THE GREAT GATSBY

By

F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

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The Great Gatsby

In my younger and more vulnerable years my father told me something that I've been turning over in my my mind ever since

"When you feel like critisizing anyone," he said, "just remember that everyone in this world hasn't had the advantages that you've had.

He didn't say any more but we've always been unusually communicative in a reserved way and I understood that he meant a great deal more than that In consequence I'm inclined to reserve all judgements, a habit that has opened up many curious natures to me and also made me the victim of not a few collossal bores. The abnormal mind is quick to detect and attach itself to this quality when it appears in a normal person, and so it came about that in college I was unjustly accused of being of politician, because I was privy to the secret griefs of wild, unknown men. Most of the confidences were unsought—frequently I have fiegned sleep, preoccupation or a hostile levity when I realized by some unmistakeable sign that an intimate revelation was quivering on the horizon—for the intimate revelations of young men or at any rate the terms in which they express them vary no more than the heavenly messages which reach us over the psychic radio. Reserving judgements is a matter of infinite hope. I am still a little afraid of missing something if I forget that, as my father snobbishly suggested and I snobbishly repeat, a sense of the fundamental decencies is parcelled out unequeally at birth.

And, after boasting this way of my tolerance, I come to the admission that it has a limit. Conduct may be founded on the hard rock or the wet marshes but after a certain point I don't care what it's founded on. When I came back here from the east last autumn I felt that I wanted the world to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever; I wanted no more riotous excursions with priveledged glimpses into the human heart. It was only Gatsby himself

that was exempted from my [1/2] reaction, Gatsby who represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn. There was, after all, something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to things as if he were related to one of those intricate machines that register earthquakes ten thousand miles away life that you might expect in some race yet unborn. This sensitivity had nothing to with that flabby unethical impressionability which is dignified under the name of the "creative temperment"—I have always felt the same disgust toward the artist that I do for that other nessessary evil, the garbage man—it was an extraordinary aliveness to life, an alert vitality such as I have never found in any human person and which it is not likely I shall ever find again. No—Gatsby turned out all right at the end; it is what preyed on Gatsby, what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams that temporarily closed out my interest in the abortive sorrows and unjustified elations of men.

My family have been substantial people here in this middle-western city for three generations. The Carraways are something of a clan and we have a tradition that we're decended from the Dukes of Buccleuch, but the actual founder of my line was my grandfather's brother who came here in '51, sent a substitute to the civil war and started the wholesale hardware business that my father carries on today.

I never saw this great-uncle but I'm supposed to look like him—with special reference to the rather hard-boiled painting that hangs in father's office. I graduated from New Haven in 1915, just a quarter of a century after my father, and I little later I participated in that delayed Teutonic migration known as the great war. I enjoyed the raid so thoroughly that I came back restless. Instead of being the warm center of the world the middle-west now seemed like the ragged edge of the universe—so I decided the go East and enter the bond business. Everybody I knew was in the bond business so I supposed it ought to be able to support one more man. All my aunts and uncles talked it over as if they were choosing a prep-school for me and finally said "Why—yes" with very grave, hesitant faces. Father agreed to finance me for a year and after various delays I came east, permanently, I thought, in the spring of twenty-one.

The natural thing was to find rooms in the city but it was a warm season and I had just left a country of wide [2/3] lawns and friendly trees, so when a young man at the office suggested that we take a house together in a commuting town I jumped at the idea. He found the house, a weatherbeaten cardboard bungalow at a hundred a month, but at the last minute the firm ordered him to Washington and I went out to the country alone. I had a dog, at least I had him for a few days until he ran away, and an old Dodge and a Finnish woman who made my bed and cooked breakfast + dinner and muttered Finnish proverbs to herself over the 1906 electric stove.

And so with the sunshine and the great bursts of leaves growing on the trees—just like things grow in fast movies—I had that familiar conviction that life was beginning over again with the summer. There was so much to read for instance and so much fine health to be pulled down out of the young breath-giving air. I bought a dozen volumes on money and banking and investment securities and they stood on my shelf in red and gold like new money from the mint, promising to unfold the shining secrets that only Morgan and Midas and Maecenus knew. And I had the honorable intention of reading many other books besides. I was rather literary in college—one year I wrote a series of very solemn and absurd editorials for the Yale News—and now I was going to bring back all such things into my life and become again that most limited of all specialists, the "well-rounded" man.

It was entirely a matter of chance that I should have rented a house in one of the strangest communities in North America. It was on that slender riotous Island which extends itself due east of New York and where there are, among other natural curiosities, two unusual formations of land. Twenty miles from the city a pair of enormous eggs, identical in contour and separated only by a courtesy bay, jut out into the most domesticated body of salt water in the [3/4] Western hemisphere, Long Island Sound. They are not perfect ovals—like the egg in the Columbus story they are both crushed flat at the contact end—but their physical resemblance must be a scource of perpetual wonder to the gulls that fly overhead. To the earth dwellers a more amazing phenomenon is the dissimilarity they manifest in every way except shape and size

I lived at West Egg, the—well, the less fashionable of the two, though this is a most superficial tag to express the bizarre and not a little sinister contrast between them. My house was at the very tip of the egg, only a hundred yards from the sound, and squeezed between two huge places that rented for twelve or fifteen thousand a season. The one on my right was a collosal affair by any standard—it was a factual imitation of some Hotel de Ville in Normandy ! with a tower on one side, spanking new under a thin beard of raw ivy, and a marble swimming pool and more than forty acres of lawn and garden. It is was Gatsby's mansion. Or rather, as I didn't know Gatsby yet it was a mansion inhabited by a gentleman of that name. My own house was [4/5] an eye-sore, but it was a small eye-sore and it had been overlooked, so I had a view of the water, a partial view of my neighbors lawn and the consoling proximity of millionaires—all for fifty dollars a month.

Across the courtesy bay the white palaces of fashionable East Egg glittered along the water and the history of the summer really begins on the evening I drove over there [5/6] to have dinner with the Tom Buchanans. Daisy Buchanan was a cousin of mine and I'd known Tom in college. And once just after the war I spent a week with them in Chicago.

Her husband, among various physical accomplishments, had been one of the most powerful ends that ever played football at New Haven—a national figure in a way, one of those men that reach such an accute limited excellence at twenty that everything afterwards savours of anti-climax. His family were enormously wealthy—even in college his spending capacity was a matter of scandal—but now he'd left Chicago and come East in a fashion that rather took your breath away: for instance he'd casually brought down a string of polo ponies from Lake Forest. It was hard to realize that a man in my own generation was wealthy enough to do that. [6/7]

Why they came east I don't know. They had spent a year in France, for no particular reason, and then drifted here and there unrestfully wherever polo was played and people were rich together. This was a permanent move Daisy said over the telephone, but I didn't believe it—I had no sight into Daisy's heart but I felt that Tom would drift on forever seeking a little wistfully for the dramatic turbulence of some irrecoverable football game. [7/8]

And so it happened that on a warm windy evening I drove over to East Egg to see two old friends who, in reality, I scarcely knew at all. Their house [8/9] house was even more elaborate than I expected, a great, cheerful red and white Georgian Colonial mansion overlooking the bay. The lawn started at the beach and ran toward his front door for a quarter of mile, jumping over sun-dials and brick walks and burning gardens—finally when it reached the house drifting up the side in bright vines as though by the momentum of its run. The front was broken by a line of French windows, glowing now with reflected gold, and wide open to the warm windy afternoon, and Tom Buchanan in riding clothes was standing with his legs apart on the front porch. [9/10]

He had changed since his New Haven years. Now he was a sturdy, straw haired man of thirty with a rather hard mouth and a supercillious manner. Two shining, arrogant eyes had established dominance over his face and gave him the appearance of always leaning agressively forward. Not even the effeminate swank of his riding clothes could hide the enormous power of that body—he seemed to fill those glistening boots until he strained the top lacing and you could see a great pack of muscle shifting when his shoulder moved under his thin coat. It was a body capable of enormous leverage—a cruel body.

His speaking voice, a gruff husky tenor, added to the impression of fractiousness he conveyed. There was a touch of paternal contempt in it, even toward people he liked—and there were men at New Haven who had hated his guts, to speak crudely. We were in the same Senior Society and while we were never intimate I [10/11] always had the impression that he approved of me and wanted me to like him with some harsh, defiant wistfulness of his own.

We talked for a few minutes on the sunny porch.

"I've got a nice place here," he said, his eyes flashing about restlessly.

Turning me around with one arm he moved a broad flat hand along the front vista, including in its sweep a sunken Italien garden, a half acre of deep pungent roses and a snub-nosed motor boat that bumped the tide off shore.

"It belonged to Demaine the oil man." He turned me around again, politely and abruptly, "We'll go inside."

We walked with insistent steps through a high hallway and into a bright rosy colored space, fragily bound into the house by French windows at either end. The windows were ajar and gleaming white against the fresh grass outside that seemed to grow a little way into the house. A breeze blew through the room, blew curtains in at one end and out the other like pale flags, twisting them up toward the frosted wedding cake of the cieling.—and then rippling over the wine-colored rug, making a shadow on it as wind does on the sea

The only completely stationary object in the room seemed to be a enormous couch on which two young women were buoyed up as though apon an anchored balloon. They were both in white and [11/12] their dresses were rippling and fluttering as if they had just been blown back in after a short flight around the house. I must have stood for a few moments on the threshold, dazzled by the alabaster light, listening to the whip and snap of the curtains and the groan of a picture on the wall. Then there was a boom as Tom Buchanan shut the rear windows and the caught wind died out about the room and the curtains and the rugs and the two young woman ballooned slowly to the floor. [12/13]

One of the two young women I had never seen before. She was extended full length at her end of the divan, completely motionless and with her chin raised a little as if she were balancing something on it which was quite likely to fall. If she saw me out of the corner of her eyes she gave no hint of it—indeed I was almost surprised into murmuring an apology for having disturbed her by coming in at all.

The other girl—it was Daisy—made [13/14] an attempt to rise—she leaned forward slightly with a conscientious expression on her face—then she laughed, an absurd, charming little laugh, and I laughed too and came forward into the room.

"And so Nick just trotted down East looking for a high old time. Didn't he."

She laughed again as if she had said something very witty and held my hand for a moment, looking up into my face, promising

that there was no one in the world she so much wanted to see. That was a way she had. She hinted in a murmur that the name of the balancing girl was Baker. I've heard it said that Daisy's murmur was only to make people lean toward her; an irrevelent critisism—that made it no less charming.

At any rate Miss Baker's lips fluttered, she nodded at me almost imperceptibly and then tipped her head quickly back again—for the object she was balancing had obviously tottered a little and given her something of a fright. Again a sort of apology arose to my lips. Almost any exhibition of complete self sufficiency draws a stunned tribute from me.

I looked back at my cousin who began to ask me questions in her low, thrilling voice. It was the kind of voice [14/15] that the ear followed up and down as if each speech was an arrangement of notes that would never be played again. Her face was sad and lovely with bright things in it, bright eyes and a bright passionate mouth—but there was an excitement in her voice that men who had cared for her found difficult to forget: a singing compulsion, a whispered "Listen", a promise that she had done gay exciting things just a while since and that there were gay, exciting things hovering in the next hour. [15/16]

I told her how I had stopped off in Chicago for two days on my way east and how a dozen people had sent her "love" through me.

"And kisses too," she cried exstaticly.

"Kisses too. The whole town is desolate. All the cars have the left rear wheel painted black as a mourning wreath and a persistent wail can be heard all night along the north shore."

"How gorgeous! Let's go back, Tom—tomorrow." Then she added, "You ought to see the baby."

"I'd like to."

"She's asleep. She's three years old. Havn't you ever seen her?"

"Never."

"Well, you ought to see her. She's—"

Tom Buchanan who had been hovering restlessly about the room stopped near me and rested his hand on my shoulder.

"What you doing, Nick?"

"I'm a bond man."

"Who with?"

I told him

"Never heard of them." he remarked decisively.

This annoyed me.

"You will," I answered shortly, "You will if you stay in the East."

"Oh, I'll stay in the East, don't you worry," he said, glancing at Daisy and then back at me as if he were alert for something more. "I'd be a God [16/17] Damn fool to live anywhere else."

At this point Miss Baker said "Absolutely!" with such suddenness that I started—it was the first word she had uttered since I came into the room. Evidently it surprised her as much as it did me, for she sighed, let fall the invisible billiard cue she had been balancing and with a series of rapid, deft movements stood up into the room.

"I'm stiff," she complained, "I've been lieing on that sofa for as long as I can remember."

"Don't look at me," Daisy retorted, "I've been trying to get you to New York all afternoon.

"No thanks," said Miss Baker to the four cocktails just in from the pantry, "I'm absolutely in training.

Her host looked at scornfully.

"Yes, you are!" He took down his drink as if it were a drop in the bottom of a glass, "How you ever get anything done is beyond me."

I looked at Miss Baker wondering what it was that she "got done." I enjoyed looking at her. She was a slender, small-breasted girl with an erect carriage which she accentuated by throwing her body backward at the shoulders like a young cadet. Her grey sun-strained eyes glanced at me with polite reciprocal curiosity out of a wan, charming discontented face. It occurred to me now that I had seen her, or a picture of her, somewhere before.

"If you live in West Egg," she remarked contemptuously, "you know Gatsby"

"Gatsby?" demanded Daisy, "What Gatsby?"

Before I could reply that he was my neighbor dinner was announced in a solemn whisper and wedging his tense arm imperatively under mine Tom Buchanan compelled me from the room as though he were moving a checker to another square.