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История американской и мировой литературы невозможна без упоминания имени Фрэнсиса Скотта Фицджеральда; его произведения признаны мировой классикой. В романах автора нашел свое отражение так называемый «век джаза» — период в истории Америки с момента окончания Первой мировой войны и до начала Великой депрессии 30-х годов. В данную книгу вошли три произведения Фицджеральда: «Загадочная история Бенджамина Баттона», «Хрустальная чаша» и роман «Ночь нежна».

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**THE CURIOUS
CASE
OF BENJAMIN
BUTTON
by F. Scott
Fitzgerald**

In 1860 it was proper to be born at home. Now, so I am told, children are usually born in fashionable hospitals. So young Mr. and Mrs. Roger Button were fifty years ahead of style when they decided that their first baby should be born in a hospital. Whether it played any role in the astonishing story I am about to tell we will never know.

I shall tell you what happened, and let you judge for yourself.

The Roger Buttons held a high position, both social and financial, in Baltimore. This was their first baby — Mr. Button was naturally nervous. **He**

hoped it would be a boy¹ so that he could be sent to Yale College in Connecticut, the institution to which Mr. Button himself had been once sent.

On that September morning he got up at six o'clock, dressed himself, and hurried to the hospital. When he was approximately a hundred yards from the Maryland Private Hospital for Ladies and Gentlemen he saw Doctor Keene, the family physician, descending the front steps, rubbing his hands together as all doctors do by the unwritten ethics of their profession.

Mr. Roger Button, the president of Roger Button & Co., Wholesale Hardware, began to run toward Doctor Keene. "Doctor Keene!" he called.

The doctor heard him, turned around, and stood waiting, with a curious expression on his harsh, medicinal face.

¹ **He hoped it would be a boy** — Он надеялся, это будет мальчик

“What happened?” demanded Mr. Button, as he came up in a rush. “How is she? A boy? Who is it?” Doctor Keene seemed somewhat irritated.

“Is the child born?” begged Mr. Button.

Doctor Keene frowned. “Why, yes, I suppose so... ”

“Is my wife all right?”

“Yes.”

“Is it a boy or a girl?”

“I’ll ask you to go and see for yourself!” Then he turned away muttering: “Do you imagine a case like this will help my professional reputation? One more would ruin me—ruin anybody.”

“What’s the matter? Triplets?”¹

“No, not triplets! You can go and see for yourself. And get another doctor. I’m through with you! I don’t want to

¹ **What’s the matter? Triplets?** — В чем дело? Тройня?

see you or any of your relatives ever again! Goodbye!”

Without another word he climbed into his carriage and drove away.

Mr. Button stood there trembling from head to foot¹. He had suddenly lost all desire to go into the Maryland Private Hospital for Ladies and Gentlemen—it was with the greatest difficulty that, a moment later, he forced himself to mount the steps and enter the front door.

A nurse was sitting behind a desk in the hall. Swallowing his shame, Mr. Button approached her.

“Good-morning. I—I am Mr. Button.”

A look of terror spread over the girl's face.

“I want to see my child,” said Mr. Button.

¹ **trembling from head to foot** — дрожа от головы до ног

The nurse gave a little scream. “Oh—of course!” she cried hysterically. “Upstairs. Right upstairs. Go up!”

She pointed the direction, and Mr. Button began to mount to the second floor. In the upper hall he addressed another nurse who approached him. “I’m Mr. Button,” he managed to say. “I want to see my—”

“All right, Mr. Button,” she agreed in a hushed voice. “Very well! But the hospital will never have the ghost of its reputation after—”

“Hurry! I can’t stand this!” “Come this way Mr. Button.”

He went after her. At the end of a long hall they reached a room. They entered. Ranged around the walls were half a dozen rolling cribs.

“Well,” gasped Mr. Button, “which is mine?”

“There!” said the nurse.

Mr. Button’s eyes followed her pointing finger, and this is what he

saw. Wrapped in a white blanket, in one of the cribs, there sat an old man apparently about seventy years old. **His sparse hair was almost white¹**, and he had a long smoke-coloured beard. He looked up at Mr. Button with a question in his eyes.

“Is this a hospital joke?”

“It doesn’t seem like a joke to us,” replied the nurse. “And that is most certainly your child.”

Mr. Button’s closed his eyes, and then, opening them, looked again. There was no mistake—he was gazing at a man of seventy—a baby of seventy, a baby whose feet hung over the sides of the crib.

The old man suddenly spoke in a cracked voice. “Are you my father?” he demanded. “Because if you are,” went

¹ **his sparse hair was almost white** — его редкие волосы были почти белыми

on the old man, "I wish you'd get me out of this place..."

"Who are you?"

"I can't tell you exactly who I am, because I've only been born a few hours—but my last name is certainly Button."

"You lie!"

The old man turned wearily to the nurse. "Nice way to welcome a new-born child," he complained in a weak voice. "Tell him he's wrong, why don't you?"

"You're wrong. Mr. Button," said the nurse. "This is your child. We're going to ask you to take him home with you as soon as possible." "Home?" repeated Mr. Button. "Yes, we can't have him here. We really can't, you know?"

Mr. Button sank down upon a chair near his son and put his face in his hands. "My heavens!" he murmured, in horror. "What will people say? What must I do?"

“You’ll have to take him home,” insisted the nurse— “immediately!”

“I can’t. I can’t,” he moaned. People would stop to speak to him, and what was he going to say? He would have to introduce this— this creature: “This is my son, born early this morning. ” And then the old man would gather his blanket around him and they would go on, past stores, the slave market—for a dark instant Mr. Button wished his son was black—past luxurious houses, past the home for the aged...

“Pull yourself together,” commanded the nurse.

“If you think I’m going to walk home in this blanket, you’re entirely mistaken,” the old man announced suddenly.

“Babies always have blankets.” Mr. Button turned to the nurse. “What’ll I do?”

“Go down town and buy your son some clothes.”

Mr. Button’s son’s voice followed him down into the hall:

“And a cane, father. I want to have a cane.”

“Good-morning,” Mr. Button said, nervously, to the clerk in the Chesapeake Dry Goods Company. “I want to buy some clothes for my child.”

“How old is your child, sir?”

“About six hours,” answered Mr. Button.

“Babies’ supply department in the rear.”

“I’m not sure that’s what I want. It’s—he’s an unusually large-size child. Exceptionally—ah—large. ”

“They have the largest child’s sizes.”

“Where is the boys’ department?” inquired Mr. Button. He felt that the clerk must scent his shameful secret.

“Right here.”

“Well—” He hesitated. If he could only find a very large boy’s suit, **he might cut off that long and awful beard**¹, dye the white hair brown, and hide the worst and retain something of his own self-respect—not to mention his position in Baltimore society.

But there were no suits to fit the new-born Button in the boys’ department. He blamed the store, of course—in such cases it is the thing to blame the store.

“How old did you say that boy of yours was?” demanded the clerk curiously.

“He’s—sixteen.”

“Oh, I beg your pardon. I thought you said six hours. You’ll find the youths’ department in the next aisle.”

Mr. Button turned miserably away. Then he stopped, brightened, and

¹ **he might cut off that long and awful beard** — он мог бы отрезать ту длинную и ужасную бороду

pointed his finger toward a dressed dummy in the window display. "There!" he exclaimed. "I'll take that suit, out there on the dummy."

The clerk stared. "Why," he protested, "that's not a child's suit. You could wear it yourself!"

"Wrap it up," insisted his customer nervously. "That's what I want."

The astonished clerk obeyed.

Back at the hospital Mr. Button entered the nursery and almost threw the package at his son: "Here's your clothes."

The old man untied the package and viewed the contents.

"They look sort of funny to me," he complained, "I don't want to be made a monkey of—"

"You've made a monkey of me! Put them on—or I'll—or I'll spank you." He swallowed uneasily at the word, feeling nevertheless that it was the proper thing to say.