

The Great Gatsby, by F. Scott Fitzgerald

CHAPTER 3

There was music from my neighbor'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. At high tide 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 while his two motor-boats slit the waters of the Sound, drawing aquaplanes over cataracts of foam. On week-ends his Rolls-Royce 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, including an extra gardener, toiled all day with mops and scrubbing-brushes and hammers and garden-shears, 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.

By seven o'clock the orchestra has arrived, no thin five-piece affair, but a whole pitful of oboes and trombones and saxophones and viols and cornets and piccolos, and low and high drums. The last swimmers have come in from the beach now and are dressing up-stairs; the cars from New York are parked five deep in the drive, and already the

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Synopsis of Chapter 3

The chapter opens with a description of Gatsby's parties and his hospitality. Nick is invited and attends, where he meets Jordan again, and has several conversations with other guests. Some of the guests gossip about Gatsby and the origins of his wealth. Jordan and Nick search for Gatsby, ending up in the library, where they meet a man with owl-eyed spectacles who enthuses about the books being real.

Beacon Towers 1920, an inspiration for Gatsby's home Nick eventually meets Gatsby, having mistaken him for one of the guests. Jordan is summoned to speak privately with Gatsby, and meanwhile Nick witnesses several scenes of drunken marital discord. As he is leaving, a car crashes into a ditch. Nick's final view of the party is of Gatsby's isolation and the emptiness of the house.

Nick then reflects on the events he has narrated so far, which comprised 'three nights several weeks apart' and...

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Chapter 3 is, in many ways, like Chapter 2, moving from one party to another, encouraging the juxtaposition of the two events. Tom's party and Gatsby's party are quite different, although in some ways alike, encouraging the reader to explore in what ways the two men are also similar. The purpose of Chapter 3 is, also like Chapter 2, to provide essential background, although this time it is Gatsby who is introduced. By inserting the chapter about Tom, Fitzgerald has...

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In his blue gardens men and girls came and went like moths - This romantic and glamorous image of Gatsby's parties, using colour imagery and a [HYPERLINK](#) "repository/atoz/simile" simile, establishes Gatsby's parties as superior to the New York experience of Chapter 2. The scale is immense - quantified to impress the reader: two hundred oranges...

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Note the excessiveness... Learn a few details.

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Nick, living next door to Gatsby, has been observing the parties at a distance, as a casual observer, but in Chapter 3 he is officially invited to attend one. As he moves from being a spectator to being a participant, Nick is able to provide an informed view of not only what goes on at Gatsby's parties, but also what the partygoers themselves are like. When Nick reveals that he is one of the few invited guests at the party, this little detail tells quite a lot: It signals that in some yet...

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Having Nick at Gatsby's party provides an unprecedented chance to peer into the lives of the seemingly well-to-do people who attend. The impression is not very appealing. It turns out that the glamorous and glib party guests are, in fact, quite shallow. Nick says that they "conducted themselves according to the rules of behavior associated with amusement parks," again stressing the carefree, stereotypical roaring '20s atmosphere. Much to the...

halls and salons and verandas are gaudy with primary colors, and hair shorn in strange new ways, and shawls **beyond the dreams of Castile**. The bar is in full swing, and floating rounds of cocktails permeate the garden outside, until the air is alive with chatter and laughter, and casual innuendo and introductions forgotten on the spot, **and enthusiastic meetings between women who never knew each other's names**.

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A province in Central Spain

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Superficial

The lights grow brighter as the earth lurches away from the sun, and now the orchestra is playing yellow cocktail music, and the opera of voices pitches a key higher. Laughter is easier minute by minute, spilled with prodigality, tipped out at a cheerful word. **The groups change more swiftly, swell with new arrivals, dissolve and form in the same breath**; already there are wanderers, confident girls who weave here and there among the stouter and more stable, become for a sharp, joyous moment the centre of a group, and then, excited with triumph, glide on through the **sea-change of faces and voices and color** under the constantly changing light.

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The lights grow brighter as the earth lurches away from the sun - Light is an important feature of the party, here defying nature.

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prodigality wastefulness or extreme lavishness.

Suddenly one of the gypsies, in trembling opal, seizes a cocktail out of the air, dumps it down for courage and, **moving** her hands like Frisco, dances out alone on the canvas platform. A momentary hush; the orchestra leader varies his rhythm obligingly for her, and there is a burst of chatter as the erroneous news goes around that she **is** Gilda Gray's understudy from the *Follies*. The party has begun.

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moving her hands like Frisco - Joe Frisco (1889 – 1958) was an American vaudeville performer famous for his jazz dance routine.

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Gilda Gray (October 24, 1901 – December 22, 1959) was a Polish American actress and dancer who became famous for her dance called the shimmy. In 1922, the setting for the events of Chapter 3, she was the headline performer in the box office hit, Ziegfeld Follies.

I believe that on the first night I went to Gatsby's house **I was one of the few guests who had actually been invited**. **People were not invited — they went there**. They got into **automobiles** which bore them out to Long Island, and somehow they ended up at Gatsby's door. Once there they were introduced by somebody who knew Gatsby, and after **that they conducted themselves according to the rules of behavior associated with amusement parks**. Sometimes they came and went without having met Gatsby at all, **came for the party with a simplicity of heart that was its own ticket of admission**.

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How was Nick different from the others? He repeats that he was invited. Why is it significant?

I had been actually invited. A chauffeur in a uniform of robin's-egg blue crossed my lawn early that Saturday morning with a surprisingly formal note from his employer: the honor would be entirely Gatsby's, it said, if I would attend his "little party" that night. He had seen me several times, and had intended to call on me long before, but a peculiar combination of circumstances **had prevented it — signed Jay Gatsby, in a majestic hand**.

Dressed up in white flannels I went over to his lawn a little after seven, and wandered around rather ill at ease among swirls and eddies of people I didn't know — though here and there was a face I had noticed on the commuting train. I was immediately struck by the number of young Englishmen dotted about; all well dressed, all looking a little hungry, and all talking in low, earnest voices to solid and prosperous Americans. I was sure that they were selling something: bonds or insurance or automobiles. They were at least agonizingly aware of the easy money in the vicinity and convinced that it was theirs for a few words in the right key.

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 amazed way, and denied so vehemently any knowledge of his movements, that I slunk off in the direction of the cocktail table — the only place in the garden where a single man could linger without looking purposeless and alone.

I was on my way to get roaring drunk from sheer embarrassment when Jordan Baker came out of the house and stood at the head of the marble steps, leaning a little backward and looking with contemptuous interest down into the garden.

Welcome or not, I found it necessary to attach myself to some one before I should begin to address cordial remarks to the passers-by.

"Hello!" I roared, advancing toward her. My voice seemed unnaturally loud across the garden.

"I thought you might be here," she responded absently as I came up. "I remembered you lived next door to —" She held my hand impersonally, as a promise that she'd take care of me in a minute, and gave ear to two girls in twin yellow dresses, who stopped at the foot of the steps.

"Hello!" they cried together. "Sorry you didn't win."

That was for the golf tournament. She had lost in the finals the week before.

"You don't know who we are," said one of the girls in yellow, "but we met you here about a month ago."

"You've dyed your hair since then," remarked Jordan, and I started, but the girls had moved casually on and her remark was addressed to the premature moon, produced like the supper, no doubt, out of a caterer's basket. With Jordan's slender golden arm resting in mine, we descended the steps and sauntered about the garden. A tray of

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Contrast Nick with the rest of the crowd.

cocktails floated at us through the twilight, and we sat down at a table with the two girls in yellow and three men, each one introduced to us as Mr. Mumble.

“Do you come to these parties often?” inquired Jordan of the girl beside her.

“The last one was the one I met you at,” answered the girl, in an alert confident voice. She turned to her companion: “Wasn’t it for you, Lucille?”

It was for Lucille, too.

“I like to come,” Lucille said. “I never care what I do, so I always have a good time. When I was here last I tore my gown on a chair, and he asked me my name and address — inside of a week I got a package from Croirier’s with a new evening gown in it.”

“Did you keep it?” asked Jordan.

“Sure I did. I was going to wear it to-night, but it was too big in the bust and had to be altered. It was gas blue with lavender beads. Two hundred and sixty-five dollars.”

“There’s something funny about a fellow that’ll do a thing like that,” said the other girl eagerly. “He doesn’t want any trouble with *anybody*.”

“Who doesn’t?” I inquired.

“Gatsby. Somebody told me —”

The two girls and Jordan leaned together confidentially.

“Somebody told me they thought he killed a man once.”

A thrill passed over all of us. The three Mr. Mumbles bent forward and listened eagerly.

“I don’t think it’s so much *that*,” argued Lucille sceptically; “it’s more that **he was a German spy during the war.**”

One of the men nodded in confirmation.

“I heard that from a man who knew all about him, grew up with him in Germany,” he assured us positively.

“Oh, no,” said the first girl, “it couldn’t be that, **because he was in the American army during the war.**” As our credulity switched back to her she leaned forward with enthusiasm. “**You look at him sometimes when he thinks nobody’s looking at him. I’ll bet he killed a man.**”

She narrowed her eyes and shivered. Lucille shivered. We all turned and looked around for Gatsby. **It was testimony to the romantic speculation he inspired that there were whispers about him from those who found little that it was necessary to whisper about in this world.**

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While Nick and Jordan mingle at Gatsby’s party, they learn many intriguing things about their host, and everything they learn underscores the idea of reality versus rumor that underlies so much of *The Great Gatsby*. One of the first things the couple find out is that when one partygoer tore a dress at a party, Gatsby sent her a new evening gown worth a small fortune. Nick and Jordan also discover that part of the Gatsby mythos is that “he killed a man once.” Another romantic rumor places Gatsby as “a German spy during the war.” How interesting that no one really knows much about Gatsby! In a way, it is a sad commentary on the people attending the party: Can they really care so little about their host that they don’t even have the common courtesy to find the difference between fiction and fact? Instead, they believe what is convenient or easy for them, creating a version of Jay Gatsby that meets their ideals. Ironically, the guests’ construction of their host is not unlike how the host himself, as is later revealed, has constructed himself.

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I’ll bet he killed a man - Gatsby inspires sensationalist gossip, placing him as a German spy, a murderer and an American soldier during [HYPERLINK "/repository/atoz/World-War-I/"](#)World War I. As a whole, the novel does little to resolve the enigma of Gatsby, of which this is an early example. Gatsby himself has not yet appeared in the novel, except viewed at a distance in the darkness at the end of Chapter 1.

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What was so unique about Gatsby?

The first supper — there would be another one after midnight — was now being served, and Jordan invited me to join her own party, who were spread around a table on the other side of the garden. There were three married couples and Jordan's escort, a persistent undergraduate given to violent innuendo, and obviously under the impression that sooner or later Jordan was going to yield him up her person to a greater or lesser degree. Instead of rambling, this party had preserved a dignified homogeneity, and assumed to itself the function of representing the staid nobility of the country-side — East Egg condescending to West Egg, and carefully on guard against its spectroscopic gayety.

"Let's get out," whispered Jordan, after a somehow wasteful and inappropriate half-hour. "This is much too polite for me."

We got up, and she explained that we were going to find the host: I had never met him, she said, and it was making me uneasy. The undergraduate nodded in a cynical, melancholy way.

The bar, where we glanced first, was crowded, but Gatsby was not there. She couldn't find him from the top of the steps, and he wasn't on the veranda. On a chance we tried an important-looking door, and walked into a high Gothic library, panelled with carved English oak, and probably transported complete from some ruin overseas.

A stout, middle-aged man, with enormous owl-eyed spectacles, was sitting somewhat drunk on the edge of a great table, staring with unsteady concentration at the shelves of books. As we entered he wheeled excitedly around and examined Jordan from head to foot.

"What do you think?" he demanded impetuously.

"About what?" He waved his hand toward the book-shelves.

"About that. As a matter of fact you needn't bother to ascertain. I ascertained. They're real."

"The books?"

He nodded.

"Absolutely real — have pages and everything. I thought they'd be a nice durable cardboard. Matter of fact, they're absolutely real. Pages and — Here! Lemme show you."

Taking our scepticism for granted, he rushed to the bookcases and returned with Volume One of the "Stoddard Lectures."

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The only person Nick encounters at the party whom he knows is Jordan Baker. The mere fact that Jordan is at the party suggests that she is, in some ways (ways that are explored later in this chapter and beyond), an extension of the party-going set. Although little is known of her, up to this point, her presence at the mansion suggests that she likely runs with the sort of people who frequent Gatsby's house. She seems intrigued by Nick, however, just as he is intrigued by her, for reasons that remain unstated. Perhaps she finds Nick a welcome relief to the kinds of men she generally meets, or perhaps she is drawn to his Midwestern sensibility, for it is clear he doesn't yet blend in with the East Coast crowd. Whatever it is that draws her to him, she has never before been involved with anyone quite like Nick (this is especially brought out in Chapters 8 and 9).

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More on the setting

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As Nick and Jordan saunter around, they also shed more light on the partygoers themselves. For example, while Nick and Jordan explore the house (under the pretense, at least, of looking for Gatsby), they meet a man known throughout the book as "Owl Eyes" due to his glasses. Two things are striking about him. First, he seems impressed that the books in Gatsby's library are real. Although this may seem merely a careless remark, in fact, it speaks volumes. Gatsby, unlike Tom, is "new money," and Owl Eyes knows it. Clearly he has spent a great deal of time among the nouveaux riches and knows them well enough to know that they are, by and large, about appearances. He is surprised that the books are real, expecting, instead, for them to "be a nice durable cardboard," giving the illusion of a library where none really exists. Instead, Gatsby does indeed have real books. Everything in the house, Gatsby reveals later, has been painstakingly chosen to create an image of affluence. The second revealing statement Owl Eyes makes is that he's "been drunk for about a week now." In this respect, he is a perfect poster boy for the Jazz Age, drunk to incapacitation for weeks on end.

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Vision and blindness

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The shallowness of the Roaring Twenties: the vast library of "realism" that Owl Eyes admires is full of books no one reads. The books contain "realism" but are just for show.

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Gatsby's library / Owl Eyes - Nick's description of the 'high Gothic library' emphasises its lack of authenticity, precisely because it is so realistic: 'probably transported complete from some ruin overseas.' Nick and Jordan meet a man there who is drunkenly contemplating the room. Owl Eyes, as Nick later dubs him, exhibits great cynicism in examining the books and ascertaining that ...

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The idea of real and unreal in the novel.

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Stoddard lectures travel books taking in the entire world.

“See!” he cried triumphantly. “It’s a bona-fide piece of printed matter. It fooled me. This fella’s a regular Belasco. It’s a triumph. What thoroughness! What realism! Knew when to stop, too — didn’t cut the pages. But what do you want? What do you expect?”

He snatched the book from me and replaced it hastily on its shelf, muttering that if one brick was removed the whole library was liable to collapse.

“Who brought you?” he demanded. “Or did you just come? I was brought. Most people were brought.”

Jordan looked at him alertly, cheerfully, without answering.

“I was brought by a woman named Roosevelt,” he continued. “Mrs. Claud Roosevelt. Do you know her? I met her somewhere last night. I’ve been drunk for about a week now, and I thought it might sober me up to sit in a library.”

“Has it?”

“A little bit, I think. I can’t tell yet. I’ve only been here an hour. Did I tell you about the books? They’re real. They’re —”

“You told us.” We shook hands with him gravely and went back outdoors.

There was dancing now on the canvas in the garden; old men pushing young girls backward in eternal graceless circles, superior couples holding each other tortuously, fashionably, and keeping in the corners — and a great number of single girls dancing individualistically or relieving the orchestra for a moment of the burden of the banjo or the traps. By midnight the hilarity had increased. A celebrated tenor had sung in Italian, and a notorious contralto had sung in jazz, and between the numbers people were doing “stunts” all over the garden, while happy, vacuous bursts of laughter rose toward the summer sky. A pair of stage twins, who turned out to be the girls in yellow, did a baby act in costume, and champagne was served in glasses bigger than finger-bowls. The moon had risen higher, and floating in the Sound was a triangle of silver scales, trembling a little to the stiff, tinny drip of the banjoes on the lawn.

I was still with Jordan Baker. We were sitting at a table with a man of about my age and a rowdy little girl, who gave way upon the slightest provocation to uncontrollable laughter. I was enjoying myself now. I had taken two finger-bowls of champagne, and the scene had changed before my eyes into something significant, elemental, and profound.

At a lull in the entertainment the man looked at me and smiled.

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Belasco David Belasco (1853-1931); U.S. theatrical producer, playwright, and actor.

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t fooled me. This fella’s a regular Belasco. – Owl Eyes describes Gatsby as being like David Belasco (1853 – 1931), a theatrical producer contemporary with Fitzgerald well known for his illusions of naturalism on stage.

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There is a delicious scene in *The Great Gatsby* that throws more light on the subject of humanistic education than any warehouse of position papers churned out by Beltway think tanks. Among those gathered at Gatsby’s East Egg mansion, one guest idly removes a volume from a nearby bookshelf. The guest is shocked to find that he is handling a real book. “It’s a bona-fide piece of printed matter...” he exclaims, confessing he had expected find “nice durable cardboard.” Seeing that the books on the shelf have “pages and everything,” he registers his respect. “It’s a triumph. What thoroughness! What realism! Knew when to stop too-didn’t cut the pages.”

Cutting the pages-a privilege formerly enjoyed by those commencing to read a new volume-would have suggested that the book was something more than a showpiece; a pretense far too outrageous even for the likes of the smart set to swallow.

Master of the exquisite gesture, Gatsby has carried off an extraordinary effect by simply acquiring and properly displaying a certifiable article of taste. It is, of course, solely in the ability to carry off the gesture that all Gatsby’s “greatness” lies.

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I was brought by a woman named Roosevelt – Fitzgerald continues name dropping, mentioning a member of the one of most prestigious New York families – two members of the Roosevelt clan were American presidents.

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The carnivalesque atmosphere of Gatsby’s party continues as the couple heads outdoors, still searching for their host. Nick offers a telling commentary on the way of life he’s witnessing, stating that after he had enough champagne, “the scene had changed before [his] eyes into something significant, elemental, and profound.” Sober, this scene has no more significance than any other, but through the haze of alcohol, it seems to become steeped in meaning. Again, Fitzgerald offers candid commentary into life in the Jazz Age. He is, in effect, offering harsh social criticism, by suggesting that the only way in which a sense of ...

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The first glimpse of Gatsby reveals a man who stands apart from the type of guests he routinely hosts at his parties. Much to Fitzgerald’s credit, the reader, just like Nick, falls into the trap of interacting with Gatsby before his identity is ever revealed. Nick strikes up a conversation with someone of a bit more substance than the typical party guest — someone who asks him questions about himself and is somewhat interested in him (albeit a general passing interest). In fact, Nick ...

"Your face is familiar," he said, politely. "Weren't you in the Third Division during the war?"

"Why, yes. I was in the Ninth Machine-gun Battalion."

"I was in the Seventh Infantry until June nineteen-eighteen. I knew I'd seen you somewhere before."

We talked for a moment about some wet, gray little villages in France. Evidently he lived in this vicinity, for he told me that he had just bought a hydroplane, and was going to try it out in the morning.

"Want to go with me, old sport? Just near the shore along the Sound."

"What time?"

"Any time that suits you best."

It was on the tip of my tongue to ask his name when Jordan looked around and smiled. "Having a gay time now?" she inquired.

"Much better." I turned again to my new acquaintance. "This is an unusual party for me. I haven't even seen the host. I live over there ——" I waved my hand at the invisible hedge in the distance, "and this man Gatsby sent over his chauffeur with an invitation." For a moment he looked at me as if he failed to understand.

"I'm Gatsby," he said suddenly.

"What!" I exclaimed. "Oh, I beg your pardon."

"I thought you knew, old sport. I'm afraid I'm not a very good host."

He smiled understandingly — much more than understandingly. It was one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in 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 so 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 rough-neck, 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.

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First meeting between Gatsby and Nick

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I'm Gatsby... I thought you knew, old sport. I'm afraid I'm not a very good host. When Gatsby finally speaks to Nick, it is without introducing himself and leads to this awkward revelation. Nick's description of him at this point focuses on his smile and presents it as having a quality of knowingness:

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.

The extended description of the smile leads to a narrative volte-face: 'Precisely at that point it vanished...', which prefigures the disappearance of Gatsby himself a few moments later, prompted by a telephone call from Chicago.

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an elegant young roughneck, a year or two over thirty, whose elaborate formality of speech just missed being absurd. This is Nick's first direct description of Gatsby, which combines positive and negative aspects in an uneasy balance. The terms 'elegant' and 'roughneck' seem contradictory, but hint at a narrative of self-improvement, whereby Gatsby transcends his class to achieve the high status associated with the mansion and the party. Nick completes his representation of Gatsby with the final comment:

Some time before he introduced himself I'd got a strong impression that he was picking his words with care.

Following this, he and Jordan also indulge in speculation about Gatsby's origins and credentials, with Jordan rejecting the story of Gatsby's Oxford background.

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Why?

Almost at the moment when Mr. Gatsby identified himself, a butler hurried toward him with the information that Chicago was calling him on the wire. He excused himself with a small bow that included each of us in turn.

"If you want anything just ask for it, old sport," he urged me. "Excuse me. I will rejoin you later."

When he was gone I turned immediately to Jordan — constrained to assure her of my surprise. I had expected that Mr. Gatsby would be a florid and corpulent person in his middle years.

"Who is he?" I demanded.

"Do you know?"

"He's just a man named Gatsby."

"Where is he from, I mean? And what does he do?"

"Now *you're* started on the subject," she answered with a wan smile. "Well, he told me once he was an Oxford man." A dim background started to take shape behind him, but at her next remark it faded away.

"However, I don't believe it."

"Why not?" "I don't know," she insisted, "I just don't think he went there."

Something in her tone reminded me of the other girl's "I think he killed a man," and had the effect of stimulating my curiosity. I would have accepted without question the information that Gatsby sprang from the swamps of Louisiana or from the lower East Side of New York. That was comprehensible. But young men didn't — at least in my provincial inexperience I believed they didn't — drift coolly out of nowhere and buy a palace on Long Island Sound.

"Anyhow, he gives large parties," said Jordan, changing the subject with an urbane distaste for the concrete. "And I like large parties. They're so intimate. At small parties there isn't any privacy."

There was the boom of a bass drum, and the voice of the orchestra leader rang out suddenly above the echolalia of the garden.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he cried. "At the request of Mr. Gatsby we are going to play for you Mr. Vladimir Tostoff's latest work, which attracted so much attention at Carnegie Hall last May. If you read the papers, you know there was a big sensation."

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Shady business?

He smiled with jovial condescension, and added: "Some sensation!" Whereupon everybody laughed.

"The piece is known," he concluded lustily, "as Vladimir Tostoff's *Jazz History of the World*."

The nature of Mr. Tostoff's composition eluded me, because just as it began my eyes fell on Gatsby, standing alone on the marble steps and looking from one group to another with approving eyes. His tanned skin was drawn attractively tight on his face and his short hair looked as though it were trimmed every day. I could see nothing sinister about him. I wondered if the fact that he was not drinking helped to set him off from his guests, for it seemed to me that he grew more correct as the fraternal hilarity increased. When the *Jazz History of the World* was over, girls were putting their heads on men's shoulders in a puppyish, convivial way, girls were swooning backward playfully into men's arms, even into groups, knowing that some one would arrest their falls — but no one swooned backward on Gatsby, and no French bob touched Gatsby's shoulder, and no singing quartets were formed with Gatsby's head for one link.

"I beg your pardon."

Gatsby's butler was suddenly standing beside us.

"Miss Baker?" he inquired. "I beg your pardon, but Mr. Gatsby would like to speak to you alone."

"With me?" she exclaimed in surprise.

"Yes, madame."

She got up slowly, raising her eyebrows at me in astonishment, and followed the butler toward the house. I noticed that she wore her evening-dress, all her dresses, like sports clothes — there was a jauntiness about her movements as if she had first learned to walk upon golf courses on clean, crisp mornings.

I was alone and it was almost two. For some time confused and intriguing sounds had issued from a long, many-windowed room which overhung the terrace. Eluding Jordan's undergraduate, who was now engaged in an obstetrical conversation with two chorus girls, and who implored me to join him, I went inside.

The large room was full of people. One of the girls in yellow was playing the piano, and beside her stood a tall, red-haired young lady from a famous chorus, engaged in song.

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Gatsby, standing alone ... formed with Gatsby's head for one link Gatsby is often presented by Nick as being isolated from others, and even when surrounded by guests at his own party, he is set apart.

Commented [38]:

The image of Gatsby is one of extreme propriety. From the "majestic hand" that signed Nick's invitation to the full-sized orchestra and exquisite catering, Gatsby appears the perfect gentleman. He is gracious and kindhearted (or else how could he put up with his own guests?), a combination that gives rise to rumors. He is, however, set apart from the guests, both mentally and physically. Nick indicates that during the course of the evening, as men and women began to move closer to each other in gestures of flirtation, Gatsby was strikingly marginalized. No one sought to rest her head on his shoulder, no friends sought him out to join their small and intimate groups. Gatsby, the host, remained strikingly aloof from his guests. Nick, likely, is one of the first people to ever realize this. (Again, as a testament to his general nature, Nick comes off as a credible and trustworthy narrator.) Just as one may think that Gatsby will have nothing to do with any woman, however, he sends for Jordan Baker, wishing to speak to her privately. When Jordan returns, Fitzgerald, wanting to maintain suspense for a bit longer, withholds the purpose of their discussion, but Jordan says that it was "the most amazing thing," which is finally discussed at the end of Chapter 4.

She had drunk a quantity of champagne, and during the course of her song she had decided, ineptly, that everything was very, very sad — she was not only singing, she was weeping too. Whenever there was a pause in the song she filled it with gasping, broken sobs, and then took up the lyric again in a quavering soprano. The tears coursed down her cheeks — not freely, however, for when they came into contact with her heavily beaded eyelashes they assumed an inky color, and pursued the rest of their way in slow black rivulets. A humorous suggestion was made that she sing the notes on her face, whereupon she threw up her hands, sank into a chair, and went off into a deep vinous sleep.

“She had a fight with a man who says he’s her husband,” explained a girl at my elbow. I looked around. Most of the remaining women were now having fights with men **said** to be their husbands. Even Jordan’s party, the quartet from East Egg, were rent asunder by dissension. One of the men was talking with curious intensity to a young actress, and his wife, after attempting to laugh at the situation in a dignified and indifferent way, broke down entirely and resorted to flank attacks — at intervals she appeared suddenly at his side like an angry diamond, and hissed: “You promised!” into his ear.

The reluctance to go home was not confined to wayward men. The hall was at present occupied by two deplorably sober men and their highly indignant wives. The wives were sympathizing with each other in slightly raised voices.

“Whenever he sees I’m having a good time he wants to go home.”

“Never heard anything so selfish in my life.”

“We’re always the first ones to leave.”

“So are we.”

“Well, we’re almost the last to-night,” said one of the men sheepishly. “The orchestra left half an hour ago.”

In spite of the wives’ agreement that such malevolence was beyond credibility, the dispute ended in a short struggle, and both wives were lifted, kicking, into the night.

As I waited for my hat in the hall the door of the library opened and **Jordan Baker and Gatsby came out together**. He was saying some last word to her, but the eagerness in his manner tightened abruptly into formality as several people approached him to say good-bye.

Commented [39]:

women were now having fights with men said to be their husbands — Nick observes a series of scenes arising from marital discord and infidelity: the weeping singer who has ‘had a fight with a man who says he’s her husband’; the hissing ‘angry diamond’ of a wife who recognises that she must compete with a ‘young actress’; and the argumentative wives who are ‘lifted, kicking, into the night’ by their sober husbands. Jordan later ‘tantalises’ Nick by referring to an ‘amazing’ story which she has promised to keep secret. The context of marital dysfunction, usurpation and reclamation, may suggest that the story is of a similar nature. The story is deferred until the next chapter and does indeed lead to catastrophically disrupted relationships.

Jordan's party were calling impatiently to her from the porch, but she lingered for a moment to shake hands.

"I've just heard the most amazing thing," she whispered. "How long were we in there?" "Why, about an hour." "It was — simply amazing," she repeated abstractedly. "But I swore I wouldn't tell it and here I am tantalizing you." She yawned gracefully in my face: "Please come and see me. . . . Phone book . . . Under the name of Mrs. Sigourney Howard . . . My aunt . . ." She was hurrying off as she talked — her brown hand waved a jaunty salute as she melted into her party at the door.

Rather ashamed that on my first appearance I had stayed so late, I joined the last of Gatsby's guests, who were clustered around him. I wanted to explain that I'd hunted for him early in the evening and to apologize for not having known him in the garden. "Don't mention it," he enjoined me eagerly. "Don't give it another thought, old sport." **The familiar expression held no more familiarity than the hand which reassuringly brushed my shoulder.** "And don't forget we're going up in the hydroplane to-morrow morning, at nine o'clock."

Then the butler, behind his shoulder: **"Philadelphia wants you on the 'phone, sir."** "All right, in a minute. Tell them I'll be right there. . . . good night." "Good night."

"Good night." He smiled — and suddenly there seemed to be a pleasant significance in having been among the last to go, as if he had desired it all the time. "Good night, old sport. . . . good night."

But as I walked down the steps I saw that the evening was not quite over. Fifty feet from the door a dozen headlights illuminated a bizarre and tumultuous scene. In the ditch beside the road, right side up, but violently shorn of one wheel, rested a new coupe which had left Gatsby's drive not two minutes before. The sharp jut of a wall accounted for the detachment of the wheel, which was now getting considerable attention from half a dozen curious chauffeurs. However, as they had left their cars blocking the road, a harsh, discordant din from those in the rear had been audible for some time, and added to the already violent confusion of the scene.

A man in a long duster had dismounted from the wreck and now stood in the middle of the road, looking from the car to the tire and from the tire to the observers in a pleasant, puzzled way.

Commented [40]:
Yet again another call

Commented [41]:
a bizarre and tumultuous scene Nick's final experience at the party is of a car crash, and many aspects of this foreshadow the crash involving Myrtle.

Commented [42]:
violently shorn of one wheel... the amputated wheel
The language here anticipates the physical damage done to Myrtle when she is hit by Gatsby's car.

Commented [43]:
A man in a long duster — in the early days of motoring, drivers exposed to the elements covered up their clothes by wearing a loose-fitting, long, light coat known as a duster coat, often made from buff coloured canvas or linen.

“See!” he explained. “It went in the ditch.”

The fact was infinitely astonishing to him, and I recognized first the unusual quality of wonder, and then the man — it was the late patron of Gatsby’s library.

“How’d it happen?”

He shrugged his shoulders.

“I know nothing whatever about mechanics,” he said decisively.

“But how did it happen? Did you run into the wall?” “Don’t ask me,” said Owl Eyes, washing his hands of the whole matter. “I know very little about driving — next to nothing. It happened, and that’s all I know.”

“Well, if you’re a poor driver you oughtn’t to try driving at night.”

“But I wasn’t even trying,” he explained indignantly, “I wasn’t even trying.”

An awed hush fell upon the bystanders.

“Do you want to commit suicide?”

“You’re lucky it was just a wheel! A bad driver and not even *trying*!”

“You don’t understand,” explained the criminal. “I wasn’t driving. There’s another man in the car.”

The shock that followed this declaration found voice in a sustained “Ah-h-h!” as the door of the coupe swung slowly open. The crowd — it was now a crowd — stepped back involuntarily, and when the door had opened wide there was a ghostly pause. Then, very gradually, part by part, a pale, dangling individual stepped out of the wreck, pawing tentatively at the ground with a large uncertain dancing shoe.

Blinded by the glare of the headlights and confused by the incessant groaning of the horns, the apparition stood swaying for a moment before he perceived the man in the duster.

“Wha’s matter?” he inquired calmly. “Did we run outa gas?”

“Look!”

Half a dozen fingers pointed at the amputated wheel — he stared at it for a moment, and then looked upward as though he suspected that it had dropped from the sky.

“It came off,” some one explained.

He nodded.

“At first I din’ notice we’d stopped.”

Commented [44]:

The crash is symbolic in two ways. It represents the reckless disregard of the Roaring Twenties and the inevitable plunge Fitzgerald sensed would end the boom. It also foreshadows a car accident later in the novel.

Commented [45]:

‘I wasn’t driving. There’s another man in the car.’ The crowd misidentifies Owl Eyes as the ‘criminal’ in this car crash, and he has to exonerate himself by pointing to the true culprit. When this happens to Gatsby, later in the novel, he protects the identity of Daisy as the culprit, and has to experience the consequences of this.

A pause. Then, taking a long breath and straightening his shoulders, he remarked in a determined voice:

“Wonder’ff tell me where there’s a gas’line station?”

At least a dozen men, some of them little better off than he was, explained to him that wheel and car were no longer joined by any physical bond.

“Back out,” he suggested after a moment. “Put her in reverse.”

“But the *wheel’s* off!”

He hesitated.

“No harm in trying,” he said.

The caterwauling horns had reached a crescendo and I turned away and cut across the lawn toward home. I glanced back once. A wafer of a moon was shining over Gatsby’s house, making the night fine as before, and surviving the laughter and the sound of his still glowing garden. 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.

Commented [46]:

A sudden emptiness ... gesture of farewell. Gatsby’s pathos derives from his loneliness and yearning, and this elegiac moment in the novel underlines the superficiality and transitory nature of Gatsby’s parties.

Reading over what I have written so far, I see I have given the impression that the events of three nights several weeks apart were all that absorbed me. On the contrary, they were merely casual events in a crowded summer, and, until much later, they absorbed me infinitely less than my personal affairs.

Commented [47]:

merely casual events - Nick retreats from this part of the narrative here, focussing for the remainder of the chapter on his working life in New York and his relationship with Jordan, and denying that the events he has related so far were as prominent in his life as they might seem to the reader.

Most of the time I worked. In the early morning the sun threw my shadow westward as I hurried down the white chasms of lower New York to the Probity Trust. I knew the other clerks and young bond-salesmen by their first names, and lunched with them in dark, crowded restaurants on little pig sausages and mashed potatoes and coffee. I even had a short affair with a girl who lived in Jersey City and worked in the accounting department, but her brother began throwing mean looks in my direction, so when she went on her vacation in July I let it blow quietly away.

Commented [48]:

About Nick, the character

Commented [49]:

Yale Club private social club in New York City.

I took dinner usually at the Yale Club — for some reason it was the gloomiest event of my day — and then I went up-stairs to the library and studied investments and securities for a conscientious hour. There were generally a few rioters around, but they never came into the library, so it was a good place to work. After that, if the night was mellow, I strolled down Madison Avenue past the old Murray Hill Hotel, and over 33rd Street to the Pennsylvania Station.

I began to like New York, the racy, adventurous feel of it at night, and the satisfaction that the constant flicker of men and women and machines gives to the restless eye. I liked to walk up Fifth Avenue and pick out romantic women from the crowd and imagine that in a few minutes I was going to enter into their lives, and no one would ever know or disapprove. Sometimes, in my mind, I followed them to their apartments on the corners of hidden streets, and they turned and smiled back at me before they faded through a door into warm darkness. 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.

Again at eight o'clock, when the dark lanes of the Forties were five deep with throbbing taxi-cabs, bound for the theatre district, I felt a sinking in my heart. Forms leaned together in the taxis as they waited, and voices sang, and there was laughter from unheard jokes, and lighted cigarettes outlined unintelligible gestures inside. Imagining that I, too, was hurrying toward gayety and sharing their intimate excitement, I wished them well.

For a while I lost sight of Jordan Baker, and then in midsummer I found her again. At first I was flattered to go places with her, because she was a golf champion, and every one knew her name. Then it was something more. I wasn't actually in love, but I felt a sort of tender curiosity. The bored haughty face that she turned to the world concealed something — most affectations conceal something eventually, even though they don't in the beginning — and one day I found what it was. When we were on a house-party together up in Warwick, she left a borrowed car out in the rain with the top down, and then lied about it — and suddenly I remembered the story about her that had eluded me that night at Daisy's. At her first big golf tournament there was a row that nearly reached the newspapers — a suggestion that she had moved her ball from a bad lie in the semi-final round. The thing approached the proportions of a scandal — then died away. A caddy retracted his statement, and the only other witness admitted that he might have been mistaken. The incident and the name had remained together in my mind.

Jordan Baker instinctively avoided clever, shrewd men, and now I saw that this was because she felt safer on a plane where any divergence from a code would be thought impossible. She was incurably dishonest. She wasn't able to endure being at a disadvantage and, given this unwillingness, I suppose she had begun dealing in

Commented [50]:

I felt a haunting loneliness sometimes, and felt it in others ... wasting the most poignant moments of night and life. Nick depicts life in New York as busy, crowded, adventurous and exciting, but also highlights his exclusion from it, creating a sense of melancholy which echoes the earlier image of Gatsby isolated in the midst of his own party.

Commented [51]:

Then it was something more - Nick's account of the relationship with Jordan emphasises that he 'wasn't actually in love, but I felt a sort of tender curiosity.'

subterfuges when she was very young in order to keep that cool, insolent smile turned to the world and yet satisfy the demands of her hard, jaunty body.

It made no difference to me. Dishonesty in a woman is a thing you never blame deeply

— I was casually sorry, and then I forgot. It was on that same house party that we had a curious conversation about driving a car. It started because she passed so close to some workmen that our fender flicked a button on one man's coat.

"You're a rotten driver," I protested. "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 met somebody just as careless as yourself."

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

Her gray, sun-strained eyes stared straight ahead, but she had deliberately shifted our relations, and for a moment I thought I loved her. But I am slow-thinking and full of interior rules that act as brakes on my desires, and I knew that first I had to get myself definitely out of that tangle back home. I'd been writing letters once a week and signing them: "Love, Nick," and all I could think of was how, when that certain girl played tennis, a faint mustache of perspiration appeared on her upper lip. Nevertheless there was a vague understanding that had to be tactfully broken off before I was free.

Every one suspects himself of at least one of the cardinal virtues, and this is mine: I am one of the few honest people that I have ever known.

Commented [52]:

you're a rotten driver Nick's criticism of Jordan leads to a discussion of 'careless' people, and Jordan's comment that 'it takes two to make an accident', which both illustrates her irresponsible attitude in expecting others to 'keep out of my way', and presents the concept that disaster strikes when careless people collide with each other. This association between driving and social responsibility has already been introduced with the car crash at the party, but is developed at several key points in the novel, most notably in the car crash which kills Myrtle.

Commented [53]:

Is Nick afraid to commit?

Nirmala Silverajan

In addition to providing information about Gatsby, his parties, and his party guests, Chapter 3 also chronicles a return to the issues of morality and equity introduced in Chapter 1. Toward the chapter's end, Nick shifts his focus away from Gatsby and toward Jordan. He reveals his interest in her, but tempers it by discussing her apparent penchant for lying. While he is initially "flattered to go places with her," largely because of her fame, he isn't "actually in love" but feels "a sort of tender curiosity." Nick's opinion of Jordan changes, however, when he finds that she makes a habit of lying her way out of bad situations, thus revealing two contrary facets of his nature. Unlike many of the novel's characters who delight in basking in the fame and notoriety of others (take for instance Myrtle's delight at the power and prestige she gets from being with Tom), Nick's judgment is not entirely clouded by fame. Even though Nick is fond of Jordan he is still able to discern her lack of honesty. However, as admirable as that is, Nick contradicts this good judgment when he confesses that "Dishonesty in a woman is a thing you never blame deeply — I was casually sorry, and then I forgot." Clearly, although he wouldn't admit it, he does hold a double standard, excusing Jordan's shortcomings because of her gender. As the chapter ends, Nick reveals his own sense of self-worth: Of all the people he has known, he is one of the few who is honest. In many respects, this is true, and as the story continues, Nick's moral fortitude becomes more and more pronounced, but the mere fact that he has dismissed Jordan's dishonesty makes the reader wonder, at least momentarily, whether this is true.

Commented [54]:

I am one of the few honest people that I have ever known. Nick's self-assessment follows a brief consideration of his dishonourable behaviour within an existing relationship (he refers to it euphemistically as 'that tangle back home' and a 'vague understanding' from which he must extricate himself). Thus Nick seems to exhibit his own dishonesty while claiming to be honest. As in Chapter 1, this kind of comment not only destabilises our opinions of the other characters, but also undermines our confidence in Nick as a narrator.