Europe (and in particular to Paris). This period is also known as the "jazz age" because the bustling nightlife in so many Western cities centered around jazz clubs and cabarets. In 1929, however, the economic boom years came to an abrupt end when the stock market crashed, leading to a twelve-year economic depression that affected every Western industrialized country in the world. The Paris that Fitzgerald describes in "Babylon Revisited" has been radically transformed by the crash—emptied of Americans, its once teeming bars and clubs all but deserted.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

F. Scott Fitzgerald lived in Paris at the same time as the American writer Ernest Hemingway, and the two became friends. Hemingway's memoir, *A Moveable Feast*, though first published posthumously in 1964, describes his life in Paris in the 1920s and chronicles some of his experiences with Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald. The book is a window into the Paris that Charlie Wales spends so much time reflecting on in "Babylon Revisited." *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck, while very different from "Babylon Revisited" in its style and focus, is one of the most important works of American literature to come out of the Great Depression. It tells the story of a family of tenant farmers in Oklahoma who are forced to migrate to California, and provides a valuable perspective on the impact the depression had on the lives of many Americans.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Babylon Revisited
- **When Written:** 1930
- **When Published:** February 21, 1931
- **Literary Period:** Modernism
- **Genre:** Short story
- **Setting:** Paris, 1930
- **Climax:** Duncan and Lorraine arrive unannounced at the Peters' home
- **Antagonist:** Marion, alcoholism, vice
- **Point of View:** Third person limited

EXTRA CREDIT

Biblical Babylon In the Old Testament of the Bible, Isaiah prophesized that Babylon, one of the largest cities on earth, would be destroyed because its inhabitants worshipped false idols. Therefore, the city became synonymous with hedonism and sin, and—like the Paris of Fitzgerald's story—is seen as having been fated to collapse.

Autobiography The events of "Babylon Revisited" are based on Fitzgerald's life. Following his wife Zelda's nervous breakdown in 1930, Zelda's sister and her husband (Rosaline and Newman Smith) tried to take possession of Fitzgerald's nine-year-old daughter, Scottie. Rosaline saw Scott Fitzgerald as an irresponsible drunk, and the two openly despised each other.

The Last Time I Saw Paris. In 1954, "Babylon Revisited" was adapted into a film starring Elizabeth Taylor and Van Johnson, titled "The Last Time I Saw Paris."

PLOT SUMMARY

"Babylon Revisited" tells the story of Charlie Wales' return to Paris in 1930, a year and a half after the stock market crashed and he moved away. The story begins with Charlie asking Alix, the barman at the **Ritz**, about all the characters that used to

frequent the bar, but it seems that all of Charlie's old acquaintances—except for a man named Duncan Schaeffer—have left Paris, no longer as fabulously wealthy as they had been during the boom years of the 1920s. Charlie, too, has changed. He works in Prague now, and has stopped drinking as much. Charlie leaves his brother-in-law's address with Alix and instructs him to pass it along to Duncan Schaeffer if he sees him.

On his way to his brother-in-law's house, Charlie looks at the streets of Paris from his taxi. He reflects on the years he spent in Paris and thinks that he spoiled the city for himself. The days had come and gone, until suddenly "two years were gone, and everything was gone," and finally he himself was gone.

When Charlie arrives at his brother-in-law's house, his nine-year-old daughter, Honoria, greets him warmly at the door. Inside, Lincoln Peters (Charlie's brother-in-law), Marion Peters (his sister-in-law), and their two children are waiting for him. Charlie and Marion greet each other coldly. Lincoln asks Charlie about business in Prague, and Charlie responds that it's going well—his salary was even higher last year than it had been before the crash—and although he is boasting for a specific purpose, he sees that it bothers Lincoln and stops himself. Charlie remarks that all the Americans seem to have cleared out of Paris, and though Marion replies that this fact delights her, Charlie reminisces that, for a period, being an American in Paris was like being a type of royalty—and that "it was nice while it lasted." Without thinking, he mentions having been at the bar earlier that afternoon, and Marion quips that she thinks Charlie would have had enough of bars. Charlie explains that he has one drink every afternoon, and no more. There is an obvious and "instinctive antipathy" between Charlie and Marion, but Charlie thinks Marion's aggressiveness will give him an advantage in the discussion he came to Paris to have.

At dinner, Charlie wonders to himself whether Honoria is more like him or her mother, Helen, and he hopes Honoria does not combine whatever qualities that had led him and Helen to disaster. He reflects that he believes in character as the "eternally valuable element," and thinks that everything else wears out. After dinner he goes walking in Montmartre, a neighborhood full of bars and jazz clubs where he used to spend a great deal of time and money. Most of the bars are empty, and some have disappeared completely. What he once saw as the "effort and ingenuity" of Montmartre, he now sees as childish "catering to vice and waste." Looking back on his days of drinking and squandering wild sums of money in this neighborhood, he regrets that he allowed his life to get so wildly out of control that his child was taken away from him and his wife "escaped to a grave in Vermont."

The next day Charlie wakes up feeling refreshed, the "depression of yesterday" gone. He takes Honoria to lunch at Le Grand Vatel, the one restaurant he can think of that doesn't remind him of the decadence of the old days. He and Honoria make a plan to go to the **toy store** and the vaudeville show, though Honoria objects that she doesn't particularly want to go to the toy store, since she has a lot of things at home and Charlie already brought her a doll. While at lunch, Charlie runs into Duncan Schaeffer and Lorraine Quarrles, a stunning blonde whom he'd spent time with in the old days. Duncan and Lorraine try insistently to rope Charlie into a plan for dinner, but he repeatedly declines, telling them that he and Honoria have plans to see the vaudeville show and that he'll call them. After they're gone, Charlie feels that it was an unwelcome encounter with ghosts from his past.

At the vaudeville show, Charlie worries that Honoria will grow up without him having had a chance to influence who she'll become. During intermission, they run into Duncan and Lorraine again and sit for a drink, but Charlie is distracted. After the show, Honoria says she wants to come live with Charlie in Prague, which makes his heart leap.

When Charlie arrives at the Peters' later that evening, the atmosphere is tense. He tells them he's "awfully anxious to have a home" and he wants to bring Honoria back to Prague with him. Marion, barely able to hide her contempt for Charlie, asks how anyone can count on Charlie to remain sober. Marion pointedly brings up an incident in which Charlie had locked Helen out of their home in a snowstorm and Helen had contracted pneumonia, nearly dying as a result. Charlie pleads with Marion, begging her to have confidence in him. He reminds her that his drinking only lasted a year and a half, from the time he arrived in Paris until he collapsed and ended up in a sanitarium—but before that he had a good track record. He expresses fear that he'll lose Honoria's childhood and his "chance for a home." But Marion can't put aside her contempt for Charlie and accuses him of being responsible for Helen's death—a tactical misstep on her part—at which point it becomes clear to everyone in the room that Charlie has gained control of the situation. Charlie leaves with Lincoln's assurance that he and Marion won't stand in Charlie's way. That night, Charlie has a dream about Helen in which she tells him she wants him to have Honoria.

The next morning, Charlie looks for a governess for Honoria and has lunch with Lincoln Peters, who tells him that he thinks Marion resents Charlie because of his wealth. When Charlie returns to his hotel, there's a letter from Lorraine waiting for him in which she asks him to meet her, but Charlie doesn't want to see her. He goes back to the Peters' house that evening, and while he's there, Duncan and Lorraine arrive, having gotten Lincoln's address from Alix, the barman at the Ritz. They drunkenly ask Charlie to come to dinner, and when he declines they leave bitterly. Charlie tries to smooth things over, but the intrusion has disturbed Marion so thoroughly that she changes her mind about allowing Charlie to take Honoria back to Prague with him.

Charlie leaves the Peters' and goes to the bar at the Ritz. The head barman, Paul, comes over to talk to Charlie, and says he heard Charlie lost a lot in the crash. Charlie says that he did, but that he lost everything he wanted in the boom. He calls Lincoln, who tells Charlie that he'll have to wait six months before discussing Honoria's custody again with Marion. Charlie thinks that tomorrow he'll send Honoria a lot of toys, but then he becomes angry that all he can do is shower her with monetary gifts. He tells himself he'll come back to Paris someday—that the Peters can't make him pay for his mistakes forever. He's sure his wife Helen wouldn't have wanted him to be so alone.

CHARACTERS

Charlie Wales – Charlie Wales, 35, is the protagonist of "Babylon Revisited," who has returned to Paris to regain custody of his daughter, Honoria. Charlie, Honoria, and Charlie's wife, Helen, lived in Paris for two years in the late 1920s. During that time, Charlie was very wealthy and didn't have to work, instead spending his time partying, travelling, and drinking heavily. However, Charlie's alcoholism eventually led to his collapse and the destruction of his marriage, after which Helen died. In returning to Paris, Charlie seems to be a changed man. He got sober after a stint in the sanatorium, began working again and recovered some of his wealth, and he now desires, above all else, to have a proper family and home in Prague, where he presently lives. To do so, he hopes to bring Honoria back with him, though he must win approval from Honoria's custodial parent, his wife's sister, Marion. In trying to prove himself to Marion—who mistrusts and even dislikes him—Charlie puts forward the best version of himself, but it's unclear whether he will remain sober or whether he has changed enough since his time in Paris to be entrusted with his daughter's care. His strong sense of remorse for his past actions, along with his desire to rebuild a family and a home, motivate him to behave with humility in the face of Marion's consistently cruel treatment of him, though at times he missteps, bragging about his wealth or becoming defensive. The murky details of Charlie's past—including the questions of whether he was responsible for Helen's death and whether he had an affair with Lorraine Quarrles—point to a potentially cruel side of Charlie that suggest Marion may be right to regard him with such suspicion, and that perhaps he shouldn't be relied upon to look after his daughter. Because the narrative follows Charlie's point of view so closely, it's difficult to clearly judge his marriage to Helen, his alcoholism, or whether he has truly changed, so he remains a morally complex—and even somewhat ambiguous—character.

Honoria Wales – Charlie's nine-year-old daughter, Honoria, lives with Marion and Lincoln Peters and their two children in Paris, but she would rather go live with her father in Prague. She's tactful and mature for her age, and seems to value family over material things (for example, when Charlie offers to take her to the toy store and buy her whatever she wants, she doesn't want to go because she feels Charlie has already bought her enough **toys**). Charlie worries that Honoria is growing up so quickly that, if he doesn't win custody of her and take her back to Prague with him, he might miss out on her childhood altogether.

Marion Peters – Marion Peters is Charlie's sister-in-law, and the legal guardian of his daughter Honoria. She despises Charlie, seeing him as an irresponsible alcoholic who not only made Helen unhappy in life but who also bears responsibility for her death. Although her thinly-concealed resentment of Charlie causes her to act bitterly toward him and makes her a deeply unsympathetic character, Marion holds the power to decide whether to allow Charlie to take Honoria back to Prague with him, and in this way she also acts as the moral judge of Charlie, evaluating whether or not he has really changed. Marion's resentment of Charlie stems not only from his treatment of her sister, but also from his wealth and the lifestyle it allows him to lead, which she sees as an injustice because her own family struggles to get by. At the end of the story, when Lorraine Quarrles and Duncan Schaeffer barge into the Peters family's home, the intrusion causes Marion to fall suddenly ill, suggesting that she has a nervous condition that worsens in stressful situations—and around Charlie in particular.

Lincoln Peters – Lincoln Peters is Marion's husband and Charlie's brother-in-law. Lincoln provides a comfortable, upper-middle-class life for his family by working at a bank. He is a reasonable and good-natured man, and a loving and concerned husband to Marion. While Marion and Charlie have a bitter relationship, Lincoln is much more hospitable toward Charlie, often acting as a mediator in Charlie and Marion's disputes. Lincoln confides in Charlie that he suspects Marion resents Charlie so strongly because of his wealth. While it seems that Lincoln would like Charlie to be reunited with Honoria, he ultimately defers to his wife's wishes in order to keep her emotionally stable.

Helen Wales – Helen is Charlie's deceased wife. She and Charlie drank, travelled, and partied excessively together in the '20s. Her marriage to Charlie was strained during their time in Paris, marred by infidelities and arguments, and it ended, according to Charlie, in "disaster." While Charlie's mental health deteriorated because of the turbulence of their lifestyle, Helen's physical health fell apart. She contracted and almost died of pneumonia one night when Charlie locked her out in a snowstorm, and she died shortly afterward of "heart troubles." Fitzgerald leaves some ambiguity surrounding the extent to which Charlie may have been responsible for Helen's death. Before she died, Helen put her sister Marion in charge of caring for her daughter Honoria, since neither she nor Charlie (who was in a sanatorium) were able to care for her themselves.

Duncan Schaeffer – An old friend of Charlie's from college. Duncan is one of the few people left in Paris that Charlie knows from his time living there. Unlike Charlie, however, Duncan doesn't seem to have sobered up or matured at all since losing everything in the crash. Rather, he continues to drink and party. Although Charlie initially leaves his address for Duncan at the **Ritz**, he seems to change his mind about wanting to see Duncan after they run into each other and Charlie realizes that his old social group has become repellent to him. Charlie sees Duncan as a ghost from his past life, and therefore he politely turns down Duncan's repeated invitations to go out together. When Duncan and Lorraine Quarrles show up drunk at Marion Peters' house without an invitation, the intrusion disturbs Marion Peters so much that it causes her to change her mind about allowing Charlie to take Honoria back to Prague with him.

Lorraine Quarrles – Lorraine is an old friend of Charlie's from the time he lived in Paris. Though Charlie once found Lorraine very attractive, he avoids her now. When Lorraine and Duncan run into Charlie at lunch, Charlie is repelled by them, describing them as ghosts from his past life—reminders of his recklessness and irresponsibility. Charlie notes that Lorraine looks older, but she doesn't seem to have emotionally matured at all. Fitzgerald insinuates that there may have been more than just a simple flirtation between Charlie and Lorraine before Charlie left Paris—that perhaps they had had an affair. When Charlie repeatedly denies Lorraine's requests to meet him, she reacts bitterly. Her and Duncan's drunken appearance at Marion Peters' home sets Marion on the path to changing her mind about allowing Charlie to take Honoria back to Prague with him.

Paul – The head barman at the **Ritz**. Charlie looks for Paul when he goes to the Ritz upon arriving in Paris, but, like all of Charlie's old acquaintances, Paul is not there. A key figure in the party scene for Americans in Paris in the 1920s, Paul reminds Charlie of his old life and his old ways.

Alix – A barman at the **Ritz**. Charlie talks to Alix at the beginning of the story, when he can't find the head barman, Paul, at the bar. Alix fills Charlie in on the gossip about all his old acquaintances from the parties of the '20s, helping to establish the fact that most of the Americans have left Paris in the wake of the market crash, and that the Paris Charlie once knew is gone.

THEMES

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WEALTH AND POVERTY

"Babylon Revisited" takes place one year after the stock market crash of 1929, in the early years of the Great Depression. Charlie Wales revisits Paris, the city where he and his wife lived lavishly during the height of the market boom of the 1920s, only to find that the bars and hotels he once frequented are all but deserted, "the big party" having come to a crashing halt. Fitzgerald portrays the relative austerity of life in Paris in 1930 as a kind of "hangover"—the inevitable consequence of the excess and overindulgence of the roaring 20s. Charlie's lonely life, with his wife dead and his daughter in the custody of his in-laws, is also a hangover from his recklessness during the boom, and Fitzgerald positions Charlie's unfulfilled longing for family as a parallel austerity to the economic conditions of the '30s, an emotional debt racked up in times of indulgence that has yet to be repaid.

Lincoln and Marion Peters (Charlie's in-laws), while not poor, provide a point of reference to help readers understand Charlie's wealth. In the '20s, they were barely managing to make ends meet while Charlie and his wife Helen were off gallivanting around Paris and beyond. And yet, Lincoln and Marion were the ones entrusted with the care of Charlie and Helen's daughter Honoria when Helen died and Charlie was "flat on his back" in a sanatorium. Therefore, they were not only were witnesses to the excess of Charlie's lifestyle during the boom years, when they themselves had little by comparison, but they also bear the weight of the consequences of Charlie's foolishness and immoderation, as they are left to look after his child. Although Marion attributes her mistrust of Charlie to his drinking and his poor treatment of her sister, Fitzgerald implies that part of her resentment may be related to class—and more specifically to the arrogance, entitlement, and superiority that Charlie feels because of his wealth. Lincoln tells Charlie directly at one point that Marion "felt there was some kind of injustice to it"—referring to Charlie "not even working toward the end, and getting richer and richer."

Although Charlie understands that wealth made him blind to the sources of real value in his life, he still must use his money as a source of power. When Charlie and Lincoln Peters discuss who will care for Honoria, they do so as though it were chiefly a financial matter. At the Peters family's home, Charlie makes a point of boasting about how well business is going for him in Prague, and he does so "for a specific purpose": to demonstrate that he's better-equipped than the Peters family to provide for Honoria. However, Charlie notices that his boasting stirs a "faint restiveness" in Lincoln's eyes, suggesting not only that money is a sensitive issue for the Peters family, but that perhaps they also associate Charlie's wealth with his immoderate behavior. Therefore, Charlie must strike a delicate balance: he is dependent on his wealth to prove his competence as a caretaker relative to the Peters family, but he must be careful not to give the impression that he's fated to repeat old

mistakes.

Charlie's reliance on money as a substitute for family is nowhere more evident than in his relationship with his daughter. Charlie and Honoria want to live together, so it's painful for both of them that their relationship seems limited to him giving her **toys**. When Charlie takes Honoria out to lunch, he tells her he's going to bring her to a toy store and buy her anything she wants, but Honoria responds that she doesn't want to go to the toy store, since she already has a lot of things at home. It's as though she is weary of accepting substitutes for her father's presence and affection. At the very end of the story, after Marion has changed her mind about allowing Charlie to take Honoria back to Prague, Charlie feels angry that the only thing he can think to do to feel close to Honoria is to send her "a lot of things" (meaning, presumably, toys). This demonstrates Charlie's main insight of the story: that while he "lost a lot in the crash," he lost everything of real value to him—his family—in the boom years through his immoderate behavior.

Ultimately, Charlie uses his wealth to gain the upper hand in the argument over who will be Honoria's guardian, and in doing so he manages to avoid fully addressing Marion's concern that he has not changed. This raises a moral question about whether Charlie is using the power his money gives him to "buy" whatever he wants—in this case, his daughter—just as he did in the past. Class, then, is part of what makes Charlie a morally ambiguous character: although he claims to no longer be the wealthy playboy he once was, he continues to wield his wealth as a source of power.

HOME AND FAMILY

In the aftermath of his catastrophic recklessness during the market boom of the 1920s, Charlie has begun to rebuild his life. He's no longer interested in the frivolous relationships that once amused him, for he realizes now that they come and go like money. His sole focus has become, instead, securing a home and a family for himself. As such, the central tension in "Babylon Revisited" is the question of whether Charlie Wales' sister-in-law, Marion, will allow him to take his daughter back to Prague with him.

While at dinner with the Peters family, who have been looking after Charlie's daughter Honoria, Charlie reflects that he believes that the "eternally valuable element" in life is character—which he seems to define as the quality of having moral integrity and strength. He expresses a desire to "jump back a whole generation and trust in character," and observes that everything else seems to wear out, which suggests not only that he sees morality and integrity as essential ingredients for building a home and family, but that the absence of these qualities in him had led his own family to fall apart. In this way, Fitzgerald shows readers that Charlie doesn't merely want to go back to how things were when he had a family and he was behaving recklessly. Rather, he wants to build a different kind of family, founded on this eternally valuable element: his newfound strength of character. Furthermore, after musing on character, Charlie wanders through the streets of the Montmartre neighborhood of Paris, where "all the catering to vice and waste was on an utterly childish scale." In contrast to the warmth and stability of the Peters' home where he was just at dinner, the emptiness and desperation of the abandoned bars and clubs lead Charlie to ruminate on the meaning of the word "dissipate," which he understands now to mean "to make nothing out of something." This underscores Charlie's dawning revelation that, like character, the bond of family abides, while other relationships and pleasures dissipate.

Despite Charlie's newfound commitment to character and family, Marion Peters remains skeptical that he is any less of an irresponsible drunk than he had been two years ago, and her opinion is significant, because she has the power to decide against allowing Charlie to complete his family by taking Honoria with him to Prague. Marion is an embittered character who threatens to destroy Charlie's dream of having a family, and yet she is the character most concerned with doing what is right for her family, including Honoria. She therefore not only embodies the familial bonds of dedication, love, and responsibility, but she also represents the moral standard to which Charlie must prove he can rise. She shows that family is a prize that is not straightforward or unambiguously pleasant, implying that unlike the pleasures of the '20s, the things worth having in life do not come easily. Fitzgerald gives evidence that Charlie understands this difficult truth, as he accepts Marion's decision not to allow him to take Honoria to Prague. While it's deeply disappointing for Charlie, he recognizes that this punishment is fair (even though Marion's change of heart was brought about by factors outside of his control), which demonstrates that he's willing to accept responsibility for his past actions and be patient and humble before Marion in order to regain his family.

Charlie speaks several times throughout the story of his desire to make a home, a concept he associates with having a family. Pleading with Lincoln Peters, Charlie at one point expresses his fear that he'll "lose Honoria's childhood," and with it his "chance for a home." At the story's conclusion, after Marion has changed her mind about allowing Charlie to take charge of Honoria, Charlie reflects sadly that "he wanted his child, and nothing was much good now, beside that fact." Without a home and a family, Charlie believes, he has nothing of value. Fitzgerald's message, then, could hardly be clearer: having lived through the glitz and glamor of the roaring '20s himself—and having seen it fade—"Babylon Revisited" is his proclamation that the only things of lasting value are the relationships people build and commitments they make to their loved ones.

TRANSFORMATION AND REDEMPTION

In "Babylon Revisited," Charlie Wales reconciles himself to his past by revisiting the city where his life fell apart. As Charlie sees it, his return is the culmination of a long process of personal transformation, as it provides an opportunity for him to not only reflect on how much he has changed since leaving Paris, but also to redeem himself in the eyes of his family. However, Fitzgerald leaves some ambiguity around the question of whether Charlie has truly changed—and if he has, whether that change will be lasting. Charlie confronts various ghosts from his past in Paris—running into old friends and visiting the places he once spent so much time and money—all of which threaten to lure him into old patterns of self-destructive behavior and show that he hasn't really changed. This pattern persists until the end of the story, and although Charlie remains resolute in the face of many temptations, Fitzgerald seems to suggest that Charlie's transformation is still, and will perhaps always be, precarious.

The primary transformation that Charlie has undergone is that he has been sober for a year and a half, presumably since his time at a sanatorium following his "collapse" in 1929. However, Charlie takes one drink every afternoon, and he does so deliberately, "so that the idea of alcohol won't get too big" in his imagination. This habit shows that personal transformation is fragile—Charlie's daily drink creates an ambiguity about whether his transformation is permanent, signaling that perhaps Charlie will fall again into old patterns, thereby ruining the new life to which he seems so committed.

Fitzgerald further emphasizes the precariousness of Charlie's transformation by introducing temptation in the form of reminders of his old life. While out to lunch with Honoria (who embodies the upright future Charlie desires), Charlie runs into two former friends from his time in Paris years ago. They are Duncan Schaeffer and Lorraine Quarrles, "ghosts out of the past" who seem to be in denial that the glory days of the '20s are over. Although Charlie describes the encounter as an unwelcome one, and remarks that "his own rhythm was different now," he admits that he still feels a "passionate, provocative attraction" to Lorraine, which symbolizes that he is still irrationally drawn to his old life, despite his new commitments. After Charlie seems to have won permission from Marion Peters to take his daughter back to Prague with him, he receives a flirtatious letter at his hotel from Lorraine, who requests that they meet. The letter reads as both a temptation from days past and a threat to Charlie's success in maintaining Marion's trust, but he reflects that the once-attractive Lorraine now seems "trite, blurred, worn away," and his thoughts drift instead to Honoria and the future. Charlie's steadfastness in the face of his old vices proves, it seems, that he's impervious to the temptations of the old days, and that his significant transformation is lasting and real.

Though Fitzgerald allows readers to glimpse Charlie's resolve, Marion is still skeptical that he has changed enough to merit regaining custody of Honoria. This mistrust is not simply a recognition that his present behavior might not be the whole truth—it's a deeply rooted antipathy, which shows that transformation is not simply a matter of changing behavior, but also of earning redemption for past mistakes. For Marion, Charlie's apparent transformation is less meaningful in light of Charlie's prior behavior to Helen (Charlie's wife and Marion's sister). Marion sees Charlie as having been responsible in some way for Helen's death, but Charlie makes a compelling case in his favor, arguing that he has undergone a transformation and that he plans to remain sober. Marion reluctantly cedes control, granting Charlie permission to take Honoria back to Prague. This victory, for Charlie, is a symbolic recognition that Marion—his harshest critic—really believes he has changed.

However, when Duncan Schaeffer and Lorraine Quarrles arrive, uninvited and drunk, at the Peters's family home, it upsets Marion enough that she changes her mind about allowing Charlie to take charge of Honoria. The reversal seems unjust, on the one hand, because Charlie is not entirely to blame for Duncan and Lorraine's intrusion, despite having left the Peters' address with the barman at the **Ritz** so that Duncan would be able to find him there. On the other hand, Duncan and Lorraine's sudden appearance—and its disastrous consequences for Charlie—are a reminder of the irrepressible and un-erasable nature of the past. Even if Charlie truly has changed, Fitzgerald seems to say, there is still a price to be paid. As the story ends, Charlie vows to come back to Paris some day, reasoning that the Peters family "couldn't make him pay forever." Perhaps the truest testament to Charlie's transformation is that, rather than placing blame on Marion and acting the victim, he seems to understand that he has caused enough pain that he may not be able to win redemption—or escape his past—by changing his behavior alone.

ALCOHOL, IMMODERATION, AND COLLAPSE

In "Babylon Revisited," Charlie's life is in shambles as a direct consequence of his abuse of alcohol. Although the story deals directly with other forms of immoderation and vice—including greed and promiscuity—Fitzgerald uses the story of Charlie's struggle with alcoholism to encapsulate his moral point about immoderate behavior inevitably leading to collapse. In this way, Charlie's story echoes the economic cycle of "boom and bust" that led to the Great Depression, which serves as the story's backdrop.

During the late '20s, when Charlie lived in Paris with his wife, Helen, and his daughter, Honoria, he drank heavily, which regularly led him to behave irresponsibly. Reflecting on a late-night drunken escapade in which he stole a tricycle with Lorraine Quarrles, Charlie confesses that the incident was only

"one of many" in which he had behaved so recklessly. Charlie identifies the night he drunkenly locked his wife out of their home as his gravest mistake and "the beginning of the end" of their marriage. Moreover, the incident implicates Charlie in Helen's eventual death, since she contracted pneumonia that night and later died of "heart trouble." Finally, Charlie forfeits guardianship of his daughter while he is "flat on his back" in a sanitarium recovering from his alcohol-induced collapse. Thus, Charlie's immoderate use of alcohol was instrumental in destroying his family, and is therefore also responsible for the suffering he continues to experience in "Babylon Revisited." Importantly, Charlie's recklessness was not limited to his use of alcohol. He also exhibited hubris—or excessive self-confidence—in the boom years of the '20s, even admitting at one point that he felt like "a sort of royalty, almost infallible."

Despite his old habits, Charlie seems to have reformed his behavior. Each time he visits the bar at the **Ritz**—the epicenter of his old life in Paris—he sticks to his new habit of having just one drink every day, as he does throughout the story. Even after learning the devastating news that Marion has changed her mind about allowing him to take Honoria, Charlie refuses the bartender's offer of another drink, thereby showing that he is not going to cope with his loss in his old ways. His moderation in drinking has transformed his perspective. Strolling the streets of Montmartre and surveying the now-empty bars and clubs with sober eyes for the first time, Charlie thinks to himself, "you have to be damn drunk" to enjoy any of it. His newfound sobriety gives him a new perspective not only on Paris, but also on his past self. When he recalls the night he and Lorraine stole the tricycle, he asks himself "how many weeks or months of dissipation to arrive at that condition of utter irresponsibility?"

Through Fitzgerald's careful description, the irresponsibility of Charlie's drinking habit is made to closely parallel the reckless immoderation of the bull market that led to the crash in 1929 (and the Great Depression of the '30s). When defending himself against Marion's accusations that no one can reasonably rely on Charlie to remain sober, Charlie retorts that his drinking only lasted about a year and a half: "from the time we came over until I—collapsed." Within the timeline of the story, this places Charlie's collapse from alcoholism at the same time as the market crash. Therefore, Charlie's personal storyline parallels the broader economic arc of the era—a time of excessive greed and irresponsibility followed by a collapse. This parallel further illustrates the overarching moral point that Fitzgerald seems to be making in this story against excessive or immoderate behavior: that excess is inevitably linked to collapse.

Fitzgerald himself struggled with alcoholism for his entire adult life and drank himself to death at the early age of 44. It is worth noting that in "Babylon Revisited," Fitzgerald does not treat addiction the way contemporary medicine understands addiction (as a disease that makes addicts deserving of help rather than condemnation). Instead, he treats addiction in the more old-fashioned sense, as a moral failing and a symptom of weak character. Thus, for Fitzgerald, alcohol is a fitting parallel to the excesses of the bull market, which were brought about by immoral and uncontrolled greed. But this story came in the middle of Fitzgerald's life, before his own story of alcoholism was completed, and it perhaps reflects an undue optimism about a person's ability to beat addiction through moral reform. Fitzgerald himself tried to quit many times and failed, which complicates the somewhat easy moralism of Fitzgerald using alcohol to embody unchecked vice.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE RITZ

"Babylon Revisited" begins and ends with Charlie having a drink at the Ritz, a fancy hotel. According to Charlie, the Ritz was the epicenter of Paris nightlife for American expatriates in the '20s, and it continues, after the crash, to be a meeting place for the few Americans Charlie still knows in Paris. Charlie reminisces about the parties at the Ritz back when the bar was at its busiest, and although he swears he has put those days behind him, the Ritz seems to have a strong gravitational pull for Charlie, representing the dangerous allure of his old life. The Ritz is the first place Charlie visits upon returning to Paris, and he leaves his address with the barman to give to his old friend Duncan Schaeffer, which further suggests that Charlie might not be fully committed to leaving his old life behind.

However, despite this, Charlie shows moderation in all his visits to the Ritz, never allowing himself more than one drink. Thus, the Ritz is also the place where Charlie proves that he can resist the temptation of his old life. Because of this tension (Charlie being repeatedly drawn back to the Ritz even as he continues to resist the allure of the lifestyle it represents) his presence there remains ambiguous. Put differently, the Ritz is not just a symbol for Charlie's past life and his old drinking habits—it's also symbolic of his inability to shake those old habits completely, and of his own attraction to the impulsive, self-destructive life he used to live. Although Charlie repeatedly denies that he wants a drink, or that he misses the extravagance of his old life, he nevertheless keeps finding himself at the epicenter of his old life: the bar at the Ritz. Just as he is haunted by his past, it seems, Charlie continues to haunt the Ritz.

TOYS

Charlie desperately wants to be more present in Honoria's life. However, because he lives far away and sees her so rarely, he's limited in the ways he is able to feel intimate with her. The primary way Charlie shows his affection for Honoria in "Babylon Revisited" is by buying her toys, but Honoria sees the gifts her father gives her for what they are: an inadequate material substitute for her father's presence in her life. The toys, therefore, symbolize the estrangement of Charlie and Honoria's relationship, despite that they both want to be closer to one another. In a broader sense, Charlie's anger about only being able to give Honoria toys when he wants to give her love and family echoes his ambivalence toward wealth in general. On the one hand, he's glad to be able to give Honoria gifts, but on the other hand he recognizes that the things he most wants cannot be purchased. Just as he boasts about his wealth to show Marion Peters that he can provide for Honoria better than she can, he uses toys to show his daughter that he cares, but in both cases, money alone fails to reassure others that he can be a responsible father, and it fails to get him what he wants, which is a family.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Scribner edition of *The Short Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald* published in 1995.

Section 1 Quotes

"My income last year was bigger than it was when I had money. You see, the Czechs—"

His boasting was for a specific purpose; but after a moment, seeing a faint restiveness in Lincoln's eyes, he changed the subject:

"Those are fine children of yours, well brought up, good manners."

Related Characters: Charlie Wales (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 618

Explanation and Analysis

Although at this point in the story Fitzgerald has yet to explicitly reveal the purpose of Charlie's visit to Paris, it becomes clear later in the story that the "specific purpose" served by Charlie's boasting is that he feels his wealth makes him better qualified than the Peters family to take care of his daughter, Honoria. The trouble with taking this approach, for Charlie, is that Marion is skeptical of him precisely *because* of his wealth, which she associates with recklessness, arrogance, entitlement, and immoderation (in part because she recognizes that it was precisely the unchecked greed of wealthy men like Charlie that led to the market crash of 1929). Therefore, Charlie must strike a delicate balance: he is dependent on his wealth to prove his competence as a caretaker relative to the Peters family, but he must be careful not to give the impression that his wealth will lead him down the path of repeating old mistakes.

A great wave of protectiveness went over him. He thought he knew what to do for her. He believed in character; he wanted to jump back a whole generation and trust in character again as the eternally valuable element. Everything wore out.

Related Characters: Honoria Wales , Charlie Wales

Related Themes:

Page Number: 619

Explanation and Analysis

At dinner with the Peters family, Charlie's thoughts move seamlessly from Honoria to the subject of character. Although neither Fitzgerald nor Charlie explain what Charlie means by "character," the word seems to signify moral strength and integrity, and also seems to be intimately related to his sense of protectiveness over Honoria and his desire to have a family. By saying he wants to "jump back" in time and trust in character, Charlie implies that character was the element he had been lacking which had been responsible for his family slowly falling apart. In this way, Fitzgerald shows readers that Charlie doesn't merely want to go back to how things were when he had a family and he was behaving recklessly. Rather, he wants to build a different kind of family, founded on this eternally valuable element: his newfound strength of character. In this way, Fitzgerald frames Charlie's transformation as a moral one—a process of maturation and character-building—rather than a purely financial one (from riches to rags and back again) or a physical one (from alcoholism to sobriety).

He remembered thousand-franc notes given to an orchestra for playing a single number, hundred-franc notes tossed to a doorman for calling a cab.
But it hadn't been given for nothing.
It had been given, even the most wildly squandered sum, as an offering to destiny that he might not remember the things most worth remembering, the things that now he would always remember—his child taken from his control, his wife escaped to a grave in Vermont.

Related Characters: Honoria Wales , Helen Wales , Charlie Wales

Related Themes:

Page Number: 620

Explanation and Analysis

When Fitzgerald describes Charlie's profligate spending during the boom years as an "offering to destiny that he might not remember" the painful experience of his life spinning out of control, he seems to mean that Charlie used drinking and partying to repress the difficult realities of his life. This, despite the fact that those difficult realities were largely the product of his excessive drinking and partying. It's worth noting that the language Fitzgerald uses to describe Charlie's loss of his family portrays Charlie as a passive rather than an active agent in the events— his child "taken," his wife "escaped." On some level, this perhaps suggests that Charlie has failed to accept responsibility for his own role in bringing about the destruction of his family, but on another level it speaks to Fitzgerald's own feeling of helplessness as an alcoholic, somebody who seems to have realized the extent of the damage he caused only after it had been done. Although it can be easy to slip into a moralistic perspective when dealing with addiction—and Fitzgerald himself does so quite often—this is a moment in which Charlie's alcoholism is portrayed with slightly more sympathy than usual, as Charlie shows himself to be someone who suffered deeply even as he caused others deep suffering.

Section 2 Quotes

"First, we're going to that toy store in the Rue Saint-Honoré and buy you anything you like. And then we're going to the vaudeville at the Empire."
She hesitated. "I like it about the vaudeville, but not the toy store."
"Why not?"
"Well, you brought me this doll." She had it with her. "And I've got lots of things. And we're not rich any more, are we?"
"We never were. But today you are to have anything you want."
"All right," she agreed resignedly.

Related Characters: Honoria Wales , Charlie Wales (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 621

Explanation and Analysis

Honoria's response is notable because it's unusual for a nine-year-old: she tells her father that she doesn't want to go to the toy store despite his having offered to buy her whatever she wants. It implies that she is aware of the ways in which her father uses gifts as a substitute for less tangible expressions of his love and affection—and moreover that she would prefer to have her father in her life rather than having the toys he brings her to compensate for his absence. Charlie himself seems aware of (and frustrated by) his inability to provide for his daughter in the ways she desires. This frustration echoes his ambivalence toward wealth in general. On the one hand, he's glad to be able to give Honoria gifts, but on the other hand he recognizes that the things he most wants cannot be purchased. Honoria, too, resignedly accepts that this is the reality of her relationship with her father—at least for now—by accepting his gifts.

Somehow, an unwelcome encounter. They liked him because he was functioning, because he was serious; they wanted to see him, because he was stronger than they were now, because they wanted to draw a certain sustenance from his strength.

Related Characters: Lorraine Quarrles , Duncan Schaeffer , Charlie Wales

Related Themes:

Page Number: 623

Explanation and Analysis

Charlie feels repelled by his encounter with Duncan and Lorraine, and although he himself does not remark that it surprises him to feel this way, his repulsion seems strange given the fact that the day before he willingly left his brother-in-law's address with the barman at the Ritz so that Duncan would be able to get in touch. By lunchtime the next day, he seems to have changed his mind—perhaps as a consequence of seeing his daughter again and remembering his priorities, or perhaps simply because seeing them again in person gives him a frame of reference that helps him realize how much he himself has changed. And yet, it is difficult to separate the arrogance and condescension inherent to what he says about Lorraine and Duncan from the hubristic behavior that led him to ruin in the '20s. This raises the question of whether Charlie has undergone a fundamental change of character by learning humility, or whether he is just as dangerously egotistical as he was before the crash. The authenticity and permanence of Charlie's transformation is perhaps the biggest uncertainty in "Babylon Revisited."

"Daddy, I want to come and live with you," she said suddenly.
His heart leaped; he had wanted it to come like this.
"Aren't you perfectly happy?"
"Yes, but I love you better than anybody. And you love me better than anybody, don't you, now that mummy's dead?"
"Of course I do. But you won't always like me best, honey. You'll grow up and meet somebody your own age and go marry him and forget you ever had a daddy."
"Yes, that's true," she agreed tranquilly.

Related Characters: Honoria Wales , Charlie Wales (speaker), Helen Wales

Related Themes:

Page Number: 623

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Charlie reveals the extent of his anxiety about missing out on Honoria's childhood. He fears the day that she'll be grown enough to love another man, since that will be the day (he reasons) on which she'll forget her father. It's a somewhat strange response to her question, but it speaks to his own loneliness and desire to be loved that, before he has even succeeded in regaining custody of his daughter, he is worried about losing her. It also points to a major question that Fitzgerald leaves unresolved about Charlie, and that is whether he truly has Honoria's best interests in mind when he comes to Paris to get her back, or whether he merely *thinks* that he does, but is actually acting selfishly to pursue his own desire for a family. Although he clearly cares for his daughter, one of his moral ambiguities as a character is that he often speaks about home and family in terms of his own desire for those forms of comfort and security, without speaking to a desire to provide them for Honoria.

Section 3 Quotes

As I told you, I haven't had more than a drink a day for over a year, and I take that drink deliberately, so that the idea of alcohol won't get too big in my imagination. You see the idea?"
"No," said Marion succinctly.
"It's a sort of stunt I set myself. It keeps the matter in proportion."
"I get you," said Lincoln. "You don't want to admit it's got any attraction for you."
"Something like that. Sometimes I forget and don't take it. But I try to take it."

Related Characters: Marion Peters , Lincoln Peters , Charlie Wales (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 624

Explanation and Analysis

Charlie's presentation of his strategy for remaining sober comes across as overly theoretical, and Marion responds flatly and cynically—as if she sees it as a lame justification for continuing to drink instead of quitting altogether. Here, as elsewhere, Marion acts as a foil to Charlie's blithe self-assuredness, reminding readers to ask themselves whether they themselves should believe in Charlie's claims to have gained control over his alcohol abuse. Addictions like alcoholism in the 1930s were typically treated as a moral failing (or a sign of a weak will) rather than as a medical issue, and Charlie is no exception, seeming to believe that handling his own alcoholism is simply a matter of exercising restraint and "keeping the matter in proportion." As a result, he continues to have one drink a day, but rather than quelling Marion's suspicion, this habit only seems to make her *more* doubtful that Charlie has changed and more wary that he will relapse.

"I don't blame Marion," Charlie said slowly, "but I think she can have entire confidence in me. I had a good record up to three years ago. Of course, it's within human possibilities I might go wrong any time. But if we wait much longer I'll lose Honoria's childhood and my chance for a home." He shook his head, "I'll simply lose her, don't you see?"

Related Characters: Marion Peters , Lincoln Peters , Charlie Wales (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 626

Explanation and Analysis

Here, as elsewhere, Charlie frames his plea for guardianship over Honoria rather selfishly—in terms of what *he* will lose rather than what *she* stands to gain. When he argues that Marion should have "entire confidence" in him, he doesn't acknowledge or take responsibility for his failures and missteps. Charlie is a prideful character, who struggles throughout his conversation with Marion not to defend himself or refute her accusations (many of which, it seems, are not unfounded). However, Charlie's desperation for a home and a family expose a major re-prioritization of his values since he left Paris. Rather than chasing pleasure and abandoning all responsibility, he now seems single-mindedly devoted to the task of winning his daughter back, even if it means swallowing his pride.

Marion shuddered suddenly; part of her saw that Charlie's feet were planted on the earth now, and her own maternal feeling recognized the naturalness of his desire; but she had lived for a long time with a prejudice—a prejudice founded on a curious disbelief in her sister's happiness, and which, in the shock of one terrible night, had turned to hatred for him. It had all happened at a point in her life where the discouragement of ill health and adverse circumstances made it necessary for her to believe in tangible villainy and a tangible villain.
"I can't help what I think!" she cried out suddenly. "How much you were responsible for Helen's death, I don't know. It's something you'll have to square with your own conscience."

Related Characters: Marion Peters (speaker), Helen Wales , Charlie Wales

Related Themes:

Page Number: 626-627

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the "terrible night" refers to the night Charlie locked Helen out of their home in a snowstorm and she contracted a nearly deadly case of pneumonia. This was the night Marion's distaste for Charlie became a real hatred, but Fitzgerald also suggests that Marion's need for "tangible villainy" may have arisen in response to the overwhelmingly *intangible* villainy that led to the Great Depression—and that Charlie was a fitting target for her anger because of his wealth and immoderation. Put differently: it seems much of the rage Marion directs at Charlie is directed at him because she sees him as a symbol of something she feels herself to be the victim of—specifically, the upper-class. Although her resentment of Charlie is based partly in their class differences and the power his wealth gives him, it is tangled up in other emotions, such as her sisterly sense of devotion, which causes her to accuse Charlie of being responsible for Helen's death.

Section 4 Quotes

"There's another thing." Lincoln hesitated. "While you and Helen were tearing around Europe throwing money away, we were just getting along. I didn't touch any of the prosperity because I never got ahead enough to carry anything but my insurance. I think Marion felt there was some kind of injustice in it—you not even working toward the end, and getting richer and richer."
"It went just as quick as it came," said Charlie.

Related Characters: Charlie Wales, Lincoln Peters (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 629

Explanation and Analysis

Over lunch with Charlie, Lincoln confirms what Fitzgerald has elsewhere implied: that Marion's resentment of Charlie is based, at least in part, on their class differences. She seems to see the power Charlie's wealth gives him as being unjust because he has not worked hard to earn it. Furthermore, his immoral behavior makes the ease of his lifestyle even more of an insult to Marion, because she sees her family as being both moral and hardworking but still having less wealth. Charlie's ambivalence toward wealth—as well as, perhaps, his lack of empathy about financial hardship—is evident in his response to Lincoln: instead of acknowledging that his behavior had been immoderate, or that he understood Marion's feelings, he

defends himself by simply saying that the money "went just as quick as it came."

His first feeling was one of awe that he had actually, in his mature years, stolen a tricycle and pedaled Lorraine all over the Étoile between the small hours and dawn. In retrospect it was a nightmare. Locking out Helen didn't fit in with any other act of his life, but the tricycle incident did--it was one of many. How many weeks or months of dissipation to arrive at that condition of utter irresponsibility?

Related Characters: Helen Wales , Lorraine Quarrles , Charlie Wales

Related Themes:

Page Number: 629

Explanation and Analysis

Charlie's use of the word "dissipation" is a clear and direct reference to an earlier passage when, strolling the streets of Montmartre, Charlie suddenly thinks he understands the meaning of the word dissipate: "to make nothing out of something." Now, looking back on the "nightmare" of his year of drinking in Paris, he seems able to acknowledge that he himself had been dissipating, or turning into "nothing." Given that it seems Charlie and Lorraine may have had an attraction that went beyond simple flirtation, his altered attitude toward that time is something of a testament to the fact that his old partying lifestyle no longer attracts him.

He tried to picture how Lorraine had appeared to him then—very attractive; Helen was unhappy about it, though she said nothing. Yesterday, in the restaurant, Lorraine had seemed trite, blurred, worn away. He emphatically did not want to see her, and he was glad Alix had not given away his hotel address. It was a relief to think, instead, of Honoria, to think of Sundays spent with her and of saying good morning to her and of knowing she was there in his house at night, drawing her breath in the darkness.

Related Characters: Helen Wales , Honoria Wales , Lorraine Quarrles , Charlie Wales

Related Themes:

Page Number: 629-630

Explanation and Analysis

Charlie reflects on his memory of Lorraine just after receiving a letter from her in which she asks him to meet her. The fact that "Helen was unhappy" about Charlie and Lorraine's friendship is just one of several pieces of evidence that there may have been an affair between the two, and yet Charlie declares that he "emphatically did not want to see her." This is significant in part because Lorraine's letter threatens to draw Charlie back into the orbit of his old social circle in a moment at which he seems to have gotten what he came to Paris for—his daughter. Instead of allowing himself to be tempted, however, Charlie's thoughts drift to Honoria, indicating that his goals and desires have shifted away from pleasure and romance toward home and family.

Section 5 Quotes

"I heard that you lost a lot in the crash."
"I did," and he added grimly, "but I lost everything I wanted in the boom."
"Selling short."
"Something like that."

Related Characters: Paul , Charlie Wales (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 633

Explanation and Analysis

Charlie's acknowledgement that he lost everything he wanted in the boom encapsulates the moral point that Fitzgerald makes in "Babylon Revisited"—that, just as the bull market led to the Depression, all forms of immoderation inevitably lead to a crash. The irony of the ending is that, as Charlie comes to a fuller realization of the error in his ways, he also seems to realize that simply becoming aware of the extent of the pain he caused is not enough to win him redemption. By saying that he lost everything he wanted, Charlie seems to acknowledge that perhaps there can be no recovering what he has lost. Helen is gone, and Honoria's childhood seems to be slipping by more quickly each day, leaving Charlie, perhaps for the first time, to confront his own irreparable loss.

There wasn't much he could do now except send Honoria some things; he would send her a lot of things tomorrow. He thought rather angrily that this was just money—he had given so many people money. . . .
"No, no more," he said to another waiter. "What do I owe you?"

Related Characters: Charlie Wales (speaker), Helen Wales , Honoria Wales

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 633

Explanation and Analysis

It's worth noting that the story ends at the Ritz bar, where it began, with Charlie speaking the very same words to the bartender: "No, no more." This parallel highlights the fact that he will leave Paris just as he came: without his daughter.

The repeated words "No, no more," in this case, can be read as a continuation of the preceding thought, which ends in an ellipsis, as if to suggest that Charlie is saying "No more" to money in general—having until now used wealth as a substitute for character, a family, and a home. In this light, the language Charlie uses in his question to the waiter ("What do I owe you?") can also be interpreted to suggest that he has begun to recognize that, in order to win forgiveness, he will have to begin to understand what he owes to his family.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

SECTION 1

The story opens with Charlie Wales, the protagonist, talking to Alix, the bartender at the **Ritz** in Paris. Alix is answering Charlie's questions about people who used to frequent the bar a year and a half ago, but most of them have left Paris—except for a man named Mr. Schaeffer, according to Alix. Since Charlie hasn't yet decided which hotel to stay in, he writes down his brother-in-law's address and tells Alix to give it to Mr. Schaeffer if he sees him.

The conversation between Charlie and Alix not only establishes that Paris has mostly emptied of Charlie's old acquaintances, but also that Charlie has some desire to re-connect with the people he knew during his time there. The narrator doesn't share any information about Mr. Schaeffer aside from his name, but Charlie's seemingly innocuous decision to leave his brother-in-law's address for Mr. Schaeffer will later prove to have disastrous consequences.

Charlie is not disappointed to find Paris is so empty, but he finds "the stillness in the **Ritz** bar … strange and portentous," since it used to be such a lively scene. From the moment he got out of the taxi, everything seemed different—the bored doorman, the silent women's room, the deserted bar. The head barman Charlie had known "in the latter days of the bull market" is out of town, so Charlie is talking instead to Alix. "No, no more," Charlie says, presumably declining to have another drink. When Charlie explains that he's "going slow these days," Alix remarks that Charlie was "going pretty strong a couple of years ago." Charlie responds that he has "stuck to it" for a year and a half.

When Charlie lived in Paris, the Ritz was the epicenter of his social life there. The desertedness of the Ritz is therefore symbolic, for Charlie, of a much larger change that is taking place: not only that Paris has been deserted, but that the crash of the "bull market" of the 1920s has transformed the world as he knew it. Charlie's brief exchange with Alix—and his refusal of a second drink—is the first indication in the story that Charlie doesn't drink the way he used to.

Alix asks Charlie about the "conditions" in America, but Charlie responds that he hasn't been there for months, since he works in Prague, "representing a couple concerns there." Charlie then goes back to reminiscing about the old days and asks what has become of someone named Claude Fessenden. Alix explains that Claude doesn't come here anymore because he ran up a huge bill over the course of a year and then gave the head barman a bad check. "Such a dandy fellow," Alix recalls, "now he's all bloated up."

Alix's brief story about Claude further establishes that the times have changed, and the story can even be read as an encapsulation of the time more generally. Like so many others, Claude has evidently struggled to adjust to the austerity of the economic depression, and as a result he racked up a tab he couldn't pay off. Alix speaks about Claude as though he were a sad, distorted version of his former self, bloated from drinking. This aside, however brief, helps set the overall mood of the story, in which Charlie's experience of loss looms large.

Charlie watches a group of "strident queens"—effeminate men he assumes are gay—sit down in a corner and he muses that "nothing affects them. … Stocks rise and fall, people loaf or work, but they go on forever." Alix asks how long Charlie is in town and Charlie tells him he's here for four or five days to see his "little girl." Alix is surprised that Charlie has a daughter.

The attention Charlie gives to the "strident queens" in the corner provides him with another opportunity to reflect on the volatility of the time by calling attention to the ways that some things seem never to change. Alix's surprise that Charlie has a daughter suggests that perhaps Charlie's behavior, as long as Alix has known him, has not been that of someone with the responsibility of a family to look after.

Charlie goes outside to catch a taxi, and directs the driver out of the way so he can see a bit of Paris in the late afternoon light. As he crosses the Seine and feels "the sudden provincial quality of the Left Bank," Charlie realizes that he never once ate at a cheap restaurant in Paris, and now he wishes he had. In fact, he thinks he "spoiled" the city for himself—that the days came and went until suddenly "two years were gone, and everything was gone," and finally he himself was gone.

Charlie's decision to take a detour reveals his nostalgia for the time he spent in Paris—a fondness for old memories which he will later claim not to feel. Despite his nostalgia, his realization that he never ate at a cheap restaurant, and his subsequent reflection that he spoiled the city for himself, imply that he feels that his wealth robbed him of some authenticity of experience.

Charlie is 35 years old and handsome. He furrows his brow and feels a cramp in his belly as he rings his brother-in-law's doorbell. A maid opens the door and a nine-year-old girl darts out excitedly from behind her, shrieking "Daddy!" This is his daughter, Honoria. Charlie and Honoria embrace warmly, and then she leads him into the home's salon, where Charlie's brother-in-law, Lincoln Peters, his sister-in-law, Marion Peters, and their two children are all waiting. When Charlie greets Marion, he's careful to avoid "either feigned enthusiasm or dislike," but Marion herself barely tries to conceal her "unalterable distrust" of Charlie. Lincoln and Charlie greet each other "in a friendly way."

By this point in the story, it's not yet clear why Charlie doesn't live with his own daughter, but it is clear from Fitzgerald's description that Charlie is nervous for the interaction he is about to have. In contrast to Honoria's uncontainable excitement at seeing her father, Marion's reception of Charlie is palpably cold, suggesting not only that Charlie's anxiety stems from his frustrated relationship to Marion, but that there are as-yet unnamed skeletons in this family's closet.

The room is warm and "comfortably American" with the three children playing nearby, but Charlie can't relax. He summons confidence from his daughter, who is playing with a doll he brought her. In response to a question from Lincoln about business in Prague, Charlie explains that he's doing very well, having made a larger income last year than ever before. But he cuts himself off, noticing that his boasting—although it has a "specific purpose"—has begun to bother Lincoln. He changes the subject by complimenting Lincoln's children.

Charlie reveals that, financially speaking, he has recovered from the market crash of 1929. This is noteworthy not only because it is unusual (for many people it took a decade to recover from the crash), but also because Charlie seems to think that bragging about his wealth will give him some desirable advantage—though in what sense it is not yet clear. Lincoln's restiveness, and Charlie's sensitivity to it, suggests that money may be a sore subject for him and his family.

Marion Peters is "a tall woman with worried eyes" who was once quite attractive, though Charlie never thought so. The two had always disliked each other. Marion asks how Charlie is liking being back in Paris and he replies that it's funny to see so few Americans around. Marion declares her delight at the sudden departure of all the Americans, explaining that while her family has "suffered like everybody," she's grateful that everyone has stopped assuming she's a millionaire, and "on the whole it's a good deal pleasanter." Charlie responds that it was nice while it lasted—to have been "a sort of royalty" as an American in Paris during the boom years, "almost infallible, with a sort of magic" around him.

Charlie and Marion clearly feel very differently about the boom years in Paris. Marion barely tries to conceal her distaste for the extravagance of the now-disappeared Americans, whereas Charlie once again grows nostalgic. The brief exchange is evidence of a difference in class between Marion and Charlie, but also in their moral views of extravagance more generally. Oblivious to Marion's disapproval, Charlie reveals what had been his own hubristic attitude during the boom years by saying he felt "infallible"—a comment that, in light of how awry everything went, carries a certain irony, of which Charlie seems unaware. Again, his nostalgia for the old days casts doubt on the authenticity of his transformation.

Charlie lets it slip that he was at a bar earlier in the afternoon, but immediately realizes his mistake. Marion quips that she thinks Charlie would have "had enough of bars," and he explains that he has "one drink every afternoon, and no more." When Lincoln offers Charlie a cocktail, Charlie repeats that he's already had his one drink. Marion, with all the coldness of her dislike for Charlie evident in her voice, says she hopes he sticks to it.

Marion's response to Charlie's admission that he had been at the bar is the first clear indication that her distrust of him stems from his drinking. His response—that he only has one drink a day—is understandably not reassuring to Marion. Charlie's habit of having one drink a day, while moderate enough, continues throughout the story to raise the question of whether he will relapse into his old patterns of alcohol abuse.

Charlie reacts to Marion's harsh treatment simply by smiling. He can't afford to react temperamentally—he came here to accomplish something, and Marion's aggression toward him gives him an upper hand. He will wait for one of the Peters to raise the subject they know he came to Paris to discuss.

Although Fitzgerald doesn't yet reveal Charlie's reasons for coming to Paris—or what he needs to discuss with the Peters—he makes it clear that Charlie feels he doesn't yet have the upper hand, and must therefore be careful not to lose control of the situation (or of himself). Here, as in other exchanges between Marion and Charlie, maintaining composure is equated with gaining control over the situation, while behaving immoderately reveals a lack of control.

At dinner, Charlie wonders to himself whether Honoria is more similar to him or her mother, Helen. He hopes she does not combine whatever qualities had led him and Helen to disaster. He feels protective of her and thinks he knows "what to do for her." He wishes he could go back in time and trust in character as the "eternally valuable element," reflecting that everything else seems to wear out.

Without saying much about what ended his marriage, Charlie reveals that it ended in "disaster." He seems to associate the idea of character not only with moral strength, but also with family, since he jumps from thinking about his daughter to feeling regretful of his underestimation of the value of character in the past. The phrase "eternally valuable" implies a contrast between character and money, which, as the crash of 1929 proved, can lose its value overnight. Therefore, this reflection indicates a shift in Charlie's values, from valuing money to valuing character and family.

After dinner, Charlie leaves the Peters' home, eager to wander the streets of Paris at night "with clearer and more judicious eyes than those of other days." He goes to see Josephine Baker perform, then walks toward Montmartre to stroll past the cabarets and the bars he used to frequent. He passes one bar where he remembers spending so much time and money, and pops his head into another "ancient rendezvous" only to withdraw immediately—the club was empty, and the man at the door was frighteningly desperate to attract clientele. Other bars have disappeared completely, or otherwise become tourist traps. "You have to be damn drunk," Charlie thinks to himself.

Charlie seems to think he has transformed enough in the span of a year and a half that his eyes are significantly wiser now, and yet he leaves dinner to visit the neighborhood where he used to do all his drinking and partying, begging the question of whether he has truly changed, or is only deluding himself. It is unclear whether the bars and clubs he used to love would seem so unappealing to him now if they had not all been deserted when the market crashed. In any case, he attributes his ability to enjoy such a grim scene to his drunkenness, suggesting that he sees alcohol as a fuel for immoderate and depraved behavior.

What Charlie once saw as the "effort and ingenuity" of Montmartre, he now sees as childish "catering to vice and waste." He thinks that he now understands the meaning of the word dissipate: "to make nothing out of something." Looking back on his days of drinking and squandering wild sums of money in this neighborhood, he regrets that he allowed his life to get so wildly out of control that his child was taken away from him and his wife "escaped to a grave in Vermont." A woman speaks to him on the street and he buys her coffee and eggs, gives her 20 francs, and takes a taxi home.

Charlie reveals that his wife is now dead and his daughter was taken from his custody, adding a greater sense of gravity to his reminiscences about the years he spent drinking in Paris. It is now clear that he sees the loss of his wife and daughter as being related to his recklessness and drinking—though it's not yet clear what occurred or how. When Charlie gives the woman on the street 20 francs (roughly equivalent to ten dollars in today's money) the act of generosity seems to betray some feeling of guilt on his part—as if he feels he has a debt to pay for the destruction he has caused.

SECTION 2

The next day Charlie wakes up feeling refreshed, the "depression of yesterday" gone. He takes Honoria to lunch at Le Grand Vatel, the one restaurant he can think of that doesn't remind him of the decadence of the old days. Over lunch, he tells Honoria he's going to take her to the **toy** store to buy her anything she wants and then to a vaudeville show. Honoria protests that she doesn't want to go to the toy store—she already has lots of things, and he already brought her a doll—but she unenthusiastically agrees anyway.

Honoria's initial refusal of Charlie's offer to buy her whatever she wants at the toy store is noteworthy because it seems unusual for a nine-year-old girl. Charlie, searching for ways to feel close to his daughter, resorts to offering to buy her things, but clever Honoria seems to see the gifts Charlie gives her for what they are: an inadequate material substitute for her father's presence in her life.

Back when Charlie had lived with Helen, and Honoria had been taken care of by a nurse, he was a stricter father, but now he tries to "be both parents to her." He tells Honoria that he wants to get to know her, so he introduces himself, which Honoria finds funny. She introduces herself as well, and Charlie asks whether she's married. When she says no, Charlie points out that she has a child, gesturing to the doll. Honoria thinks quickly, and says that she was married once, but her husband is dead.

Charlie and Honoria's interactions are awkward because they aren't used to seeing each other, and Charlie struggles to find ways to fulfill the roles of "both parents." This is a somewhat ironic goal for him to have as someone who, at present, barely even fulfills the role of father. Charlie's lunch date with Honoria underscores the newness and effort involved, for Charlie, in prioritizing family over money or pleasure.

Charlie asks Honoria whether she likes her aunt and uncle, Marion and Lincoln, and she replies that she does, but then asks if the reason she doesn't live with her father is that her mother is dead. Charlie responds that Honoria must stay in Paris to learn French, and because it would have been hard for him to take care of her as well as the Peters family had. Honoria responds that she doesn't need to be taken care of because she does everything herself.

Honoria's question about why she doesn't live with her father—as well as her assertion that she doesn't need to be taken care of—are evidence that she longs to feel closer to her father. Meanwhile, it seems that Charlie is cautiously and subtly beginning to lay the groundwork for a plan to regain custody of Honoria (and in doing so, to rebuild a family).

Suddenly Charlie and Honoria's lunch is interrupted by Duncan Schaeffer and Lorraine Quarrles, "two ghosts out of the past" who greet him enthusiastically. Duncan is a friend from college and Lorraine is a "lovely, pale blonde of thirty." Lorraine explains that her husband is not with her because they're "poor as hell," and Duncan suggests that they come back and all sit together, but Charlie declines. Despite finding Lorraine very attractive, "his own rhythm was different now."

Part of the irony of Duncan and Lorraine running into Charlie at lunch is that he purposely chose a location that he thought of as being far-removed from his old social life. Therefore, the sudden appearance of these two "ghosts" seems an affirmation of the inescapability of the past. Lorraine's explanation that she is "poor as hell" rings somewhat hollow in light of the fact that she is taking time to vacation by herself in Paris. Fitzgerald seems to be pointing to a general lack of perspective among the wealthy about the conditions most people live in. Charlie seems to find still more evidence of his change of character in the fact of his not finding Lorraine as attractive as he once did.

However, Duncan and Lorraine are persistent. They offer dinner, and Charlie declines again, saying he'll call them. Lorraine supposes aloud that Charlie must be sober, and Charlie nods toward Honoria, which makes them laugh. Duncan asks for Charlie's address but Charlie tells him he's not settled into a hotel and changes the subject, telling them that he and Honoria are going to see the vaudeville at the Empire. Lorraine suggests that she and Duncan come along, but Charlie tells them he and Honoria have an errand to run. At that, Duncan and Lorraine depart. Charlie feels the encounter with Duncan and Lorraine was unwelcome, and supposes that they liked him because he was "stronger than they were now"—that they wanted to see him because "they wanted to draw a certain sustenance from his strength."

Lorraine and Duncan are portrayed as characters who have yet to sober up and move on from the wasteful and opulent lifestyle they lived in the 1920s. Charlie feels a sense of superiority when he doesn't agree to make time to see them, which is presumably why he lies about not having a hotel yet. It is telling, however, that Lorraine is able to discern so quickly that Charlie is sober, since it implies that his abuse of alcohol was a primary characteristic of his in the time they knew each other. That Charlie attributes his sobriety to Honoria illustrates again that he has chosen to prioritize family as a virtue over alcohol as a vice.

At the Empire, Honoria proudly refuses to sit on Charlie's folded coat, prompting him to worry that she will "crystalize" into a fully formed individual before he has an opportunity to influence her development at all. During the intermission, Charlie and Honoria run into Duncan and Lorraine and agree to sit with them for a drink. At the table, Charlie is barely listening to Lorraine. He watches Honoria instead.

Charlie is anxious that Honoria will grow up before he has a chance to parent her, a concern that adds urgency to his quest to get his daughter back. Charlie's inability to listen to Duncan and Lorraine over drinks at intermission illustrates how dramatically his priorities have shifted. Instead of seeking pleasure in drinking and abandoning responsibility, he now single-mindedly seeks the pleasure of being responsible for a family.

In the taxi home, Charlie asks Honoria whether she ever thinks about her mother. She answers vaguely that sometimes she does. Charlie says he doesn't want Honoria to forget her, and reminds Honoria that her mother loved her very much. Honoria says that she wants to come live with Charlie, which pleases him to hear. She says that she loves him better than anybody, and asks whether he loves her more than anybody "now that mummy's dead." Charlie says he does, but reminds her that someday she'll grow up and meet a man and forget all about her father.

Charlie's response to Honoria's question reveals the depth of his anxiety about missing out on her childhood. He fears the day that she'll be grown enough to love another man—since that will be the day she'll no longer love her father more than anyone else. It's a somewhat strange response to her question, but it speaks to his own loneliness and desire to be loved that before he has even regained custody of his daughter, he is worried about losing her.

When the taxi arrives at the Peters' home, Charlie doesn't go in because he's coming back later and wants to save his energy for "the thing he must say then." He tells Honoria to wave from the window when she gets inside.

Fitzgerald still has not explicitly stated the purpose of Charlie's visit, but he foreshadows a difficult confrontation by suggesting that Charlie must steel his nerves beforehand.

SECTION 3

Lincoln and Marion Peters are waiting anxiously in the salon of their home for Charlie to ask the question he came to Paris to ask. Lincoln's nervousness suggests he and Marion have already been discussing the matter. Charlie launches right into it, explaining that he's "awfully anxious to have a home" with Honoria in it. He says that although he was "acting badly" three years ago, "things have changed now," and he hasn't had more than a single drink each day for over a year. He says that he takes his one drink "deliberately, so that the idea of alcohol won't get too big" in his imagination. Charlie asks Marion and Lincoln if they understand, and Marion says "no," but Lincoln says that he does.

Charlie reveals that he has come to Paris to convince Marion and Lincoln Peters to allow him to take Honoria back to Prague with him, and the debate that ensues very quickly turns to the subject of his drinking habit. Charlie's rationale for having one drink a day seems to be that it will keep him from craving alcohol too strongly and having a catastrophic relapse as a result, but the very suggestion that he might have to worry about a relapse seems to cause Marion concern—and indeed, it raises real questions about the permanence of Charlie's supposed transformation.

Charlie carries on by saying that he "couldn't afford to drink" in his position, since he has business matters to attend to, and his sister is coming from Burlington to keep house, and he wants Honoria. He reminds Marion and Lincoln that even when he and Helen were not getting along, they didn't let it influence Honoria. Then he asks them what they think of his request. He knows that he will have to "take a beating," but he is determined to control his temper, since he sees it as his only chance of winning.

Charlie anticipates an unfriendly response from Marion, but he is prepared to take the position of humility rather than righteousness if it means getting what he wants. It's one of several moments in the story in which he seems prepared to pay for his past transgressions in order to earn redemption, but it is unclear whether he would be able to "take a beating" in this way if he didn't feel it served his purposes (which in turn begs the question of whether he is truly repentant).

Lincoln begins by saying that he and Marion have been discussing the matter since they received Charlie's letter a month ago. He goes on to say that they are glad to have Honoria in their home, but then Marion interjects, asking Charlie how long he's going to remain sober. Charlie says he hopes permanently, and explains that he never started drinking heavily until he quit his job and moved to Paris with nothing to do, at which point he and Helen — but Marion interjects again, telling Charlie to leave Helen out of it, and that she can't bear to hear him talk about her "like that." Charlie thinks to himself that he was never even sure that the sisters liked each other very much in life. He says that his drinking lasted a year and a half, from the time he moved to Paris to the time he collapsed.

Marion makes it clear that Charlie's sobriety is the primary concern for her in determining his trustworthiness. Although Marion tells Charlie to leave Helen out of the issue, Charlie suspects that she is actually just looking for any opportunity to act aggressively toward him. However, Marion silences Charlie just as it seems he is about to suggest that Helen, too, had been a heavy drinker. Charlie's revelation that he "collapsed"—presumably as a result of his drinking—gives more detail about the "disaster" that was the end of his marriage.

Marion states that her duty is to Helen, and that ever since the night Charlie "did that terrible thing," he hasn't existed for her. When Helen was dying, she asked Marion to take care of Honoria. Marion holds it against Charlie that at that time he had been in a sanitarium. She says she will never forget the morning Helen came to her door soaking wet, having been locked out by Charlie. Marion's mention of the evening angers Charlie, and he begins to explain, but Marion cuts him off, saying she doesn't feel up for "going over that again."

A clearer picture is beginning to emerge of why Marion harbors such an intense resentment of Charlie. Not only does she seem to think that Charlie mistreated her sister, but she also resents him for being unable to care for his dying wife or his own daughter because he was recovering from an alcoholism-related collapse. Charlie's instinct to defend himself seems natural, but is perhaps also an indication that he has yet to accept responsibility for his actions.

Lincoln chimes in to suggest that the real question is whether Marion has enough confidence in Charlie to give him legal guardianship of Honoria. Charlie says he doesn't blame Marion, but that she can have total confidence in him—and that he's afraid if he waits too much longer he'll have lost "Honoria's childhood" and his "chance for a home." Marion asks why he didn't think of all this before. Charlie says that he did, but at the time he agreed to let Marion take care of Honoria he was broke and flat on his back in the sanitarium, willing to do anything he thought might make Helen happy. But now, he says, he's behaving "damn well."

Here, Charlie equates his desire for "a home" with his fear of missing out on Honoria's childhood, showing that for him, conceptions of home and family are inextricably connected. Lincoln, as elsewhere in the story, plays the role of an intermediary in the conflict between Charlie and Marion by trying to steer the conversation toward what really matters: the question of whether Charlie has changed.

Marion takes issue with Charlie's use of the word "damn," which startles Charlie. He realizes the extent of Marion's dislike for him, and grows concerned about the idea of leaving Honoria in the care of someone so hostile toward him. But when Lincoln points out that Marion has never before taken issue with anyone's use of the word "damn," Charlie feels he has won a point. He takes the opportunity to add that he's now able to give Honoria "certain advantages." He intends to bring a French governess back to Prague with him, and he has a lease on a new apartment. But he stops himself, realizing that he's flaunting his wealth in front of people with an income half the size of his.

Here, Charlie uses his wealth to gain the upper hand in the argument over who will be Honoria's guardian. This raises a moral question about whether Charlie is using the power his money gives him to buy whatever he wants—in this case, his daughter—just as he has in the past. Charlie's complicated relationship to his own wealth is part of what makes him a morally ambiguous character: although he claims to no longer be the wealthy playboy he once was, he continues to wield his wealth as a source of power.

Marion admits that Charlie can give Honoria "more luxuries," recalling that while Charlie and Helen were "throwing away money," she and Lincoln were "watching every ten francs." She supposes Charlie will start "doing it again," but Charlie denies it, saying he worked hard for ten years before he got lucky enough in the markets to be able to quit working, but he's learned his lesson. In a moment of tense silence, Charlie feels a desire to have a drink for the first time in a year, but he feels certain now that Lincoln wants him to take Honoria.

Marion isn't specific about what she means when she suggests that because Charlie has money he will start "doing it again." She may be referring to the way he threw away money in the past, or to his drinking, but the ambiguity of her statement creates an equivalence between these different forms of immoderation. In this way, Marion acts as a moral authority in the story, seeming to believe that all forms of immoderation lead to ruin.

Marion suddenly shudders. She can see that Charlie has his "feet planted on the earth now," but she has harbored a prejudice against him for a long time, thinking him responsible for her sister's unhappiness. The night Helen was locked out, her prejudice turned to hatred—in a moment when the adverse circumstances of her own life made it necessary for her to believe in "tangible villainy and a tangible villain." She exclaims that she can't help what she thinks, and that Charlie will have to sort out with his conscience to what extent he is responsible for his wife's death.

Marion's hatred for Charlie is founded as much in his actions as it is in her own need to have something to despise. Fitzgerald is perhaps suggesting that Marion's need for "tangible villainy" arose in response to the intangible *villainy that led to the Great Depression, and that Charlie was a fitting target for her anger because of his wealth and immoderation. In light of this, it is difficult to know how much weight to give to Marion's very serious accusation that Charlie is in some way responsible for Helen's death.*

An "electric current of agony" surges through Charlie, but he controls himself. Lincoln asserts that he never thought Charlie was responsible for Helen's death, and Charlie states that Helen died of heart trouble. Marion repeats Charlie's words as though "the phrase had another meaning for her." In the moments after her outburst, it becomes clear to everyone in the room that Charlie has gained control over the situation. Marion tells Charlie he can do what he likes, but that if it were her child she'd "rather see her—" but Marion manages to stop herself, and excuses herself from the room.

Marion's emotional outburst crosses a line, making Charlie seem like the rational one by comparison. But her suggestion that there may have been some relationship between the emotional distress Charlie caused Helen and her death from heart trouble is not entirely senseless, raising the question of whether Charlie may, in some way, have been responsible for his wife's death.

Lincoln explains that Marion has had a hard day, as if apologizing on her behalf. He says that Marion can see now that Charlie can provide for Honoria, so they won't stand in his way. Charlie leaves.

By concluding the conversation in terms of what Charlie can provide for Honoria, Lincoln settles the matter as though it were a purely financial one—using terms that Charlie is responsible for introducing. Thus, Charlie's wealth again appears as a variable in his effort to rebuild his family, despite money having been the impetus of his family's destruction. Nonetheless, Charlie seems to have gotten the answer he came for.

On the street, Charlie is still shaking. The image of Helen haunts him. On the night that he locked her out, they had gotten into a long quarrel. There had been "a scene at the Florida," then Helen had kissed a young man named Webb at a table, and "after that there was what she had hysterically said." Charlie had gone home alone, and angrily turned the key in the lock—but, unbeknownst to him, Helen had arrived by herself an hour later, and a snowstorm had begun in which she wandered around in her slippers, "too confused to find a taxi." Afterwards, Helen had come down with pneumonia and barely survived. It had been the beginning of the end, and Marion had never forgotten.

Charlie's recollection of the evening he locked Helen out provides important insight into their life together. Specifically, it shows that—at least in his version of the events—Helen had been equally out of control, and, it seems, also a heavy drinker. However, Charlie's recollection is one-sided and therefore far from entirely reliable, which is underscored by his use of words like "hysterical." The revelation that Helen nearly died of pneumonia gives teeth to Marion's accusation that Charlie was partly responsible for his wife's death of "heart trouble." This ambiguity is central to Charlie's moral complexity as a character—as it is not clear to what extent he is, or feels, culpable.

In a half-asleep state in his hotel room, Charlie imagines himself talking to Helen. She says she wants Honoria to be with him, and that she's glad he's doing better. She's wearing a white dress and being very friendly, but she's on a swing that goes faster and faster until Charlie can't hear what she's saying anymore.

The swing in Charlie's dream of Helen is a symbol of his lost connection with her. As she swings faster and faster, their conversation begins to blur, as if his memory of her is slipping away. However, her words for him are kind rather than admonishing, suggesting that he may not feel that he bears responsibility for bringing about her death.

SECTION 4

Charlie wakes up feeling happy. He begins imagining life with Honoria, but becomes sad when he remembers Helen, who had not planned to die. He calls Lincoln Peters at the bank where he works to ask whether he can count on being able to take Honoria back to Prague with him, and Lincoln says yes, but that Marion would like to keep legal guardianship over her for another year, to be safe. Charlie agrees to this. Then he goes to an agency to find a governess for Honoria, but he doesn't meet one that he likes.

Charlie's optimism about the prospect of rebuilding a family is tinged with sadness at the loss of his wife Helen. Although she is absent from most of his daydreams about family life, here is one of the few places that he expresses grief over losing her. Despite the fact that she seems to have died only a year and a half ago, the general absence of her death from his thoughts perhaps indicates that their marriage didn't give Charlie the sense of family he desires.

Charlie goes to lunch with Lincoln, where he bemoans the fact that Marion has held such a grudge against him since the night he locked Helen out. Lincoln hesitates before suggesting that the root of Marion's dislike of Charlie is that she felt there was an injustice to the way that, during the boom years, Charlie had been able to act so irresponsibly without even working and continue to grow wealthier. Lincoln adds that if Charlie comes by his house at six o'clock that night they will all settle the details together.

By admitting that Marion's resentment of Charlie is based in part on his wealth, Lincoln highlights one of the story's most prominent themes: class. Marion doesn't simply despise wealth. Her displeasure is more about the arrogance, entitlement, and superiority that often come with wealth.

When he returns to his hotel, Charlie finds a letter waiting for him from Lorraine Quarrles. She writes that he behaved so strangely toward her the other day that she wondered whether she had done anything to offend him. She writes that she thinks about him "too much," and reminisces about a night when she and Charlie stole a butcher's tricycle. She says that "everybody seems so old lately," but that she doesn't feel old. Then she proposes they meet, and says she'll be at the **Ritz** at five o'clock.

Lorraine's letter arrives at a sensitive time for Charlie—he has just secured permission to take his daughter back to Prague—and it therefore threatens to destabilize the situation. Because Charlie finds Lorraine very attractive—and because she is a figure from his past who represents the indulgence of his old lifestyle—she is a temptation for Charlie, testing the authenticity of his transformation.

Charlie can hardly believe he had once behaved so irresponsibly. He remembers it now like a nightmare, and wonders "how many weeks or months of dissipation" it takes for a person to behave that way. Lorraine had always been very attractive to him—which had bothered Helen—but now she seems "trite, blurred, worn away." He has no desire to see her and is glad Alix hasn't given her his address. His mind turns to the prospect of being together at home with Honoria.

There is a slight implication that perhaps Helen was bothered by Charlie's relationship with Lorraine because she wondered whether there may have been something between them (perhaps an affair), but Charlie doesn't say anything about this directly. However, the way Charlie's mind moves from the subject of Lorraine to Honoria suggests his desires and values truly have shifted radically since he left Paris.

Charlie arrives at the Peters' home with presents for all of them, and sees that Marion has "accepted the inevitable." Although Honoria has been told she is leaving, she conceals her joy, and it pleases Charlie to see her tact. When Marion and Charlie are alone for a moment, he speaks to her impulsively, saying that "family quarrels are bitter things" and he wishes they "could be on better terms." She replies that "some things are hard to forget." Charlie says he plans to take Honoria in two days, but Marion insists: not before Sunday. Charlie agrees, and asks for his "daily whisky."

One of the undercurrents of Charlie's story is that his excessive confidence often leads to a fall, just as the bull market led to a crash. His remark about Marion accepting "the inevitable" is, he will shortly learn, premature in light of the reversal that is about to occur, making it yet another example of Charlie's hubristic attitude and lack of caution setting him up for failure.

The Peters' house is warm and feels like a home. Marion and Lincoln are "not dull people," but they are "very much in the grip of life and circumstances." Suddenly the doorbell rings, and rings again as a maid opens the door, and in walk Duncan Schaeffer and Lorraine Quarrles, laughing hysterically. Charlie takes a moment to realize how they found the Peters' address, then introduces them. Marion nods but remains silent, even shrinking away from Duncan and Lorraine, toward the fire. Charlie waits for them to explain themselves.

Fitzgerald never says explicitly that Duncan and Lorraine are drunk, but his descriptions of their hysterical laughter and slurred speech clearly give them away. Their sudden appearance in the very moment when it seems that the story is reaching its resolution is symbolic of the irrepressible and un-erasable nature of the past. Although of course Charlie hadn't intended for them to appear when they did, he's not entirely blameless: they found him, after all, because he left the address for Duncan with the barman at the Ritz.

Duncan explains that he and Lorraine came to invite Charlie to dinner. He says they insist that "all this shishi, cagy business" about not having an address to give out must stop. Charlie declines, and tries to move them toward the door, but Lorraine sits down and begins talking to Richard, Marion's son. Duncan and Lorraine are slurring their words. Charlie says that they should go have dinner and he'll phone them later, at which point Lorraine becomes unpleasant, saying that they'll go, but she reminds Charlie of the time he came to her door at 4am and she had been "enough of a sport" to give him a drink. The two leave, visibly angry.

The comment Lorraine makes as she leaves (about giving Charlie a drink at 4am) suggests that there had been more than flirtation between them. Perhaps her comment confirms Fitzgerald's earlier suggestion that she and Charlie had had an affair. At the very least, it's an unflattering episode for her to mention as she leaves, as it would hardly seem proper to anyone for a married man to show up unannounced at another woman's home in the middle of the night. Duncan and Lorraine's bitterness in this moment reveals their resentment of Charlie for changing, showing that they don't have his best interests at heart.

Charlie, expressing outrage, exclaims "People I haven't seen in two years having the colossal nerve—" but before he can finish Marion has stormed out of the room, furious. Lincoln sends the children into the other room to eat dinner, and says to Charlie that Marion can't stand shocks, and that those "kind of people make her really physically sick." Charlie explains that he didn't invite Duncan and Lorraine, but Lincoln responds that it's "too bad" and it "doesn't help matters." Lincoln excuses himself. In the other room, Charlie hears a telephone being picked up, and in a panic he moves out of earshot.

Although Fitzgerald doesn't state it clearly, it's likely that he meant for the sound of the phone in the other room to be an indication that Lincoln had called a doctor. It seems as though Marion may have some kind of nervous condition that is aggravated by stressors like the intrusion of two drunken strangers into her home. The recklessness of wealth is again equated with the recklessness of alcohol when Lincoln refers ambiguously to "that kind of people," since it's unclear whether he means wealthy people or drunk people.

Lincoln comes back into the room and tells Charlie that Marion is in bad shape, and he thinks it best to call off dinner. Charlie asks if she has changed her mind about Honoria, but Lincoln doesn't give a clear response, saying only that Marion is feeling pretty bitter and he doesn't know. He instructs Charlie to call him the next day at the bank. Charlie says goodbye to Honoria, and then, "trying to conciliate something," he says "Good night, dear children."

Although Lincoln doesn't say so directly, he seems to think that the episode has sabotaged Charlie's chances of taking Honoria back to Prague with him. The fact that Charlie leaves with a conciliatory tone suggests that he's already aware that he has lost, and there's little he can do to help the situation now.

SECTION 5

Charlie goes directly from the Peters' house to the **Ritz** bar. Furious, he thinks he might find Lorraine and Duncan, but when they're not there he realizes there's nothing he could do anyway. He orders a drink, not having had a chance to touch the whisky he'd asked for at the Peters'. Paul, the head barman, comes over to talk to Charlie and says he hears he lost everything in the crash. Charlie says he did, but he lost everything he wanted in the boom.

Charlie's comment to Paul about losing everything he wanted in the crash is the clearest expression of loss and remorse that Charlie makes in the story. It demonstrates the fullness of his awareness that his wealth and alcohol abuse made him blind to the sources of real value in his life. Although he seems to have believed, until this point in the story, that he would be able to win his daughter back, his comment to Paul seems to be an acknowledgement that what he has lost may never be regained.

Again, Charlie's thoughts drift back to the boom years, and he remembers them—and the people he met—like a nightmare. Along with the detestable people he met, he thinks of himself locking Helen out in the snow "because the snow of twenty-nine wasn't real snow. If you didn't want it to be snow, you just paid some money."

Here, Charlie seems to acknowledge that he had been aware, on some level, of what he was doing when he locked Helen out of their home, despite having made it sound in his earlier account that he had been oblivious. The idea that he could pay for snow not to be snow is of course ridiculous, but it demonstrates his awareness of the ridiculousness of the feeling of infallibility he told Marion he felt during the boom years. His remark about the snow is also a recognition of guilt, in the sense that he sees that the pain he has caused others is real—and that he can't pay to make it disappear.

Charlie calls Lincoln to ask if Marion has said anything, and Lincoln responds that Marion is sick, and that he's afraid they'll "have to let it slide for six months" before deciding anything. Then Lincoln apologizes. Charlie goes back to the bar and declines Alix's offer of another drink. Charlie thinks about how tomorrow he'll try to help the situation by sending Honoria some **toys**, but it makes him angry that all he can do is give his daughter material possessions.

The fact that Charlie returns to the Ritz bar and orders a drink immediately after the incident at the Peters' home is worrisome because it raises the question of whether he will revert to his old patterns of alcohol abuse in coping with the pain he's experiencing. It's reassuring, then, that he declines when the barman offers him another drink. Charlie's frustration that his only way of feeling close to Honoria is to buy her things demonstrates his main insight of the story: that while he "lost a lot in the crash," he lost everything of real value to him—his family—in the boom years through his immoderate behavior.

Another waiter offers Charlie a drink, and he declines again, asking "What do I owe you?" He thinks that he'll come back some day, and that the Peters can't "make him pay forever." It seems that the only thing that matters to him now is getting Honoria back. He's not young anymore, and he's sure Helen wouldn't have wanted him to be so alone.

Despite having recovered from the crash financially, Charlie's loneliness at the end of the story is a type of emotional poverty. In other words, his recklessness during the boom years has left him with a debt he cannot seem to pay. Through Charlie's story, Fitzgerald seems to be making a moral argument that, whether it's alcohol or money, all forms of recklessness and immoderation lead to ruin, and no one is above having to pay their debts if they hope to win redemption.

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Fitzgerald, F. Scott. Babylon Revisited. Scribner. 1995.

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