Over nine chapters, F. Scott Fitzgerald constructed a novel that he once confessed in a letter sounded almost like pulp when one simply wrote down the bones of the story. Jimmy Gatz falls in love with Daisy, a young woman from a wealthy family, but at the time lacks the financial resources and confidence in his past necessary to propose marriage. He leaves then, determined to make his fortune that he may return to marry her and support her in a manner reasonable for her expectations and her class. He changes his name to Jay Gatsby, earns his fortune through illicit means, bootlegging and organized gambling, and as he earns it so quickly, he is not in possession of the bearing and mores to handle wealth to which so many of Daisy's suitors were born. His house, his clothing, his car—all scream of his "new" wealth, making his wealth less alluring than that of "old money."

In the quest to lure Daisy to him, he purchases a home near hers and begins to throw enormous parties, solely meant to attract her interest, such that she would eventually stroll into his home during one of his parties, discover him, and fall in love all over again. Instead, Nick Carraway, Daisy's second cousin, moves in next door. When Gatsby realizes the family relationship, he asks Nick to help him "accidentally" encounter Daisy again. When Nick does, Gatsby learns Daisy is unhappily married to Tom Buchanan, a rich boor. Daisy is impressed with the things Gatsby has amassed. However, Daisy is also fickle, unpredictable, and more complicated than Jay Gatsby assumes. As well, her marriage to Tom provides her benefits and comforts Gatsby does not and, due to the limits of his experience, cannot understand.

After Tom confronts Gatsby during a drunken lark in the Plaza Hotel in Manhattan, everyone leaves in separate cars. Daisy and Gatsby race back in his car and, with Daisy driving, they strike down and kill a woman coming out to meet them, Myrtle Wilson, Tom's vapid and déclassé mistress. Daisy and Gatsby drive away, not even stopping. Myrtle's husband, George, is immediately distraught, so much so that he becomes murderous. Having seen the car earlier, and knowing Tom through his garage business, George finds out who owned the atypical car. George then hunts down and kills Gatsby. In the denouement, no one attends Gatsby's funeral except his decrepit father, Nick, and a senile partygoer. Daisy and Tom travel abroad. Nick moves on, with the realization that dreams, even malformed dreams such as Jay Gatsby's, drive us against the unknown world.

Of course, the novel contains far, far more than the just-mentioned elaborate series of events. Fitzgerald himself wrote to Maxwell Perkins, his famous editor at Scribner's, that it was his intent to write an intricately crafted novel along the lines of his heroes, Conrad and Thackeray, and one that would be wholly different than anything that had come before. Other critics say that Conrad is not exactly the right stylistic antecedent. To them, Henry James would be more appropriate, given James' weaving of essential—and only essential—details. But the critics have long argued about Gatsby's stylistic antecedents, due to its complex layers and its universality. But the text of The Great Gatsby gives even the casual reader much to think about, so dense is its structure, so distinctive is its language, so full is its plot, and so effortless it all appears.

Epigraph and Chapter One

Though attributed to Thomas Parke D'Invilliers, Fitzgerald himself actually wrote the novel's epigraph. As a statement fronting the book, it could have been instructions given to Jimmy Gatz on how to approach the one for which he pined:

*Then wear the gold hat, if that will move her;*

*If you can bounce high, bounce for her too,*

*Till she cry "Lover, gold-hatted, high-bouncing lover*

*I must have you!"

In other words, do what you must, young Gatz. Earn gold, dance, what have you. If you do the things she likes, she will be yours. The advice presupposes a degree of formulaic demeanor on the part of the one pursued, and so is a kind of antiquated bit of advice when compared with what Gatz and Buchanan and Carraway would have understood about affluent young women of the
By 1925, Fitzgerald had earned a reputation as a trustworthy first chronicler of the "flapper," a young woman who chafed against the prohibitions of the period, who danced and wore revealing clothes and frequented speakeasies, and who, while certainly swayed by a number of influences, was often also purposefully contrary, argumentative, and willful. The popular literature of the period either dealt with flappers salaciously, as temptresses whose loose morality would be the undoing of society, or—as did Fitzgerald and a few others—as women whose exposure to modern wealth, disillusionment, achievement, art, and other aspects of worldly culture inspired them to break with convention, to varying results. In some cases, it led to women whose very complication of character would seem scandalous to people still accustomed to typical Victorian and Romantic portrayals of women. To others, the complexity of a so-called flapper was the embodiment of the times having changed, the advent of modernity. Thus, Fitzgerald knew, while such feats as high-bouncing and wearing a gold hat might impress a young woman of the time, she was just as likely to leave a young man on his own at the end of the evening, or to kiss another man in the very next dance.

So the advice comes from someone antiquated by comparison, some name that sounds neither "American" (in the narrow way Tom Buchanan might interpret the word) nor modern: Thomas Parke D'Invilliers, a name that sounds as though it belonged to a stuffed-shirt poet of the Victorian era—and certainly not a modern man, one who understands the industrial age and the changing face of everything when cast against the great doubt and wasteland created in the aftermath of the Great War.

The certainty of the epigraph almost immediately rubs up against the moral and spiritual uncertainty pervading the novel itself. Chapter One opens with Nick Carraway introducing the story to readers, while first introducing himself, and telling how he, a person of solid Midwestern upbringing, happened to fall in with a crowd of eastern decadents. He begins asserting that he is careful to criticize, and while he explains why, the explanation also provides a clue into why he is the perfect narrator for the story. He says, "I'm inclined to reserve all judgments, a habit that has opened up many curious natures to me." As we see throughout the novel, Nick does inspire people to moments of candor, of confession, such that he is not only a witness, he is the only person privy to the real characters of the individuals he encounters.

Nick's explanation and constant qualification of how he came to be in the East ("my aunts and uncles talking it over as if they were choosing a prep school for me, and finally said, 'Why ye-es,' with very grave, hesitant faces ... the Middle West now seemed like the ragged edge of the universe—") also serves to give readers a sense of the trauma to come. Nick's foreboding narration gives immediate tension to the tale, particularly as much of the foreboding is centered on the first mention of Gatsby.

Gatsby, even two years after the fact, had "something gorgeous about him." And if Nick is now sour on the East and its "riotous excursions," it is for no fault of Gatsby's. Rather, Nick has seen a heart of darkness, of sorts. For Fitzgerald's hero, Conrad, the heart of darkness was a similar thing: a perverse extreme of human nature. For Fitzgerald, through the cipher of Nick Carraway, the perversion in this case was "what preyed on Gatsby, what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams that temporarily closed out [Nick's] interest in the abortive sorrows and short-winded elations of men." Fitzgerald does not have Nick tell the reader yet what it is; the answer is complicated, and requires the story. It is not simply affluence, nor is it moral decay in the face of fatalism. Neither is it aspiration; although, for Nick, Gatsby's acquisitive zeal and corruptibility by wealth and status turned him into a man "who represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn," the man himself still possessed "an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness such as I have never found in any other person and which it is not likely I will ever find again." Unlike all the other characters Nick met, Gatsby had hope.

Nick details the business circumstances that resulted in his being in West Egg, as opposed to the more fashionable East Egg. West Egg was the nouveau riche locale, and East Egg had old mansions of older money. Gatsby, of course, lived at West Egg. The Buchanans lived at East Egg. Nick rented one of the few remaining small houses left on West Egg. Outside the city, in the Long Island communities housing the social elite, Nick finds promise: "I had the familiar conviction that life was beginning over again with summer." Fitzgerald's style mirrors Nick's feeling through metaphor: "so much fine health to be pulled down out of the young breath-giving air."

Soon, Nick describes Gatsby's mansion, an enormous anachronistic palace, gaudy even for the time, a decade or two previous, when it would have been the style, part of a late nineteenth-century revival of Gothic and Roman architecture. The description reveals its vulgarity: "factual imitation," "a tower on one side, spanking new under a thin beard of raw ivy." As well, Nick tells about East Egg, and the "white palaces"—marking the beginning of Fitzgerald's constant use of color, particularly white, to
indicate status. White—as well as gold and silver—are almost exclusively used throughout *The Great Gatsby* to signal an ethereal affluence.

Nick introduces Tom before he does Daisy, perhaps because Tom is an easier person for Nick to nail down in a few words. Tom is an athletic sort, at one time a famous football player at Yale. But his glory days have passed; Nick says he was "one of those men who reach such an acute limited excellence at twenty-one that everything afterward savor of anticlimax." In other words, Tom peaked early in life. But he is wealthy, enough to buy polo ponies, spend a year idling in France, do things which make Nick find it "hard to realize that a man in my own generation was wealthy enough to do."

As Nick approaches the Buchanans' house for the first major scene of the novel, and the scene that dominates Chapter One, the prose grows more unusual in spots, marking moments in which Fitzgerald sought the reader's high engagement, a stylistic choice examined in more detail by Jackson R. Bryer. Bryer points out how Fitzgerald paired adjectives and adverbs with nouns and verbs in very unexpected combinations, thereby surprising readers and demanding their heightened attention to the prose and its suggestive qualities. The effect, according to Bryer, is to not only make the prose very active and distinctive, but to suggest the amplified and distinct quality of the novel's settings.

Stylistic innovation and color both are very much at work in the first section: the house is red and white, the front yard features "burning gardens," and Tom Buchanan stands, legs apart like a colossus, on the porch, surveying his domain as he awaits Nick. Tom is then described in a paragraph featuring such modifiers as "hard," "supercilious," "arrogant," "dominance," "aggressively," "power," and "cruel." The surprising pairing of "pack" and "muscle" gives Tom Buchanan bulk and presence as a character, particularly one standing at the edge of a lawn that metaphorically burns, in a house where the lawn "jumps" up the sides in "bright vines."

Tom's strength is something of an act. Nick notes Tom's need for approval, that Tom wanted Nick to like him "with some harsh, defiant wistfulness" (another unusual grouping of words). Tom declares to Nick that he has a "nice place here," rather than asking Nick's opinion. Tom's strength, his home, his rude superiority and his almost brittle need for approval combine to suggest the conflicts at work within him, conflicts with consequences for the plot of *The Great Gatsby."

Once the two men enter the house, into "rosy-colored space," everything is in motion, a device used by Fitzgerald in many scenes involving the Buchanans and their friends. In the home, a breeze works through the room, curtains rise. Grass seems to grow into the house, and the reiteration of white colors dresses, the "wedding-cake" ceiling, the windows, and more. Tom puts a stop to the motion by shutting the windows with a "boom"; the action is the first of many wherein Tom will change the quality of a room or a moment. In the absence of all the motion, Nick's attention is drawn to Daisy and Jordan, both in white.

Jordan is described as someone attempting to balance an object on her chin, almost as though she were a statue. Jordan's posture and aspect suggest an almost Petrarchan treatment. Daisy, on the other hand, is motion and self-awareness, a spirit of contradiction from the first moment. Her expression is "conscientious," and she makes an "absurd, charming little laugh," and declares, with the intent to ingratiate herself to whomever she meets, "I'm p-paralyzed with happiness." Daisy herself is the only one who laughs at her comment, "as if she said something very witty."

Through Nick's introduction of Daisy, Fitzgerald is able to use his narrator to distinct advantage. Rather than simply let the scene occur in the present tense, dramatized so that the reader interprets the actions, Fitzgerald has Nick report about it from the standpoint of looking back, knowing how to guide us. With a character like Daisy, someone so adept at charming people, it is helpful and important (in this case) to have a narrator who can help the reader deduce Daisy's character. Thus, when Daisy greets Nick, holding his hand and "looking up into [his] face, promising there was no one in the world she so much wanted to see," he can tell the reader, frankly, "That was a way she had." When she murmurs Jordan's last name, he notes, "I've heard it said that Daisy's murmur was only to make people lean toward her; an irrelevant criticism that made it no less charming."

Fitzgerald makes much of Daisy's voice throughout the novel. Nick finds it charming, engaging, and it is her most compelling characteristic—despite what Nick tells us is her great beauty:

I looked back at my cousin, who began to ask me questions in her low, thrilling voice. It was the kind of voice that the ear follows up and down, as if each speech is an arrangement of notes that will 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
Daisy is, for Nick, for Tom, for Gatsby, promise, an entirety of light and delight not fully attainable. She is also self-indulgent, flirtatious, and fragile. As she jokes with Nick about Chicago and how everyone misses her, she refers once to her child, a three-year-old daughter, and Tom breaks into the discussion only to compare vocations with Nick. When Tom hears that Nick works in bonds, he dismisses the narrator's firm "decisively." When Nick says that Tom will soon know the firm if he stays in the East, Tom declares he'd be "a God damned fool to live anywhere else."

The scene moves on through a number of details that, to individuals not living in locales like East Egg and working in Manhattan in the 1920s, would seem frivolous, decadent, immoral, or worse. Tom curses. He takes a drink as if "it were a drop in the bottom of a glass," an important detail during Prohibition and amidst widespread temperance movements left over from the period after the Civil War. In Chapter Two, the violence is fueled by two bottles of whiskey, and the series of missteps in Chapter Seven are similarly instigated. The presence of booze throughout the book would have provoked responses ranging from recognition to shock. The amounts of money referred to would also have been exorbitant; in Chapter Two, Myrtle Wilson's sister, Catherine, mentions losing $1,200 in two days while traveling in Europe. Given that most Americans of typical means in 1925 had never left the state in which they lived, and they made scarcely more than $1,200 per year, both details would have revealed a world of privilege as alien as the surface of the moon. Jordan Baker complains of lounging the afternoon away on the couch, whereas most Americans at the time would have been working six or seven days a week, and leisure time would have been largely unheard of.

While much about Daisy and Tom is colored in white or shades of red, Jordan Baker is drawn as "gray," "sun-strained," with a "wan, charming, discontented face." Jordan is different from the Buchanans in that she is not a celebrity due to society or generations of wealth, and her demeanor and description supports it. She is, Nick learns, a professional athlete, and so is still part of the society of affluence and leisure, but of a lesser level than the wealthy Buchanans.

The conversation turns to Gatsby, but is cut short by dinner, through which Tom sulks and launches into a boorish conversation on race and supremacy which he instigates after taking umbrage at Daisy's referring to him as a "brute of a man, a great, big, hulking physical specimen." When Tom is called from the table to answer the phone, Daisy works to charm Nick some more, until she, too, leaves to follow Tom. At that point, Jordan tells Nick, "Tom's got some woman in New York."

When Daisy and Tom return, Daisy announces her departure "couldn't be helped." She does so with "tense gayety"—another startling pairing of words—after which she forces the conversation toward what she might show Nick, if there is enough light after dinner. But as the conversation has proceeded, the light has steadily left the room. As Nick puts it, it is as though the light is leaving Daisy herself: "each light deserting her with lingering regret, like children leaving a pleasant street at dusk." As the light leaves, so, too, does her attitude change. As the twilight moves in, and candles wink out, Daisy tells Nick, finally, "I've had a very bad time, Nick, and I'm pretty cynical about everything."

Her admission colors the reader's understanding of the ferocity of her charm. To use the modern language of pop psychology, one might accuse Daisy of living in willful denial of her situation in front of others, and of only facing the reality of her situation when her defenses are down. With Daisy, however, such analysis is not that simple. As Nick suggests, even when she is being forthright about her life, it could also be another part of her arsenal of tools with which to charm. When she confesses how alone she felt at the birth of her daughter, when Tom was nowhere to be found, she tells Nick that she hoped her daughter would grow into a "fool—that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool."

Daisy's cynicism is also a bit fashionable, as she herself points out. However real the sense of disillusionment was amongst the generation that fought in and returned from World War I (and about which Malcolm Cowley and Ernest Hemingway wrote most memorably in *Exile's Return* and *A Moveable Feast*, respectively), many also flocked to the fashionable and iconoclastic position of cynicism in the face of a burgeoning American economy based on the strong pseudo-secular zeal of the Protestant work ethic. Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street* and *Babbitt* were published while Fitzgerald was writing, and as his characters were not quite as far in the fringe as were Fitzgerald's disaffected affluents, Lewis won more acclaim, more attention, and more readers than Fitzgerald. But they underscore a point to which Fitzgerald also wrote: disaffection and cynicism were rampant among the culturally elite. What separates Fitzgerald from Lewis is that the former's work looks at the disillusionment itself and its effect, whereas the latter's produces art from the standpoint of cynicism. Some critics argue the difference is precisely why Lewis is no longer much read today, whereas the popularity of Fitzgerald's work endures.
Daisy's possible faddishness is revealed in her overwrought exclamation to Nick:

"You see I think everything's terrible anyhow," she went on in a convinced way. "Everybody thinks so—the most advanced people. And I know. I've been everywhere and seen everything and done everything." Her eyes flashed around her in a defiant way, rather like Tom's, and she laughed with thrilling scorn. "Sophisticated—God, I'm sophisticated!"

Daisy compares herself to Tom: she wants everyone to think her sophisticated in the same way Tom wants everyone to think him rich and powerful. Daisy is, as Nick says, convinced in the way that the desperate are convinced: she has averred her own sophistication for so long that she has come to believe her own hype.

And it is hype. As Nick points out, once Daisy stops speaking, he is no longer compelled. He feels the "basic insincerity of what she had said." At that moment, Nick feels quite forcefully the gap between himself and the Buchanans, and it is a foreshadowing of the increasing isolation he will feel from everyone else in the novel. Daisy looks at Nick and he sees her assert "her membership in a rather distinguished secret society to which she and Tom belonged." And one to which Nick most assuredly does not belong.

When Nick returns home, he sees Gatsby for the first time. He mistakenly thinks his neighbor is looking at the stars. Gatsby's posture impresses Nick, as he seems comfortable, sure, even graceful. Then, Gatsby does something surprising that arrests Nick's attention: "he stretched his eyes toward the dark water in a curious way, and, far as I was from him, I could have sworn he was trembling." Nick only sees a green light, the light readers later learn shines from the end of the Buchanans' dock.

Chapter Two

Chapter Two details Nick's foray into the city with Tom and his mistress and the drunken shenanigans that ensue. It features several layers Fitzgerald constructs to develop important symbols and plot details.

The first few paragraphs introduce readers to two of the most enduring symbols in *The Great Gatsby*: the valley of the ashes and the eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg. The valley of ashes is "that solemn dumping ground," the industrial stretch between East and West Egg and Manhattan, where everything is gray. Nick says the ash forms "grotesque gardens," taking shape as "houses and chimneys and rising smoke and, finally, with a transcendent effort, of ash-gray men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air." It is a stylized depiction of the neighborhoods and blocks where working people—those who are not of Daisy and Tom's "distinguished secret society," or even of Nick's own class—live. The bleakness and despondency of their lives and fates, as perceived by Nick and others, are the realities from which Gatsby himself had fled. The ordinary is thus conceived of as horrific, crumbling, hopeless—quotidian with fatal verve. Queens is, then, neither the ribald bustle of Manhattan nor the moneymad enclave of the Eggs. It is drudgery, where fire's only evidence is the ash left after consumption. If there is any question as to the importance of the symbol to the novel, consider that one of Fitzgerald's several working titles for the novel was "Among Ash Heaps and Millionaires."

The valley of ashes powders under the watchful eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg. Long ago erected by "some wild wag of an oculist" to "fatten his practice in the boroughs of Queens," the eyes of the doctor "brood" like those of a despondent god. George Wilson later sees them almost literally as the eyes of God. They are also ever seeing, overseeing, never blinking, and take the role of conscience, witness, and judge.

Because a "small foul river" (or, the East River) borders the valley, the train into the city is often delayed at the drawbridge, making passengers "stare at the dismal scene for as long as half an hour." That delay, Nick tells the reader, resulted in his meeting Tom Buchanan's mistress. The two had been heading into New York when they hit the delay and, rather than waiting, Tom suddenly says, "I want you to meet my girl." He "literally forced" Nick off the train and the two walk along "under Doctor Eckleburg's persistent stare." The stare comes after Tom's brazen admission to a mistress, and watches Nick's (however reluctant) complicity in going to meet the woman.

They end up at George Wilson's garage, described as "unprosperous and bare," in stark contrast to the sumptuous animation of the Buchanan home. It is a "shadow of a garage," another contrast to the light constantly surrounding Daisy and Tom. George Wilson himself wipes his hand on "a piece of waste," is a "spiritless man, anæmic [sic]," and when he sees the two, "a damp gleam of hope sprang" into his eyes.
The short conversation that follows reveals that Tom is trying to sell a car to Wilson, entering them into a business arrangement crucial to the later plot. The remarks are almost lost as an aside, and are a very good example of how densely Fitzgerald had packed the short novel. Every piece of each chapter is critical to the plot or the full understanding of the characters, even though the importance is seldom apparent at the time of its mention. To someone reading the book for the first time, the conversation between Tom and George may seem incidental, little more than small talk about an unrelated fact of their acquaintance, but it is their potential business interaction that leads George, through other connections and actions, finally to kill Gatsby.

Myrtle Wilson's presence contrasts forcefully with Daisy Buchanan's. She literally "blocks out the light," carries "surplus flesh sensuously," and her face "contained no facet or gleam of beauty." But where Daisy is charm and illusion, lightness and façade, Myrtle Wilson has "an immediately perceptible vitality about her as if the nerves of her body were continually smouldering." The reasons for Tom's attraction are underscored by Fitzgerald's use of fire imagery in the initial description of both characters. For Tom, it was the burning gardens. With Myrtle, it is her smouldering of vitality. Although she and her husband are rendered separately from the Buchanans by color (for each, the only color mentioned is blue), Myrtle is differentiated from George by her stunning substance. She walks through "her husband as if he were a ghost" and orders him around, clearly dominating him.

As George moves to get chairs, Nick notes the "white ashen dust" covering his shoulders, linking the dust, perhaps, to the Buchanans and their ilk. The valley of ashes is covered in the ash drifting down from on high, from the fiery consumption of the elite. It veils everything, Nick notes. The effect of the wealthy covers everyone else in a fine scrim.

Nick and Tom leave after Tom tells Myrtle to get on a train, to meet him in the city. Tom denounces the entire place outside, and as he does so, meets the eye of Eckleburg again, "exchanging a frown." Since the eyes have no corresponding face, or even any other features, the characters are free to imagine the expression such a face might have, projecting their own assumptions on God, after a fashion. The only characters in the novel that make that assumption, however, are also the most desperate ones: Wilson, Tom, and Gatsby.

The use of color and characterization continues in the scene which follows, wherein Tom and Myrtle meet in New York. Myrtle wears a brown dress, picks up a copy of Town Tattler, a rough equivalent to today's Star magazine, or Us Weekly, a tabloid that, in its day, followed the exploits of Broadway and the fledgling movie industry, then still centered in New York. The cab she selects is lavender (a variation on blue) with gray upholstery. She chatters about getting a dog for the apartment. In all aspects, she reveals her station as below that of the Buchanans (who, rather than Town Tattler, read George Horace Lorimer's vastly superior Saturday Evening Post, the magazine of national conversation, and one in which Fitzgerald himself had published many of his stories and in which he later serialized Tender is the Night).

Once the trio makes it to Fifth Avenue, the city is "warm and soft, almost pastoral" and Nick says, "I wouldn't have been surprised to see a great flock of white sheep," underscoring again the contrast between the realm of wealth (the Eggs and Manhattan) and the valley of ashes. Several of Nick's later depictions of the city have similar qualities. At the same time, Myrtle's displacement regarding her station continues to be clear; she mentions her sister Catherine and announces, "she's said to be very beautiful by people who ought to know." In her zeal for such approval, she appears for a moment to be similar to Daisy. But unlike Daisy, cynicism does not undercut Myrtle's zeal.

The apartment's details include more copies of Town Tattler, as well as a copy of Simon Called Peter, a 1921 novel by Robert Keable. Fitzgerald had called the novel "immoral" and a "piece of trash" in The New York Herald in March 1923, and its inclusion is meant to imply the same about Myrtle Wilson. In addition to the reading material, Nick notices a single picture, "an over-enlarged photograph, apparently a hen sitting on a blurred rock." As he looks at it, though, it dissolves, and readers learn it resembles a famous optical illusion—resonating with the illusory quality of Myrtle's aspirations to culture. That the illusion is really Myrtle's mother is yet another layer of revelation.

Nick is soon drunk on Tom's whiskey, but notes that it was only the second time he had ever been drunk. And that he has not been drunk since. The admission is another instance wherein Fitzgerald's construction of a narrator is apparent and important. The admission, in the present tense, indicates that throughout the remainder of the events of the novel, many of which transpire in liquor-soaked afternoons and parties, Nick is sober, and thus reliable, insofar as his biases allow. As well, it reinforces how he is separate from the other individuals in the novel. His honesty and isolation are so important to his credibility that Fitzgerald asserts them on occasion throughout the book, but perhaps most memorably at the end of Chapter Three, when Nick notes—believably—"I am one of the few honest people that I have ever known." (It is also notable that Nick rarely places himself in
Company starts to arrive, and Myrtle's sister Catherine is "a sticky bob of red hair, and a complexion powdered milky white." A pure flapper, her arms bangle with bracelets, and her coloring matches that of Tom and Daisy. The only difference is that it is clearly cultivated: the bob is sticky, as if colored, and the complexion is created with powder. She is proprietary, possessive, acquisitive—in all, a more refined version of her sister. Myrtle, by the time company arrives, is wearing cream. It's not white, but she is approaching the palette of the elite, and it rustles, appropriating the movement more typical to both Jordan and Daisy.

The McKees arrive as well. He is a photographer, the one who took the photo of Myrtle's mother, and is, like George, dominated by his carping wife. As the conversation progresses, Catherine asks Nick if he knows Gatsby. She tells him that people think Gatsby is a descendant of Kaiser Wilhelm, the ruler of Germany before and during World War I. It is the first of many rumors Nick will hear about his neighbor. Many critics have written about how Fitzgerald's decision to delay the truth about Gatsby's past contributes to the novel's tension and makes Gatsby the memorable character he becomes.

As Catherine tells Nick about how neither Myrtle nor Tom could stand their spouses, Myrtle overhears and soon launches into a classist tirade about how George fooled her into marrying her: "I thought he knew something about breeding, but he wasn't fit to lick my shoe." As the whiskey continues to flow, Nick tries to leave, but continues to become "entangled in some wild, strident argument." He is aware of his observation as well as his complicity in the excess. Nick's conflict over his own difference stirs in him:

Yet high over the city our line of yellow windows must have contributed their share of human secrecy to the casual watcher in the darkening streets, and I was him too, looking up and wondering. I was within and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life.

The night winds down—McKee is asleep, the dog stares off, people move in and out—and yet the tension rises between Myrtle and Tom, as both are aware of transgression and frustration, when near midnight they begin to argue over whether "Mrs. Wilson had any right to mention Daisy's name." Fitzgerald then delivers a description of violence that has since been imitated by countless writers. Rather than drawing out the sensational in a moment of violence, he delivers only the facts. The restraint forces the reader to imagine the details, making the moment both as fast and as brief as it must really have been while simultaneously allowing readers to dwell on the particulars they themselves devise. The prose matches the action: "Making a short deft movement, Tom Buchanan broke her nose with his open hand." The description almost puts one in mind of Hemingway, whose "theory of omission" stated that if a writer leaves out all but the most essential details, a reader will fill in the rest, thus participating in the experience and making it the more powerful. (Though Fitzgerald would not meet Hemingway until the spring of 1925, after he wrote *Gatsby*, he was an admirer of the younger writer and sought him out on arriving in Paris.)

Drunk, Nick leaves the party. The only thing he does afterward is foggily visit McKee to look at photographs. The names suggest a kind of order and resonance: "Beauty and the Beast" might be Daisy and Tom; "Loneliness" might be Myrtle, might be any of the characters in their refined isolation; "Old Grocery Horse," might be an image from the valley; "Brook'n Bridge" might be the conduit between Manhattan and the valley. The end of Chapter Two and its violence, insights, and suggestions weighs on Nick's knowledge of Tom's mistress, more rumors regarding his neighbor, and his own drunken performance. It is a preamble to the excess, longing, and violence to come.

Chapter Three

The chapter begins with one of the more famous passages of the book: the first description of Gatsby's Friday night parties. In it, Fitzgerald summarizes a list of delights and actions that go into the making of a Gatsby event, the particulars meant some fine day to lure Daisy Buchanan to his home. As Matthew Bruccoli, in particular, and many others have pointed out, the passage highlights one of Fitzgerald's tendencies as a writer, and one of his celebrated talents: that of constructing and reeling off lists that both reveal the specifics of a scene as well as suggest character and motion to events.

In this case, the list serves to highlight the magical quality of the parties and how they first impressed Nick and the many other partygoers. The sentences mix numerous poetic qualities: assonance and alliteration, simile and metaphor: "In his blue gardens men and girls came and went like moths among the whisperings and the champagne and the stars." As well, the unusual word pairings are also at work: turkeys are "bewitched to a dark gold," motor boats "slit the water," the hors-d'oeuvre are "glistening," the
Fitzgerald builds the scene to a frenzy: “The lights grow brighter as the earth lurches away from the sun ... laughter is easier minute by minute, spilled with prodigality.” The flappers are “wanderers, confident girls who weave here and there among the stouter and more stable” until “suddenly one of these gypsies, in trembling opal, seizes a cocktail out of the air, dumps it down for courage, and ... dances out alone on the canvas platform.” At this display, Nick tells the reader in understatement, “The party has begun.”

The concluding understatement technique occurs as well in Chapter Four, after another list about Gatsby's parties.

A "girl" breaks open the party. Much of the criticism of The Great Gatsby considers the roles and portrayals of women in the book. Much of the action of the novel leading to strange or unruly behavior by men is instigated—actively or passively—by women. Gatsby's desire and fortune-craving are inspired by Daisy. Daisy also charms Nick before repelling him and changing his understanding of the world he has encountered. Myrtle and Daisy both work on Tom in different ways, and George Wilson is more attached to his wife, and more vulnerable to her loss, than he thinks, while Tom emerges as protective of Daisy. That's not to say that women in the novel are not complete characters with actions and motivations all their own; Daisy is certainly complicated and full of a variety of purposes. But Fitzgerald has a history of writing about women who inspire in men extreme behaviors. It is thus no surprise that a party of Gatsby's cannot truly begin until a young woman has, in her zeal, become a spectacle.

Nick arrives at the first party at the behest of Gatsby; an invitation arrives via Gatsby's butler (dressed, notably, in blue). Nick attends, dressed in white, the color of the Buchanans and their ilk. After all the celebration of the party dressings and the girl emerging as the kick-off for festivities, the first thing Nick notices is commerce: "young Englishmen ... all well dressed, all looking a little hungry, and all talking in low, earnest voices to solid and prosperous Americans." The women are young, impetuous, boozy, and vital; the men are solid, sober, hungry, reserved, scheming.

Nick feels out of place, and is about to "get roaring drunk from sheer embarrassment," when Jordan Baker finds him. As he begins to speak with her, two young women (in yellow dresses) approach her, star-struck by her celebrity as a golfer. As they talk, Nick learns that one of them had torn her (blue) dress at a previous party, and that Gatsby had sent her a new one (the cost is $265, another instance of detail revealing much about character, status, and the like). One of the girls notes, importantly, that "There's something funny about a fellow that'll do a thing like that ... He doesn't want any trouble with anybody." One of the girls then says, "Somebody told me they thought he killed a man once."

Another breaks in with the rumor that he was a spy, another that he had grown up in Germany, and so on. The speculation causes others to lean in, to try to hear more. Gatsby is the source of much discussion, causing Nick to observe: "It was testimony to the romantic speculation he inspired that there were whispers about him from those who had found little that it was necessary to whisper about in this world."

After bolting from dinner, Nick and Jordan go to look for Gatsby, as Jordan senses Nick's discomfort at not yet having met the host. In the library, however, they find an older man in spectacles, drunk, looking over some of the books, crying that the library actually held things of substance—an important comment given the ethereality of the parties, the women, the conversations, the rumors. In some ways, situated far into the house, concealed from most and away from the parties, the library symbolizes the kernel of substance at the heart of the mythical Gatsby. The old man, later, crashes a car to conclude the chapter, a foreshadowing of the disaster to come.

Nick and Jordan leave the library, the site of substance, to return to the party, where the dancing consisted of "old men pushing young girls backward in eternal graceless circles." Nick watches the scene of "superior couples holding each other tortuously" as he sits at a table, drinking champagne until "the scene had changed before [his] eyes into something significant, elemental, and profound. At that moment, he meets Gatsby for the first time, when the host recognizes him from the military—providing the first tangible and seemingly true information about Gatsby.

Only after a brief conversation does Nick realize the man he speaks to is Gatsby. When he does, his observations sharpen, contradict, and paint Gatsby in a memorable paragraph wherein the man is forcefully revealed as cultivating his own persona:

He smiled understandingly—much more than understandingly. It was one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance
it, that you may come across four or five times in life. It faced—or seemed to face—the whole external world for an instant, and then concentrated on you with an irresistible prejudice in your favor. It understood you just as far as you wanted to be understood, believed in you as you would like to believe in yourself, and assured you that it had precisely the impression of you that, at your best, you hoped to convey. Precisely at that point it vanished—and I was looking at an elegant young roughneck, a year or two over thirty, whose elaborate formality of speech just missed being absurd. Some time before he introduced himself I'd got a strong impression that he was picking his words with care.

Note the use of "seemed," "believed," "impression," "convey," "picking"—words all in support of creating an image. Note the final line, about Gatsby's picking his words carefully. Nick is aware of Gatsby's ability to charm (not unlike Daisy's) as well as his careful work in making "elegant" and elaborately formal someone who was once a "roughneck," and perhaps still is. Thus, even when Nick experiences Gatsby in person, after all the innuendo and rumor, he is unsure if the man he is meeting is genuine or just another invention, similar to the rumors. Of course, Gatsby is an invention; the reader simply does not yet know this to be true. Fitzgerald has carefully layered the first impression such that the evidence and suspicion are present in the very language, so that the reader's impressions of Gatsby have the same uneasy quality as Nick's.

Gatsby leaves to take a call from Chicago, a town most famous at the time for corruption: Upton Sinclair's book The Jungle, published nineteen years before The Great Gatsby, had exposed the horrible state of the meat-packing industry. Theodore Dreiser's Sister Carrie, published in 1900 and set in Chicago, painted the city unflatteringly and had been deemed obscene by the U.S. government. Most recently, Prohibition had led to the rise of gang activities most famously connected to Al Capone. Given the context of conjecture regarding Gatsby's past, his taking a call from Chicago creates an atmosphere of suspicion.

On Gatsby's departure, Nick reveals to Jordan that he had expected Gatsby "would be a florid and corpulent person in his middle years." The unspoken suggestion was that Gatsby was too young, a bit too dashing, to have really worked for the massive fortune he had attained. He had not inherited it, that anyone knew, so how did he come about it? Jordan reveals another rumor, that he had attended Oxford, and she doesn't believe it.

As the orchestra launches into another bombastic work (with the pretentious title, The Jazz History of the World), Nick watches Gatsby not only maintain rectitude in the face of his glamorous party, but also actually become more careful as everyone around him descends into stumbling incoherence. Gatsby is utterly separate from all of it in ways that will mirror Nick's own isolation as it develops later. As he observes his host's near exclusion from his own party, Jordan is called away, as Gatsby wishes to talk with her alone.

The party begins to falter—a famous singer descends into a sobbing despondency, husbands and wives start fighting, girls hiss at their paramours, women are "lifted, kicking, into the night" as their dates take them home at the late hour. Nick waits in the hall, near the library, from which Gatsby and Jordan soon emerge. Notably, Gatsby had taken her to the library—the spot of substance—to ask her a favor, to be revealed in the next chapter. Nick apologizes for not seeking the host earlier, and Gatsby brushes it off.

As Nick leaves, he sees an accident. The "owl-eyed" man from the library had crashed his "coupé," and there is much animated discussion from the crowd about how the accident could have been much worse. The moment is clear foreshadowing, and a hint of the consequences to the mad fanfare of the night, and possibly of the era, though Fitzgerald was seldom one to moralize overtly in his serious fiction. But Nick, as a character and a narrator, certainly possessed the capacity for judgment. While he withholds it at the moment, he has told readers that he looks back on the events with some scorn and disdain. The realization that comes to him as he views the wreck is the first step toward his developing that scorn: "A sudden emptiness seemed to flow now from the windows and the great doors, endowing with complete isolation the figure of the host, who stood on the porch, his hand up in a formal gesture of farewell." Cast against the chaos of the street, the gesture becomes absurd, haunting, foreboding.

Following the party, Nick pauses the story—as if feeling the need to set the drama of the parties and betrayals into a context of his life. He tells of how the events themselves aroused little interest until later, and that his days were, instead, filled with work, with time, and with the city itself and its romantic possibilities. Even so, his enjoyment was tinged with isolation: "At the enchanted metropolitan twilight I felt a haunting loneliness sometimes, and felt it in others—poor young clerks who loitered in front of windows waiting until it was time for a solitary restaurant dinner—young clerks in the dusk, wasting the most poignant moments of night and life." The passage reveals a conflict in Nick (that was actually also a conflict in Fitzgerald): he does not want to be among the lost masses, the inhibitors of valleys of ashes, people lost in the industrial vastness of what Eliot termed a "waste land." On the
other hand, he did not want the tragic, false, and cheap magic of the Gatsby partygoers. The frustration becomes increasingly important later in the book.

Nick is also, he tells us, taken with Jordan Baker, and seeing quite a bit of her. He feels toward her a "sort of tender curiosity," something different from love. He details how, like Daisy, Jordan is about appearances—only instead of Daisy's buoyancy, Jordan prefers a mask of "boredom" that covers her "incurably dishonest" nature.

By this point in the novel, the only people Nick has met who are forthright are also on the fringe: the owl-eyed man and the "Finn" who cleans his house. And he reasserts his own honesty, but not until after one last bit of foreshadowing of the accident to come. After noting that Jordan is a bad driver, they have the following exchange:

"Either you ought to be more careful, or you oughtn't to drive at all."

"I am careful."

"No, you're not."

"Well, other people are," she said lightly.

"What's that got to do with it?"

"They'll keep out of my way," she insisted. "It takes two to make an accident."

"Suppose you meet somebody just as careless as yourself."

"I hope I never will," she answered. "I hate careless people. That's why I like you."

Of course, everyone she knows is careless—precisely the thing Nick notices about the East Egg residents as well as the partygoers, and the thing for which he develops intense animosity by the novel's end. Such carelessness, as he sees it, leads to avoidable tragedy, recrimination, and the dissolution of lives and fortunes.

Chapter Four

Returning his attention to his neighbor, Nick begins the next chapter with a sardonic assessment of the Sundays at Gatsby's, when "the world and its mistress" would return to "twinkle hilariously" on the lawn for cocktails and a last delight before the work week. The hilarity and over-the-top nature of Nick's statement yield then to the list, the famous recital of partygoers that has attracted the attention of many critics. In its riotous specifics, the list tells readers of the parties' ability to attract the ambitious, the curious, the newly rich, and the socially ungracious—the literary puns are extensive. In all, though, the list has not a few betrayals, maimings, strange events, and murders contained within, as well as the reiteration of young women as status objects and ciphers for wealth and influence. The details form an exultation that ends with the understatement of "All these people came to Gatsby's house in the summer."

Nick's understatement suggests how deeply he has become enmeshed in the fabric of Fifth Avenue and East and West Egg—how he has come to see not spectacle, but a kind of regularity to events and people suggesting a skewed understanding of the status quo. He has forgotten his own Midwestern roots, though readers also understand he will return to them by the story's end (and, indeed, he writes of Gatsby only after having returned there). The last sentence also underscores the disconnect of the privileged and the aspiring from the situation of most people in the country—in the valley of ashes particularly.

The overdone quality of everything related to Gatsby and West Egg is further reinforced in the next section, wherein Gatsby arrives to take Nick to lunch, driving his elaborate car. Don Seiders discusses much of the symbolism related to objects in the novel, and cars in particular. It is important to note that the car's overblown quality signifies Gatsby's wealth as well as his conspicuous lack of the understated mores that characterize Daisy and Tom Buchanan.

The invitation and trip to lunch is but the latest "urgent invitation" of Gatsby to Nick. By this point in the novel, Gatsby realizes
Nick's relation to Daisy, and readers realize later that Gatsby has worked to rapidly develop a friendship with his neighbor, such that he could exploit it to hasten his "accidental" reunion with Daisy. At the same time, Nick observes Gatsby, attempting to reconcile what he knows and can discern from Gatsby with the rumors swirling about him. For instance, when Gatsby arrives in the car, Nick notes his posture, balancing on the running board of the car, "with that resourcefulness of movement that is so peculiarly American—that comes, I suppose, with the absence of lifting work or rigid sitting in youth and, even more, with the formless grace of our nervous, sporadic games." In other words, Gatsby has the bearing one would expect of a member of the leisure class.

Aware of both Nick's observation and the whisperings that surround him, Gatsby divulges his history—a very calculated story—to Nick as they drive. Gatsby claims he descended from wealth in the "Middle West," and when Nick asks where, exactly, he came from, Gatsby answers, "San Francisco," revealing a lack of knowledge about geography (making the Oxford claim seem the more specious) as well as the likely fabrication of his past. Gatsby moves on, talks in "threadbare" phrases such that Nick sees only "a turbaned 'character' leaking sawdust at every pore." He "swallows" or "choke on" the phrase "educated at Oxford," and his entire bearing as well as his glance seem sidelong to Nick. However, just as Nick is suppressing "incredulous laughter," Gatsby begins to talk about the war, shows Nick pictures from Oxford, reveals accurate details about parts of the world until Nick tells how his "incredulity was submerged in fascination now; it was like skimming hastily through a dozen magazines."

Clearly, Gatsby has arranged the confessional moment. He had with him his medal for military service, his picture from Oxford, and the occasion of a long drive. He also has a favor to ask of Nick, but only through Jordan—thus Gatsby has utilized a romantic relationship (as he perceived it) for his own romantic ends. Gatsby has arranged things well, if a bit hastily and clumsily. Nick has learned enough of his past that appears demonstrably true, and likes Gatsby well enough on top of it, that he is primed for a favor. In one last show—calculated or not—Gatsby is nearly pulled over by a police officer on a motorcycle. But when Gatsby flashes his Christmas card from the commissioner, the cop lets him go, the Gatsby image firmly established.

Immediately afterward, Nick and Gatsby cross over the "great bridge" into Manhattan, and the description of their entry blazes with motion and white, from the sunlight's "flicker upon the moving cars" to the city's skyline of "white heaps and sugar lumps." Nick says, "The city seen from the Queensboro Bridge is always the city seen for the first time, in its first wild promise of all the mystery and the beauty in the world." The Queensboro Bridge enters Manhattan from the east, right at the bottom of Central Park, where some of the most famous architectural landmarks in Manhattan are visible. Thus, the momentary insight and revelation of the Gatsby history end in the panorama of what is to Nick the financial and cultural capital of the world. As they cross, however, a "dead man" passes them in an ornate funeral procession, and the deceased's friends "looked out ... with the tragic eyes and short upper lips of southeastern Europe" and Nick was "glad that the sight of Gatsby's splendid car was included in their somber holiday."

This inclusion does a few things worth noting. First, it juxtaposes the rarefied position of Gatsby, Nick, and the Manhattan skyline with death, the end for everyone, from which Gatsby flees, in a way. It is an early hint of the tragic imagery and consequences of excess waiting in later chapters. As well, it shows the further distancing of Nick from what he might term the "plebeian." Finally, as the paragraph goes on, it draws further distinction between Nick and Gatsby and the other people of various races and ethnicities.

Critics have recently devoted much consideration to the portrayal of race and ethnic differences in Fitzgerald's work, and in The Great Gatsby particularly. Nick's statement, "Anything can happen now that we've slid over this bridge," suggests a slackening or loosening of the rules governing places like Fifth Avenue and East Egg, or it could suggest something darker, related to the mixing of individuals so forcefully lamented by Tom Buchanan in the novel's opening chapter. In the very next scene, Wolfsheim's Jewish identity is depicted in ways most contemporary readers would find offensive to some degree. Given the themes of class privilege and racial preference present to varying degrees in The Great Gatsby and Fitzgerald's other works, as well as some of the contradictory behavior of Fitzgerald himself with regard to racial and ethnic sensitivity during his lifetime, recent scholarship has had much with which to work.

As for Wolfsheim's contribution to the plot, the scene does two things. It reveals to Nick that Gatsby deals with shady characters. Not only does Wolfsheim wear cufflinks made of human molars, he helped fix the 1919 World Series. Wolfsheim also lends more credibility—to the extent a gangster can—to Gatsby's history, reiterating the "Oggsford" connection. At the end of the scene, Tom Buchanan happens to catch sight of Nick. Tom tells Nick how Daisy is "furious" because he hasn't called. When Nick introduces Gatsby to "Mr. Buchanan," Gatsby is clearly uncomfortable, and then he quickly disappears. Immediately afterward, Nick segues into the story behind Gatsby and Daisy.
The story paints Daisy, once again, in white. Gatsby meets her before he goes to war, and does so when the houses in Daisy's neighborhood are festooned with "red, white, and blue banners." Fitzgerald wanted the resonance of American identity in the scene, and the idyllic meeting of the two under such circumstances was so powerful that the novelist wanted, for a short time, to name the novel Under the Red, White, and Blue. The tale also paints Gatsby again as the man possessing the ability to look at people and charm them. Jordan tells the story, as she grew up with Daisy in Louisville, and was best friends with her. It is Jordan who assures Nick that Gatsby looked at Daisy "in a way that every young girl wants to be looked at at some time, and because it seemed romantic" to her she has "remembered the incident ever since." Tragically, to hear Jordan tell it, Gatsby leaves, disappears for four years, during which Daisy has her debut and soon becomes engaged to Tom Buchanan from Chicago. Jordan notes that he gave Daisy a "string of pearls valued at over three hundred and fifty thousand dollars."

Daisy, however, is reluctant. Jordan finds her drunk and despondent just before the bridal dinner, clutching a letter and a bottle of wine, having thrown her pearls into the trash. As Jordan and Daisy's mother work to sober her up, she refuses to let go of the letter, even taking it into the cold bath they make her take. The letter disintegrates "like snow" and no one ever learns what was on it. The prose and the mode of the tale leave the powerful suggestion that Gatsby had written the letter. Daisy marries, discovers Tom is a philanderer (in an anecdote that also operates as yet another foreshadowing of the novel's climactic events), and gives birth to her daughter, and while she and Tom travel, Jordan characterizes Daisy as enduring, not drinking much, not developing a reputation, despite their wild crowd. All seems settled. Then, however, she hears the name Gatsby on the night that Jordan stays at the Buchanans, and it troubles Daisy enough that she wakes Jordan to ask more about him.

Later, while riding in a carriage through Central Park, Nick also learns that Gatsby moved to the mansion on West Egg so he could be near Daisy. In modern terms, given his behavior, his reading of Chicago newspapers, and his elaborate scheming, one might consider Gatsby a stalker. But even in the more forgiving context of social interaction among the reckless inhabitants of West Egg, his behavior gives a little pause. Fitzgerald constructed a character whose romantic understanding of the world runs smack into realism, cynicism, and disillusionment—much the way the author's sense of the romantic drove him to write realist novels dealing with the disconnect between romantic and pragmatic world views. In short, as James E. Miller, Jr., once noted, Gatsby displays the dangers of idealizing an unworthy or even sinister object. Nick feels the conflict of those dangers, borne of admiring Gatsby's unflattering spirit while disapproving of his methods and scorning his acquisitiveness. But Nick feels the same conflict elsewhere: enjoying the charms of the people he meets while feeling repulsed by their cynical and reckless behavior.

As a result, he grows more attracted to Jordan, whom he refers to as a "clean, hard, limited person, who dealt in universal skepticism." He hears a phrase "beat" in his ears, a philosophical realization borne of his experiences, and it reveals what he has come to understand: "There are only the pursued, the pursuing, the busy, and the tired." As Jordan tells Nick how Gatsby wants him to invite Daisy to tea, Nick considers how he fits into the four groups in the phrase, and determines:

Unlike Gatsby and Tom Buchanan, I had no girl whose disembodied face floated along the dark cornices and blinding signs, and so I drew up the girl beside me, tightening my arms. Her wan, scornful mouth smiled, and so I drew her up again closer, this time to my face.

The moment suggests a number of interpretations: is Jordan so different, so much a mix of realism and scarcely concealed need that Nick finds her "truer" than others? Or, is he caught in the moment of romance and heedlessly loving what is closest at hand? Milton R. Stern suggested, in The Novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald (1970), that the Jordan-Nick relationship paralleled the Gatsby-Daisy relationship: Nick is lured into hope and puts aside obvious hurdles through denial. In Nick's case, the obvious hurdle is the fact that Jordan, at base, is fundamentally dishonest, a cheat at her profession, a cynic whose pallid expression belies the scorn she feels for others, and a deserter in times of trouble (as she does in Chapter Seven, after the accident). Stern further points out that her bad driving, referred to throughout the novel, is a symptom of her underlying poor moral character, and that which Nick rejects. While Gatsby himself is a man made from crime, he emerges from the novel a sympathetic character, showing how Fitzgerald, through Nick, values the dream and the capacity for hope more than just about anything else.

Chapter Five

By this point, Fitzgerald has laid the foundations for the climactic events of the novel to unfold. In this chapter Daisy and Gatsby will meet, precipitating events that will result in the shattering of Gatsby's dreams and the bringing about of his untimely death. These events will also galvanize Nick's disdain for the life of the rich—and by extension demonstrate Fitzgerald's own indictment of American culture—and thrust Tom and Daisy Buchanan back into the spiral of meaninglessness and recrimination to which their
The chapter opens with fire imagery applied to Gatsby's house, lit up at two in the morning. He was, he tells Nick, looking into the rooms, surveying his possessions or judging the effect of the place. Nick comments that the house looked like "the World's Fair," raising evocations of the Chicago fair of 1899, another connection with the city that, until the rise of Wall Street, stood for progress as well as the less savory corruptions and muckraking journalists of the previous era. The connection, applied again to Gatsby, is still not flattering.

Nick tells Gatsby he will invite Daisy to tea the following day, but Gatsby makes him wait another day, so that he can hire someone to cut the grass in Nick's yard. Later, Gatsby will insist on flowers and baked goods, working hard to engineer the moment to specifications he has long imagined. Gatsby continues to work on sweetening the incentives for Nick, even offering to help him make "a nice bit of money," to which Nick demurs, despite Gatsby's assurances that Nick wouldn't have to work with Wolfsheim. Nick's pause ensures his removal from everyone as the narrative moves on.

Gatsby and Daisy each have their character on full display in the scene. When Nick phones Daisy about the tea, and asks her to come alone, she misinterprets willfully and flirts almost automatically. Gatsby shows up for the event visibly bothered and dressed in a gaudy mix of silver, gold, and white. He is even a bit off his act, almost forgetting to drop his trademark "old sport" affectation while he talks with Nick.

When Daisy arrives, Fitzgerald again announces her with distinctive prose style:

"Is this absolutely where you live, my dearest one?"

The exhilarating ripple of her voice was a wild tonic in the rain. I had to follow the sound of it for a moment, up and down, with my ear alone, before any dash of words came through. A damp streak of hair lay like a dash of blue paint across her cheek, and her hand was wet with glistening drops as I took it to help her from the car.

While the typical unusual pairings are present ("wild tonic") as well as the density of description, the passage is also distinct due to its presenting Daisy, for the first time, not in imagery related to air, but to water. As well, the tone has changed; no longer white, she arrives in lavender, blue, and lilac. It is a different Daisy that arrives at West Egg, to Nick's home.

The strain of the moment comes through in Gatsby's posture, in the pauses and delays in conversation, in the ridiculous conversation about the clock Gatsby nearly upends. Nick tries gamely to host, but as Gatsby gets "himself into a shadow" and Nick and Daisy endure his unhappy eyes, Nick soon decides to leave. Fraught with nerves, Gatsby follows him, declares the meeting a mistake, and Nick talks him back into the room, ultimately, by pointing out that Gatsby, the instigator of all of it, was being rude by leaving Daisy alone in the other room.

Fitzgerald's narrator then amplifies the moment's tension by leaving the discussion and directly not talking about it. As earlier noted, such omission can often cause readers a more visceral reaction to the work by imagining, themselves, what transpires. In this case, however, readers have the added tension of not knowing, really, what either person might say. While the conversation happens, Nick muses on the house Gatsby acquired, and the previous owner's similar misunderstanding of what wealth did and did not allow. In noting it, Nick makes one outright statement regarding American culture—a rare such move for the book which, itself, is an implicit indictment of American culture: "Americans, while occasionally willing to be serfs, have always been obstinate about being peasantry."

The rain ceases, the grocer arrives at Gatsby's, the house opens, and soon Nick returns inside, to find them both moved by whatever has transpired. Daisy is teary, Gatsby exultant. Daisy is referring to Gatsby as "Jay," and at Gatsby's suggestion that she
see his house, the reason for his hours spent room-gazing become apparent: he wanted to see how they would look to Daisy.

As he asks Nick how the place looks, he divulges that it took him only three years to earn the money to buy it, and in his boast reveals more about his past than he realizes. Nick calls him on it, says, "I thought you inherited your money." His answers, automatic and snippy, arouse yet more curiosity in Nick, which results in more cagey behavior from Gatsby. Before it can worsen, Daisy reappears and the trio tours the grounds and the house, Daisy all the while admiring.

While Gatsby's home is ornate and expensive, the colors gold, lavender, rose, and more reveal its "gaudy" outsider status—there is no white. The silhouette is described as "feudal," primitive, and gauche, and the rooms are distinctly wrong in the age of Modernism and Art Deco. As Gatsby surveys with Daisy, he watches her the entire time, as though he "revalued everything in his house according to the measure of response it drew from her well-loved eyes." The house, once still and from which he isolated himself during parties, comes alive as it finds its purpose, and Gatsby's appreciation for it changes.

As he is stunned by "wonder at her presence," finally comfortable enough with her response and confident with the way things are going, they enter his bedroom, the "simplest room of all," perhaps since no one else ever sees it. Like the library, it has special status different from the rest of the house, something of truth about it. But once there, he opens his patent cabinets and reveals his shirts, "piled like bricks," a relevant description, given how they (and other possessions) have built the man.

The shirts are all colors but white, and as he tosses them to the bed, Daisy begins "to cry stormily." She cries because the shirts are so beautiful, and because she has not seen their like. Tom, presumably, buys white shirts only, muted suits, the understated style befitting old wealth. And Daisy, married to a man long since bored with his wealth and those things it enables him to acquire, seldom sees ostentatious and beautiful objects. Moreover, Daisy herself is a possession of which Tom has grown tired. She is fine, lacking color and verve, nearly porcelain, and Tom views her as such, in stark contrast to Myrtle Wilson. Wilson's energy is not something he purchases, and she is not refined in the ways Daisy is. For as much as Daisy is enamored of wealth and the lifestyle to which she is chained with golden shackles, so to speak, she does not benefit from the ability to acquire in the way, being new to wealth, she would like. Hers is not a world of zeal, but a world of scornful sophistication, a world of white.

The moment of triumph cannot last. In the very next scene, the rain returns, and the mist shrouds the Buchanan home—something Gatsby points out to Daisy. As Gatsby does so, Nick watches his neighbor mull over the importance of what he has just said:

Possibly it had occurred to him that the colossal significance of that light had now just vanished forever. Compared to the great distance that had separated him from Daisy it had seemed very near to her, almost touching her. It had seemed as close as a star to the moon. Now it was again a green light on a dock. His count of enchanted objects had diminished by one.

The last sentence above signals the beginning of the end. Gatsby has attained the momentary attention of his lost love, and has achieved the goal to which he has devoted five years of his life. But he also did not yet have it; Daisy would go home at the end of the day. As well, the realization would come soon that the love he hoped to recreate could never be the same, if it had indeed ever really been as he had imagined (a possibility for which the text leaves ample interpretive room).

After that moment, Nick notices the photograph of Dan Cody, setting up the further development of Gatsby's past set to happen in the next chapter. As Nick does so, Daisy looks, too, and notes how Gatsby never told her anything about the yachting. As she protests, he tries to draw her attention to newspaper clippings of her that he has collected, when the phone rings. The conversation suggests something shady, hinting at a past that will trouble Gatsby's attempts at rejoining with her. When the conversation ends, Gatsby exclaims that Klipspringer, the boarder in his home, will play the piano for them all.

As Gatsby and Daisy sit on a couch in a darkened corner, Klipspringer plays music entirely inappropriate to the tensions in the room. Nick notes the dusk outside, the return of West-Eggers from New York, the "hour of a profound human change" when "excitement was generating on the air." At that point, Klipspringer sings how "the rich get richer and the poor get—children." The conflation of misread intent, a tense reunion, the shattering of expectations, and the energy of threat and storm in the air affect Nick as well as Gatsby. Even though the two of them were "possessed by intense life" in the tumult of the moment, Nick notes:

There must have been moments even that afternoon when Daisy tumbled short of his dreams—not through her own fault, but because of the colossal vitality of his illusion. It had gone beyond her, beyond everything. He had thrown himself into it with a creative passion, adding to it all the time, decking it out with every bright feather that drifted his way. No amount of freshness can
He also guesses that it is Daisy's voice that holds Gatsby with its "deathless song." When Nick leaves, alone again, outside of their collusion, his isolation is again increased and reaffirmed. The overwhelmingly uncertain and negative cast to the events of the afternoon ends the chapter with a kind of dread—a dread that will not be satisfied by events until Chapter Seven.

Chapter Six

To delay the inevitable confrontation and further develop the mysterious man at the heart of the novel, Fitzgerald makes the decision to change pace at the beginning of Chapter Six and deal a bit with the development of Jimmy Gatz into Jay Gatsby. When a reporter seeks out Gatsby for a comment regarding controversial happenings on Wall Street, it is because his name was dropped in the office and, as he was the source of speculative legends, the reporter took initiative on his day off and sought a comment.

Nick points out that for some reason or another Gatsby took satisfaction in the legends. Insomuch as they might have been heard by Daisy, it's easy to see why Gatsby would enjoy a little notoriety. It would help with the attraction factor.

But Nick reports more of the rationale for Gatz's change, reasons that predated his meeting Daisy Fay. In another moment revealing some of the novel's thematic concerns with social class, Nick tells how Gatz's parents were "shiftless and unsuccessful farm people" and that their young son "never really accepted them as his parents at all." Gatz's vision of himself, Nick relates, was "Platonic." The word refers most commonly to an idea expressed in Plato's "Allegory of the Cave," in which Plato relates his philosophy that all worldly manifestations are but versions of an ideal, the perfection of which can never be expressed in actual existence, only approached. For Jimmy Gatz, "Jay Gatsby" is the manifestation of an ideal projected by a seventeen-year-old boy desperate to be glamorous and from another place and time. As Nick points out, in Gatsby's focus, he never allowed the vision to mature. The lack of maturity in his cultivated identity is exactly what Tom Buchanan and others like him sense and reject in Gatsby.

Gatsby's past is, according to a number of critics, Fitzgerald's spin on the typical Horatio Alger tale. Readers of The Great Gatsby would have been, on the whole, more familiar with such tales than would today's readers. A very popular nineteenth-century author, Horatio Alger published a string of similar tales in which young men of modest means would, through their own stout-heartedness, ingenuity, and American pluck, rise above and prevail over their native situations to become captains of industry, leaders of men, and altogether virtuous American types. Gatz's tale, with its protagonist who "knew women early," who lived "beating his way along the south shore of Lake Superior" essentially as a mercenary sailor, who "lived naturally through the half-fierce, half lazy work of bracing days," was the typical Horatio Alger protagonist in far grittier circumstances. His imagination foresees "a universe of ineffable gaudiness," all the pomp of wealth. For Gatsby, coming from nothing, the promise of wealth is the promise to have everything. Tom Buchanan might well have noted that the promise of wealth is the ability to depend on nothing. While Nick supposes Gatsby had some sense of the unreality of his dreams ("a promise that the rock of the world was founded securely on a fairy's wing"), Gatsby also had enough faith in hope, and enough instinct, to put himself near opportunity and to seize it—like an Alger hero.

However, Gatsby's story turns when he meets Dan Cody. A former miner from what was still an American wilderness, Cody had vast stores of wealth, and was thus the target of "an infinite number of women" bent on separating "him from his money." Looking for a suitable mate for his ill-advised seaward voyage in a yacht, Cody trolled the coast for help. On meeting Gatsby, Cody took him on, seeing in him ambition and judgment, and made the young man, for all intents and purposes, his ward.

While Gatsby had earned his claim on a partial inheritance from Cody, and Cody had made provisions for it, a woman (note the role, yet again, of another woman in the novel) made use of legal maneuvering to deny Jay Gatsby his legacy of $25,000. He was left only, as Nick says, "with his singularly appropriate education; the vague contour of Jay Gatsby had filled out to the substantiality of a man."

Nick points out that Gatsby only tells him of the past much later. (Chapter Eight reveals that Gatsby tells the story in the very early morning following the car accident that kills Myrtle Wilson.) Nick still feels a loyalty to Gatsby, the only person from the summer for whom he still holds any affection, and so notes that he tells the story to dispel the rumors that became worse after the scandalous death. But he tells the story, he says, to let the reader know about the past and its impact, the true sad story of the
man. He also tells it because, as he says, there was a pause after the dreadful afternoon spent with Gatsby and Daisy. He doesn't say why, but Nick's character and tone imply the awkwardness as well as the feeling of having been used might have played a part in the break.

The story also colors the reader's understanding of the scene immediately following the history, in which Tom Buchanan's small riding party arrives at Gatsby's for a quick drink. Gatsby effuses, and the party greets his enthusiasm with disdain—a fact clear to Nick but not to Gatsby. Gatsby asserts himself toward Tom, mentions he knows Daisy, to which Tom mutters only, "That so?"

The man, Sloane, and the "pretty woman," are only mildly more talkative. The woman suggests they attend Gatsby's next party, and it is possible she is joking. Sloane accepts Gatsby's tacit invitation "without gratitude." The entire party believes itself above Gatsby. Gatsby, however, bent on a good showing and, more particularly, driven to see more of Tom, takes their niceties as serious invitations, much to Tom's consternation. Tom says to Nick:

I wonder where in the devil he met Daisy. By God, I may be old-fashioned in my ideas, but women run around too much these days to suit me. They meet all kinds of crazy fish.

The irony, of course, utterly lost on a boor of the magnitude of Tom Buchanan, is that George Wilson might well bemoan the "crazy fish" his own wife met while "running around too much these days." Shortly afterward, in another move signaling low character, the trio leaves, abandoning Gatsby as he is off in the house, preparing to accompany them.

Tom's jealousy has him at Daisy's side the following Saturday as the two attend Gatsby's party, each for the first time. Nick senses "an unpleasantness in the air, a pervading harshness that hadn't been there before," or, more accurately, that his experience had not yet caused him to see. Daisy's eyes are having an effect on the way he sees the party now, just as they had an effect on Gatsby's own sense of his possessions and achievements. As such, Nick muses:

West Egg [is] a world complete in itself, with its own standards and its own great figures, second to nothing because it had no consciousness of being so, and now I was looking at it again, through Daisy's eyes. It is invariably saddening to look through new eyes at things upon which you have expanded your own powers of adjustment.

Many people have made the mistake of remembering the eyes on the most famous jacket cover of *The Great Gatsby* as the eyes of Dr. Eckleburg when, in fact, they are a woman's eyes, eyes often read as Daisy's. Daisy's gaze changes the way Nick and Gatsby see the world in which they are embroiled, and her face is itself representative of all Gatsby wishes to achieve. The eyes of Eckleburg represent other things—as detailed in the excerpts in this volume's next section. But perspective and its change—whether as a result of class, sex, or a change in character—are major themes of the novel, expressed ever more forcefully in the later chapters of the novel.

The entire sense of being "second to nothing" due to having "no consciousness of being so" is also often seen as a greater criticism of American exceptionalism, the nationalistic sense of absolute superiority and greatness in all things on which American culture writ large periodically asserts. The decade of the twenties is notable for its optimism and sense of manifest and pre-ordained American greatness, a feeling for which the Great Depression was a most horrible comeuppance. Given its overwhelming feel of dread, illusion and tragedy, and its particular focus on American affluent culture as well as the pointlessness of existence in the valley of ashes, *The Great Gatsby* has been read as Fitzgerald's statement of warning, despite his life's paralleling the excess of his novels.

As the party gets under way, Daisy flirts, the behavior now almost automatic, and Tom glares and scans the room. Tom states that he would "rather look at all these famous people in—in oblivion," while Daisy, on watching a director work to be able to kiss a starlet, declared she found the scene offensive. Nick states that she found it offensive because it was real emotion, and not gesture.

She was appalled by West Egg, this unprecedented "place" that Broadway had begotten upon a Long Island fishing village—appalled by its raw vigor that chafed under the old euphemisms and by the too obtrusive fate that herded its inhabitants along a short-cut from nothing to nothing. She saw something awful in the very simplicity she failed to understand.

According to Nick (and, thus, Fitzgerald) Daisy and Tom are insulated by wealth and the mores of restraint and gesture. They are cynical and dead to all emotion from their protected spot, far from struggle. They, and others like them, the affluent dressed in
white with their pallid faces, having never known struggle and the feelings of agony and triumph, hold nothing but scorn for such extremes. Additionally, Broadway has "begotten" West Egg by allowing a new route for people of average or lowly means to shortcut the access to wealth and, thus, privilege. "Ordinary" people can now attain the province of the elite.

Thus, Tom's jealousy of Gatsby arises more from his feeling violated by a person of a lower station than out of any real concern for his own wife. Of course, Tom does not see how his zeal for Myrtle Wilson is ironic in this setting; his lies to avoid having to marry Myrtle, however, speak to his fear of "mixing" classes.

Daisy's action at the party, however, mixes revulsion and interest, automated flirting as well as a moment of singing which results in her having "tipped out a little of her warm human magic upon the air." The difficulty of her reaction speaks to how she has a little in common with Gatsby; while he has attained wealth through a secondary means (questionable business actions instead of inheritance or lineage), she has attained it through the only slightly more honorable mode of marrying into it. She might well have ended up like Myrtle Wilson, had she bought into Gatsby's early overtures.

As the party winds down, Nick reports that both Daisy and Gatsby are in a state of high agitation. She is worried about what might happen between her and Gatsby. Still uncertain, still torn, Nick says "her glance" revealed a worry over the "romantic possibilities" of those parties, and that "some authentically radiant young girl"—that is, someone not composed of gesture and affectation—"would blot out those five years of unwavering devotion." For Daisy, a woman for whom adoration is most important, such a change (now that she knows of the half-decade mission) would be ruinous. As for Gatsby, his agitation is more anticipation for what, in his mind, must happen next: "He wanted nothing less of Daisy than that she should go to Tom and say: 'I never loved you.'"

Nick and Gatsby walk a "desolate path of fruit rinds and discarded favors and crushed flowers," a symbolic treading if ever there was one. At this time, Nick suggests to Gatsby, "You can't repeat the past," to which Gatsby responds, "incredulously. 'Why of course you can!'" Nick imagines Gatsby seeing the full trajectory of his life in that moment, from back when it all began: Daisy's "white face," when he "wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath." He placed immortal dreams upon something mortal, perishable, changeable, uncertain. The rock of his existence was, he might be learning, sand.

Chapter Seven

The longest chapter by far in The Great Gatsby, Chapter Seven is the fruition of Fitzgerald's layers of style and theme as well as particulars of character, events, exposition, and setting. The events lead to the death of Myrtle Wilson, Daisy's abortive betrayal of Tom, Gatsby's ruin, the end of Nick and Jordan's affair, and the beginning of George Wilson's murderous quest.

The foreboding begins immediately. For the first time since his arrival in West Egg, Gatsby does not throw a party: "the lights failed to go on one Saturday night—and, as obscurely as it had begun, his career as Trimalchio was over." Trimalchio was another of the titles Fitzgerald considered for the novel, and a full explanation of Trimalchio's resonance for Gatsby and his role in the novel can be found in Trimalchio: an Early Version of The Great Gatsby by James L. West III. Nick notes that the servants are new, and do not seem servants so much as people temporarily assuming the role of servants. The observation suggests more bad dealings in Gatsby's business affairs. Gatsby himself informs Nick that the servants are "some people Wolfsheim wanted to do something for," and that he needed discreet individuals, given that Daisy is now visiting in the afternoons.

Daisy invites Nick to lunch at the Buchanan house, as well as Jordan Baker and Gatsby. The day of the lunch is hot—with actual heat as well as tension. But where Jordan and Daisy repose, it is cool. And, of course, white, with silver, and in motion with "the singing breeze of the fans." Nick and Gatsby arrive as Tom argues on the phone about selling a car, indicating George Wilson is on the other line. When Tom returns from the phone call, Daisy sends him back to make a cold drink. Once Tom leaves, Daisy kisses Gatsby and tells him she loves him.

Jordan reproaches her for it, and Daisy displays a range of emotion in a remarkably short amount of time. Jordan's remark makes Daisy look around "doubtfully," but then Daisy counters, attempts a dance to show she doesn't care a whit for convention, but as her daughter comes into the room, reverts to an overblown affectation of motherly love. The child has a different effect on Gatsby, making real Daisy's bond to Tom in ways that his willful denial could no longer overcome.

As the daughter leaves, Tom reappears with gin rickeys. As they drink, Tom prevails on Gatsby to go outside, to "have a look at
the place," asserting himself in the only way he knows. The effect is not what Tom had hoped for; instead, Gatsby points out the location of his own home, "right across from you." Tom's response echoes his earlier, suspicious "That so?" He says, simply, "So you are." Just as he exercises restraint in his style, home, and bearing, he exercises it in his distaste. Gatsby, being the character he is, and newly schooled in manners, cannot be as subdued. He almost has to point out the house, to show Tom what he had long intended.

Back inside, as Daisy lobbies to go to town, Tom continues to attempt his domination of Gatsby through his home. Asserting that he has made stables from his garage, almost no one hears him, other than Nick. The room has become a place where each individual within it has begun to pursue her or his agenda. Then, when Gatsby and Daisy exchange a glance from which Daisy finds it most difficult to disengage, Tom sees and hears that his wife declares she loves Gatsby. At that point, Tom interrupts Daisy and insists they all go to town.

While the women prepare to depart and Tom goes to get whiskey for the trip, Gatsby and Nick have one of the novel's most famous exchanges:

Gatsby turned to me rigidly:

"I can't say anything in this house, old sport."

"She's got an indiscreet voice," I remarked. "It's full of—" I hesitated.

"Her voice is full of money," he said suddenly.

That was it. I'd never understood before. It was full of money—that was the inexhaustible charm that rose and fell in it, the jingle of it, the cymbal's song of it.... High in a white palace, the golden girl ...

Daisy's ability to be indiscreet is bought—her charm derives from her wealth freeing her from any real consequence. She can afford to be devil-may-care, flirtatious, and so on, since she is financially insulated and protected from the outcomes of her behavior. Nick's realization of the source of her charm sets yet another brick in the wall building between himself and the Buchanans and all they stand for. Jordan states early in the novel that she cannot abide careless people, yet it is most clearly Nick who has difficulties with the wages of carelessness and the attitudes that go with it. Nick is the one shocked at ruin and consequences.

At the same time, Gatsby realizes the spot into which he has gotten himself. The daughter has made real the depth of marriage that, however ill-conceived, is still powerful. It is also important that Gatsby be the one to notice Daisy's symbolic alliance with money; the girl and the dream are one, "golden." Both are to be acquired.

When Tom returns, he insists on driving Gatsby's car, while Gatsby and Daisy (after some disagreement with Tom) follow together in the coupé. Tom's anger rises once they start off. Tom tells Nick, accusingly, that he is not as dumb as Nick and Jordan must think, and reveals that he has checked on Gatsby's background. As tensions rise and they ride silently for a while, Nick notes Eckleburg's eyes, both reminding the reader of the presence of either a ruinous god or an unblinking conscience over the valley of ashes. It also sets up the need for gas, and the necessary stop at Wilson's.

At Wilson's, Tom lets George mistakenly assume Gatsby's elaborate car to be the one he plans to sell. George is also shifty—he tells Tom he has "wised up to something funny," and that he and Myrtle plan to move west. Tom, stunned, asks about it, and Wilson confesses that his haste has led him to ask about the car.

Early in the scene, George is described as "hollow-eyed" and sick, and Fitzgerald is once again using eye imagery at a moment of tension. Nick observes, "there was no difference between men, in intelligence or race, so profound as the difference between the sick and the well." To Nick, George appears guilty, perhaps not even of sound mind. He looks a wreck, spiritually as well as physically. As Nick turns away from the guilty aspect of the garage proprietor, he sees "over the ashheaps the giant eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg kept their vigil." However, he also mentions other eyes, the third in the scene: those of Myrtle, tragically misreading what she sees.
The scene is rife with misunderstanding: Jordan doesn't understand Tom's reactions, Tom is unclear on Gatsby's background, George has only an inchoate sense of his wife's transgressions or of Tom's transactions, and Myrtle mistakes Jordan for Daisy. In essence, no one except the dispassionate eyes of Eckleburg and the narrator himself is seeing anything with clarity.

As they approach Manhattan, the city is transformed from its earlier sugar heaps to the "spidery girders"—a place Jordan calls "overripe," now that it is too hot, too tense, too similar to the "hot whips of panic" now lashing at Tom. In the city, Daisy has the drunken idea that five rooms and five cool baths would help ease the heat. The idea devolves into "a place to have a mint julep," and they wind up renting a room at the Plaza.

Once in the room, Tom seizes on the first opportunity to light into Gatsby. When Tom accuses Daisy of making the heat worse by "crabbing about it," Gatsby says, "Why not let her alone, old sport?" After an awkward moment, Tom asks, "All this 'old sport' business. Where'd you pick that up?

The wedding below them causes Daisy to recall her own wedding then, and a series of memories leads Tom to question Gatsby further. The wedding is another thematic reminder of the situation into which Gatsby has insinuated himself. When Tom finally confronts Gatsby directly, asking, "What kind of row are you trying to cause in my house, anyhow?" Daisy steps in to defend Gatsby, asking Tom to have "self-control." Daisy's asking for such is not only ironic, given her role in the affair, but also telling of what she prizes most: the gesture. Tom is guilty of showing emotion and, however boorish and unsympathetic a character he has been made to be, his emotional response is genuine, something for which earlier chapters have established Daisy has considerable disdain.

Tom's comment in return—"I suppose the latest thing is to sit back and let Mr. Nobody from Nowhere make love to your wife"—is also telling, as if it would be preferable to him that Mr. Somebody from Somewhere were to do it instead. In Tom's world, of course, that would make a bit more sense. For both Tom and Daisy, the moment is fraught with challenges to the very different sanctities they each hold.

Gatsby, too, reveals that which he values most. He becomes most animated when he says, thinking to strike a death blow, "Your wife doesn't love you ... she's never loved you. She loves me." For Gatsby, the love of the golden girl, the final attainment after the upward struggle, is the most important thing. He thinks that his saying it will undo Tom and bring Daisy to him. It does not. Tom dismisses him "automatically." As Gatsby makes his case, however, he does cause Tom to defend himself, even through the tactic of owning up to "sprees," with the assertion that he always returns. Daisy tells Tom he's "revolting," but even then, she does not fully capitulate to Gatsby's wish, to tell Tom she never loved him. The one time she does so is with "perceptible reluctance." In the moment when truth matters, she is unsure which gesture will compel her to the next scene. Thus, when her confused honesty finally surfaces, it is the first of many rebukes of Gatsby's dream. She does confess to having loved him—Gatsby's romantic ideal—but the ideal is flawed because in the same breath, she avers that she loved Tom as well. Nick describes the intensity of Gatsby's response: "Gatsby's eyes opened and closed."

Tom sees that the idea is anathema to Gatsby, so he pursues it. When he says, "there're things between Daisy and me that you'll never know, things that neither of us can ever forget," Nick tells: "The words seemed to bite physically into Gatsby." Gatsby takes his last refuge, insisting that Daisy is leaving Tom. Daisy temporarily says she is, "with a visible effort." At that point, Tom reverts to his original tactic, questioning Gatsby's background.

The argument over merit has its base in money, as if wealth, gotten only one way, were the sole permission for actions. Tom's savagery and the novel's portrayal of him suggest to many critics much about Fitzgerald's feeling regarding American culture at the time, particularly among the social elite. But the other idea at work in the entire exchange is the place of the romantic, the dreamer, in such a culture. Daisy's actions in the scene, particularly, have generated much writing, not only about gender roles, but also about Fitzgerald's attitude toward tenets of Romanticism as expressed in the novel. Nick's description of the remainder of the fight suggests some of the novelist's thinking: "But with every word [Daisy] was drawing further and further into herself, so that he gave that up, and only the dead dream fought on as the afternoon slipped away, trying to touch what was no longer tangible, struggling unhappily, undespairingly, toward that lost voice across the room." For Gatsby, the realization is complete: the past is gone. There is no way to recreate that perfect moment.

Tom, "with magnanimous scorn," sends Daisy and Gatsby along home, together, in Gatsby's car. Some have speculated about
why Tom decides not to take the car back, especially given the conversation with George and the ability to further embarrass Gatsby, but it is also clear that Tom believes, by savaging Gatsby's "worthiness," he has short-circuited any risk. Once Gatsby and Daisy have left, Nick suddenly realizes it is his birthday. He has turned thirty—adulthood, middle age, and a kind of maturity, suggest themselves, parallel to the worldly maturity he is attaining during the singular summer on West Egg. He notes:

Before me stretched the portentous, menacing road of a new decade.

It was seven o'clock when we got into the coupé with him and started for Long Island. Tom talked incessantly, exulting and laughing, but his voice was as remote from Jordan and me as the foreign clamor on the sidewalk or the tumult of the elevated overhead. Human sympathy has its limits, and we were content to let all their tragic arguments fade with the city lights behind. Thirty—the promise of a decade of loneliness, a thinning list of single men to know, a thinning briefcase of enthusiasm, thinning hair. But there was Jordan beside me, who, unlike Daisy, was too wise ever to carry well-forgotten dreams from age to age. As we passed over the dark bridge her wan face fell lazily against my coat's shoulder and the formidable stroke of thirty died away with the reassuring pressure of her hand.

So we drove on toward death through the cooling twilight.

Nick equates youth with dreams, and age with the loss of hope, of friends, of expectation. The destruction wrought in the room at the Plaza exacerbated that loss. Then, of course, the tragedy made it worse.

Nick's narration changes from a reportorial, experience-based mode to one more expository. The accident is told from great distance, as he circles down toward the terrible moment wherein Daisy struck and killed Myrtle Wilson. Fitzgerald has Nick begin far from the circle of characters, from the vantage point of the eyewitness, Michaelis. He tells how George has locked Myrtle in her room to keep her from fleeing, how George has suspected Myrtle's cavorting with the coffee shop owner, how the newspapers named Gatsby's vehicle "the death car," how Myrtle had demanded that George have the brass to "beat" her, before she ran into the street and, seeing what she thought was Tom, ran out to stop him.

After describing the savagery of the damage wrought on Myrtle, Nick returns to reportorial mode. In the exchanges that follow, Tom learns that Gatsby's car has hit Myrtle. Tom talks with George, to make sure George does not tell police it was his car. As he does so, he is able to maintain his composure and exonerate himself from suspicion. However, his composure is short-lived; once he leaves with Nick and Jordan, Nick sees Tom stricken with tears and rage. Thinking Gatsby had been driving, Tom says, "The God damned coward! ... He didn't even stop his car."

When they arrive at the Buchanans, the house is still a vision of light and movement, despite the darkness and the circumstances. Disgusted with everyone, Nick doesn't go in, and remains outside alone. Since she owes so much of her existence to the Buchanans, Jordan enters the house. As Nick turns to leave, to meet his taxi back to West Egg, he encounters Gatsby lurking in the trees, wearing a ridiculous pink suit. Nick finds everything about Gatsby, as well, "despicable." For Nick, ultimately, a woman has died from carelessness. For the rest, the matters of importance have to do with status and relationships. Gatsby is more concerned with protecting the stupid and selfish actions of Daisy than with the fate of Myrtle. Tom professes loathing for Gatsby more forcefully than any feeling of loss.

Finally, Nick realizes the truth, and why Gatsby has remained: Daisy had been driving when the car hit Myrtle. More importantly to Gatsby, however, he wants to know Tom is not bothering Daisy about "that unpleasantness this afternoon." He tells Nick how "if [Tom] tries any brutality," Daisy will signal for Gatsby. Nick's response is another instance of brilliant understatement in the novel: given all that Nick knows about Tom's real concerns—Myrtle and Gatsby, and certainly not Daisy—as well as how wrongly Gatsby perceives all that is happening, Nick's response could very well be stronger than "He's not thinking about her." His restraint signals not only the muted behavior typical to the elite, it also indicates a fundamental dismissal of Gatsby.

Gatsby's dwindling relevance in Tom and Daisy's lives is reinforced when Nick goes to check on the house. Nick sees Tom and Daisy sitting together, talking intently, Tom's hand atop one of hers, and untouched fried chicken and glasses of ale between them. More than that, however, Nick sees "an unmistakable air of natural intimacy about the picture, and anybody would have said that they were conspiring together."

Gatsby had not penetrated the marriage, such that it was. Nor, really, had Myrtle. For all of the damning of society and accusation
contained in the novel, for better or worse, Tom and Daisy were connected. Nick could see it, but Gatsby could not, and would refuse to understand it. He intended to keep vigil, and Nick notes that he will be "watching over nothing." At least, nothing that will be as he thinks it or wants it to be.

Chapter Eight

Gatsby's delusions persist when he arrives home at around four in the morning. As Nick suggests he should leave, Gatsby insists he has to stay to see what Daisy will do, and Nick saw how "he was clutching at some last hope and [Nick] couldn't bear to shake him free." Daisy's behavior is clear, by then, to everyone but Gatsby.

Despite his insistence on believing Daisy will come to him, Gatsby is otherwise humbled, the façade of "Jay Gatsby" having been "broken up like glass against Tom's hard malice." The jig was up, and so with nothing to lose and no face to save, Gatsby tells Nick how it came about. Thus, the importance of the very first few paragraphs of the book: the paragraphs of Chapter One's beginning establish Nick as a confessor for many. It also helps that Nick is the only person who has treated Gatsby consistently to this point in the novel. Even as he tells his story, Gatsby continues to focus on Daisy, telling Nick why she was so powerful a lure.

The passage highlights Gatsby's own feelings of illegitimacy regarding his pursuit of Daisy: while her house enticed with its "ripe mystery," Gatsby knew he was there "by a colossal accident." He was "a penniless young man without a past" who sensed his time amid "gay and radiant activities" was limited, and thus he "took what he could get, ravenously and unscrupulously." Rather than feeling guilty for his subterfuge, having fallen utterly for her charm, Gatsby is "somehow, betrayed"—baited and, once on the hook, left wriggling. Daisy remained in her "rich house, her rich, full life.... [on] her porch bright with the bought luxury of star-shine." She has purchased, however unwittingly, a seat far above him. Gatsby's doom is sealed, finally, when he becomes "overwhelmingly aware of the youth and mystery that wealth imprisons and preserves, of the freshness of many clothes, and of Daisy, gleaming like silver, safe and proud above the hot struggles of the poor." Hot struggles from which Gatsby has only recently found the means to escape, and with those means, pursue a dream made whole in the person of Daisy.

The combination of seeing the "grail" and having about him the wits to achieve it act on Gatsby very powerfully, and he finds, to his surprise, that he loves her. Gatsby tells of the final days before he went to war, how he and Daisy were quite close, and how he worked afterward to regain it, setting in motion his actions for the next few years. Oxford, it turns out, was more an accident than an intention, but he did spend five months there. Daisy remained in rooms "that throbbed incessantly" with a "low, sweet fever" of "pleasant, cheerful snobbery." The world did not change for her, save that Gatsby had left it. When Tom Buchanan arrived and suggested the continuation of her lifestyle, she chose. In another moment of understatement and omission, Nick notes "the letter reached Gatsby while he was still at Oxford."

As dawn breaks, Gatsby still maintains Daisy's preference, through the years, for him. But the story he tells, about knowing how he had lost "the freshest and best" part of the affair, suggests—possibly—his dawning understanding of what had happened. But readers will never know for sure. The gardener approaches and announces he'd like to drain the pool, and Gatsby asks him to wait, as he would like to swim once, since he had not all summer. Nick doesn't want to leave, though he can't figure why, until, as he leaves to head to the city, promising to call, he turns impetuously and shouts, "They're a rotten crowd ... You're worth the whole damn bunch put together." It is the last thing he will say to Gatsby.

Though Nick says he "disapproved of [Gatsby] from beginning to end," he was glad to have complimented him. Readers know from the first chapter that Gatsby, despite his considerable flaws, is valued due to his pursuit of imperishable hope, and that for Nick, that fact redeems him. The final compliment makes it known, and, of course, it also places the final image of Gatsby, in his "rag" of a pink suit, before a background of "white" steps. For a fleeting moment, Gatsby has attained rarefied air.

Later that morning, Nick and Jordan stop talking, their relationship ended. Her only concern, after the tragedy of the night before, is expressed when she says, "You weren't so nice to me last night." To which Nick says, "How could it have mattered then?" Nick might have had even stronger feeling about such a shallow concern, but he does not voice it. Just as they began in a muted way, they end that way as well.

The remainder of the chapter follows the build-up of George Wilson's anger and despair into murderous rage. Michaelis, no longer considered the philanderer, stays with George Wilson through the night, talking with him, trying to soothe him. Michaelis tries to suggest places George can find some comfort or absolution, a church or family, but George has no such connections. In
other words, George is a man not connected to the world; rather, he is someone suffering and affected by it, but one who does not contribute or take warmth from it. Hence his position among the ashheaps. As Nick later says of Michaelis: "he was almost sure that Wilson had no friend: there was not enough of him for his wife." Wilson is a man composed of ash and shadow, barely alive.

George does not want Michaelis' comfort. He wants the other man to understand his position. He points out the dog leash, and as Michaelis rationalizes its existence, it occurs to George, "Then he killed her." At the same time, George realizes he can find out who did it, since he knew the car, and that Tom Buchanan knew the owner. As he sits, rocking, not talking any longer with Michaelis, and he sees dawn coming, he begins to plan. At that point, he looks out to the ashheaps and sees how "gray clouds took on fantastic shapes and scurried here and there in the faint dawn wind"—an image that could be literal or could be a stylized symbol for the movements of men like him. Fitzgerald describes the scene:

"I spoke to her," he muttered, after a long silence. "I told her she might fool me but she couldn't fool God. I took her to the window"—with an effort he got up and walked to the rear window and leaned with his face pressed against it—"and I said 'God knows what you've been doing, everything you've been doing. You may fool me, but you can't fool God!'"

Standing behind him, Michaelis saw with a shock that he was looking at the eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg, which had just emerged, pale and enormous, from the dissolving night.


As Michaelis points out, Wilson's "God" is an advertisement. Beyond that of Wilson and the cadre of characters involved in the tragedy, there is a subtle indictment here of American culture, again. The scene implies Americans' willingness to worship commercialism, as seen through the belief in this advertisement, an ultimately silly and crass attempt to gain customers among the less discerning individuals in the valley of ashes. To be sure, Wilson is also a bit deranged at the moment, and likely had been for some time, but the powerful suggestion—when taken together with other commentary throughout the novel—acts as Fitzgerald's criticism of consumer culture at the time.

For the final death scene of the novel, Nick once again starts at a generous distance from the actual moment, tracking Wilson's steps, describing how George Wilson determined where to go, how he proceeded on foot, and so on. At the same time, Gatsby, while waiting for a phone message from either Nick or Daisy, headed for the pool, to float on a "pneumatic mattress that had amused his guests during the summer." He would use his own indulgent home, finally, for himself. As he does so, floating in the pool, Nick imagines, quite persuasively, that in the clear sunlight, Gatsby might well have had a moment of revelation:

No telephone message arrived ... I have an idea that Gatsby himself didn't believe it would come, and perhaps he no longer cared. If that was true he must have felt that he had lost the old warm world, paid a high price for living too long with a single dream. He must have looked up at an unfamiliar sky through frightening leaves and shivered as he found what a grotesque thing a rose is and how raw the sunlight was upon the scarcely created grass. A new world, material without being real, where poor ghosts, breathing dreams like air, drifted fortuitously about ... like that ashen, fantastic figure gliding toward him through the amorphous trees.

Note how the imagery of nature is no longer "dripping" or "sparkling" or reverberating. It is "frightening" and "harsh," Gatsby is "shivering" and the sunlight is "raw." The ashen figure is, of course, the final realization as well as the figure of George Wilson. It is as close to the moment of murder the novel will come. In the next paragraph, it is the chauffer who hears the shots. When Nick joins the servants to rush to the pool, the water barely moves, and only a "thin red circle in the water" hints at the violence. "A little way off in the grass," Wilson lies dead, having shot himself. As Nick says, "the holocaust was complete."

Chapter Nine

The newspaper coverage is sensational, and the range of Wilson's despair—at cuckold, at oppression, at his wife's disregard, his conviction regarding God and morality—is "reduced to a man 'deranged by grief.'" Nick becomes Gatsby's only spokesperson, the majority of the man's associates suddenly silent and gone. Of the people involved in the car accident, Tom and Daisy have left for Europe, gone even before the murder had occurred. As Nick looks around the house for anyone to assist with putting affairs in order, he finds only the picture of Dan Cody, a reminder that he is, of course, dealing with a man without a past.
He sends a memo to Wolfsheim, even drives into New York to visit him, and the man demurs, implying that his association with Gatsby would not be good for his "business." At Gatsby's home, a Chicago call comes through, from a man named Slagle, about "business" going bad, and when Nick says he is not Gatsby, the man ends the call. Even Klipspringer, the tenant, wiggles out of attending the funeral despite Nick's badgering. Out of desperation, Nick starts to call revelers, finally stopping when he makes the mistake of calling "one of those who used to sneer most bitterly at Gatsby on the courage of Gatsby's liquor." Nick's contempt builds as he tries to salvage some rightful parting ceremony for Gatsby and discovers, instead, the shallow motivations and callous and fickle character of most of the West Eggers.

It is only after three days that a telegram arrives, telling Nick of the imminent arrival of Henry C. Gatz, Gatsby's father, "a solemn old man, very helpless and dismayed." Mr. Gatz believed fully in his son, at least as Gatsby had sold himself to his father. But the father shows Nick an old copy of Hopalong Cassidy, in which young Jimmy Gatz had outlined a schedule for self-improvement. Gatsby had, for his entire life, sought to improve, to rise up from his circumstances, to be the hero of a Horatio Alger tale. He had even, however unwittingly, marked down his schedule on the inside cover of a tale about an American folk hero. The great irony, of course, comes at the end of the section: the funeral for a murdered self-made man to which no one came. At the burial itself, only Owl-Eyes shows up, the man who had admired with surprise the substance of Gatsby's home.

After the funeral, the final pages feature a ruminative Nick Carraway both finishing tasks necessary for the story's denouement and taking stock of the experience. First, he wants to "leave things in order" with Jordan Baker, however "unpleasant" it would have to be. Jordan is her cool and duplicitous self to the end: she tells Nick she is engaged, an obvious lie, and she claims the abrupt dissolution of their romance, by him, to be a new experience. She eventually refers him to the conversation they had about driving a car, in which Jordan had expressed her first distaste for careless people. When she accuses him of being another careless person, he retorts that he is thirty, and thus "five years too old to lie to myself and call it honor." The insult is directed to her, but she says nothing. His statement of being older and wiser is the last thing between them, and his last comment on the matter, complicated by his admission of conflict about it.

With Tom, he is more direct. He doesn't actually want to talk with Tom Buchanan, but Tom forces it when they meet accidentally on Fifth Avenue. When Nick nearly spurns him, Tom insists Nick is crazy, goading Nick to ask, "What did you say to Wilson that afternoon?" As Nick figured, Tom told Nick that Gatsby owned the car. Tom is convinced of his rightness in telling Wilson, and goes through his rationalization, complaining of his own suffering through the ordeal. In a show of mercy for Tom or affection for Daisy, Nick withholds the fact that Daisy had been driving the car.

While Nick's mercy doesn't extend to forgiveness or affection of any kind for Tom, it does permit him to understand him. But the understanding is still damning. Because of Tom's skewed sense of entitlement, two people are dead. Daisy was fully complicit in the death of the third. Nick realizes:

It was all very careless and confused. They were careless people, Tom and Daisy—they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made....

The notion of carelessness is reinforced by much of the imagery in Chapter Nine. After Nick concludes that "Eastern life" requires an adaptation to which one is either born or naturally suited, he declares that the problem might have been that none of them—Westerners, all—had been adaptable to it. But then, to Nick, was that bad? He imagines the East

as a night scene by El Greco: a hundred houses, at once conventional and grotesque, crouching under a sullen, overhanging sky and a lustreless moon. In the foreground four solemn men in dress suits are walking along the sidewalk with a stretcher on which lies a drunken woman in a white evening dress. Her hand, which dangles over the side, sparkles cold with jewels. Gravely the men turn in at a house—the wrong house. But no one knows the woman's name, and no one cares.

The scene is grim, but ultimately of no consequence. If no one cares, nothing is wrong. Yet, to Nick, the great unanswered question in the scene is the fate of the people within it. What happens to the woman? If no one cares, then her life, as well, is nothing of consequence. It is a scene that removes hope and aspiration from existence, rendering the East wholly an endless grim party in which all that matters is the progression itself. Nick acknowledges that the vision is one "distorted beyond my eyes' power of correction," but the events of the novel support the view.
In Nick's vision, what is typical becomes grotesque. As well, his view of Gatsby's house changes. In the end, it is a "huge incoherent failure of a house." A boy writes an obscenity on the white steps. One last guest arrives on a forlorn Saturday, "who had been away at the ends of the earth and didn't know that the party was over." The "big shore places" are closed or closing, and few lights remain. The community is empty, deformed, and tainted. Some critics have noted the spooky prescience of some of the novel's final imagery, given the crash to come four years later.

But as Nick is able to gradually imagine the island in its original form, a "fresh, green breast of a new world," he marvels at humankind's "capacity for wonder," what he feels ultimately was Gatsby's saving grace. Wonder drove Gatsby "a long way to this blue lawn, and his dream must have seemed so close he could hardly fail to grasp it ... Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us." Our pursuit of it, Nick says, is why "we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past."