

CHAPTER 1

In my younger years my father gave me some advice. “Whenever you feel like criticizing any one¹,” he told me, “just remember that all the people in this world haven’t had the advantages that you’ve had.”

A habit to reserve all judgments has opened up many curious natures to me. In college I was privy to the secret griefs² of wild, unknown men.

When I came back from the East last autumn I felt that I wanted the world to be in uniform. I wanted no more riotous excursions with privileged glimpses into the human heart³. Only Gatsby, the man who gives his name to this book, was exempt from my reaction — Gatsby

who represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn⁴.

There was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life⁵, as if he were related to⁶ one of those intricate machines that register earthquakes ten thousand miles away. It was an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness such as I have never found in any other person.

My family have been prominent, well-to-do people for three generations. The Carraways⁷ are something of a clan. I graduated from New Haven⁸ in 1915, then I decided to go east and learn the bond business⁹. Father agreed to finance me for a year and after various delays I came east, permanently, I thought, in the spring of twenty-two¹⁰.

I had an old Dodge¹¹ and a Finnish woman who made my bed and cooked breakfast.

I bought a dozen volumes on banking and credit and investment securities and they stood on my shelf in red and gold.

I lived at West Egg¹². My house was between two huge places that rented for twelve or fifteen thousand a season. The one on my right was Gatsby's mansion.

Across the bay the white palaces of fashionable East Egg glittered along the water, and the history of the summer really begins on the evening I drove over there to have dinner with the Buchanans¹³. Daisy¹⁴ was my second cousin¹⁵. Her husband's family was enormously wealthy — even in college his freedom with money was a matter for reproach¹⁶. Why they came east I don't know. They had spent a year in France, for no particular reason, and then drifted here and there.

Their house was even more elaborate than I expected. The lawn started at the beach and ran toward the front door for a quarter of a mile. Tom had changed since his New Haven years. Now he was a sturdy, straw haired man of thirty with a rather hard mouth¹⁷ and a supercilious manner.

It was a body capable of enormous leverage¹⁸ — a cruel body.

“Now, don’t think my opinion on these matters is final,” he seemed to say, “just because I’m stronger and more of a man than you are.” We were in the same Senior Society¹⁹, and while we were never intimate I always had the impression that he wanted me to like him.

“I’ve got a nice place here,” he said. He turned me around again, politely and abruptly. “We’ll go inside.”

We walked through a high hallway into a bright rosy-colored space. The only completely stationary object in the room was an enormous couch on which two young women were lying. The younger of the two was a stranger to me. The other girl, Daisy, made an attempt to rise. She murmured that the surname of the other girl was Baker.

My cousin began to ask me questions in her low, thrilling voice. Her face was sad and lovely with bright things in it, bright eyes and a bright passionate mouth.

“You ought to see the baby,” she said.

“I’d like to.”

“She’s asleep. She’s three years old. Haven’t you ever seen her?”

“Never.”

Tom Buchanan stopped and rested his hand on my shoulder.

“What you doing, Nick?”

“I’m a bond man²⁰.”

“Who with?”

I told him.

“Never heard of them,” he remarked.

This annoyed me²¹.

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

“Oh, I’ll stay in the East, don’t you worry,” he said, glancing at Daisy and then back at me.

At this point Miss Baker said “Absolutely!” It was the first word she uttered since I came into the room. It surprised her as much as it did me.

I looked at Miss Baker, I enjoyed looking at her. She was a slender girl, with an erect carriage²². It occurred to me now that I had seen her, or a picture of her, somewhere before.

“You live in West Egg,” she remarked contemptuously. “I know somebody there.”

“I don’t know a single —”

“You must know Gatsby.”

“Gatsby?” demanded Daisy. “What Gatsby?”

Before I could reply that he was my neighbour dinner was announced. We went out.

“Civilization’s going to pieces,” said Tom. “We don’t look out the white race will be submerged. It’s all scientific stuff; it’s been proved.”

The telephone rang and Tom left. Daisy suddenly threw her napkin on the table and excused herself and went into the house, too.

“Tom’s got some woman in New York²³,” said Miss Baker. “She might have the decency not to telephone him at dinner-time. Don’t you think?”

Tom and Daisy were back at the table.

“We don’t know each other very well, Nick,” said Daisy. “Well, I’ve had a very bad time, and I’m pretty cynical about

everything. I think everything's terrible anyhow. I KNOW. I've been everywhere and seen everything and done everything."

CHAPTER 2

Tom Buchanan had a mistress²⁴. Though I was curious to see her I had no desire to meet her — but I did. I went up to New York with Tom on the train one afternoon and when we stopped he jumped to his feet.

"We're getting off!" he insisted. "I want you to meet my girl."

I followed him over a low white-washed railroad fence. I saw a garage — Repairs. GEORGE B. WILSON. Cars Bought and Sold²⁵ — and I followed Tom inside.

"Hello, Wilson, old man," said Tom, "How's business?"

"I can't complain," answered Wilson. "When are you going to sell me that car?"

"Next week."

Then I saw a woman. She was in the middle thirties²⁶, and faintly stout²⁷, but she carried her surplus flesh sensuously as some women can. She smiled slowly and walking through her husband as if he were a ghost shook hands with Tom. Then she spoke to her husband in a soft, coarse voice:

“Get some chairs, why don’t you, so somebody can sit down.”

“Oh, sure,” agreed Wilson and went toward the little office.

“I want to see you,” said Tom intently. “Get on the next train.”

“All right.”

“I’ll meet you by the news-stand.”

She nodded and moved away from him.

We waited for her down the road and out of sight.

“Terrible place, isn’t it,” said Tom.

“Awful.”

“It does her good to get away²⁸.”

“Doesn’t her husband object?”

“Wilson? He thinks she goes to see her sister in New York. “

“Myrtle’ll²⁹ be hurt if you don’t come up to the apartment,” said Tom.

I have been drunk just twice in my life and the second time was that afternoon. Some people came — Myrtle’s sister, Catherine, Mr. McKee, a pale feminine man from the flat below, and his wife. She told me with pride that her husband had photographed her a hundred and twenty-seven times since they had been married.

The sister Catherine sat down beside me on the couch.

“Where do you live?” she inquired.

“I live at West Egg.”

“Really? I was down there at a party about a month ago. At a man named Gatsby’s. Do you know him?”

“I live next door to him.”

“Well, they say he’s a nephew or a cousin of Kaiser Wilhelm’s³⁰. That’s where all his money comes from.”

“Really?”

She nodded.

“I’m scared of him. I’d hate to have him get anything on me.”

Catherine leaned close to me and whispered in my ear: "Neither of them can stand the person they're married to." She looked at Myrtle and then at Tom.

The answer to this came from Myrtle.

"I made a mistake," she declared vigorously. "I married him because I thought he was a gentleman, but he wasn't fit to lick my shoe³¹."

CHAPTER 3

There was music from my neighbour's house through the summer nights. In his blue gardens men and girls came and went like moths among the whisperings and the champagne and the stars. In the afternoon I watched his guests diving from the tower of his raft or taking the sun on the hot sand of his beach. On week-ends his Rolls-Royce³² became an omnibus, bearing parties to and from the city between nine in the morning and long past midnight, while his station

wagon scampered like a brisk yellow bug to meet all trains. And on Mondays eight servants toiled all day with mops and brushes and hammers, repairing the ravages of the night before.

Every Friday five crates of oranges and lemons arrived from a fruiterer in New York — every Monday these same oranges and lemons left his back door in a pyramid of pulpless halves. There was a machine in the kitchen which could extract the juice of two hundred oranges in half an hour, if a little button was pressed two hundred times by a butler's thumb.

At least once a fortnight a corps of caterers came down with several hundred feet of canvas and enough colored lights to make a Christmas tree of Gatsby's enormous garden. On buffet tables, garnished with glistening hors-d'oeuvre, spiced baked hams crowded against salads of harlequin designs and pastry pigs and turkeys bewitched to a dark gold. In the main hall a bar with a real brass rail was set up, and stocked with gins and liquors and with cordials so long

forgotten that most of his female guests were too young to know one from another.

When I went to Gatsby's house I was one of the few guests who had actually been invited³³. People were not invited — they went there. They got into automobiles which bore them out to Long Island³⁴ and somehow they ended up at Gatsby's door. Sometimes they came and went without having met Gatsby at all.

I had been actually invited. A chauffeur in a uniform gave me a formal note from his employer — the honor would be entirely Jay Gatsby's³⁵, it said, if I would attend his little party that night.

Dressed up in white flannels I went over to his lawn a little after seven. I was immediately struck by the number of young Englishmen dotted about; all well dressed, all looking a little hungry.

As soon as I arrived I made an attempt to find my host but the two or three people of whom I asked his whereabouts stared at me in such an