

Once We Were Great:
Continuing F. Scott Fitzgerald's Story of Tom and Daisy Buchanan Through
the Voice of their Daughter Pammy

Introduction

F. Scott Fitzgerald's iconic novel *The Great Gatsby* has drawn the attention of readers for nearly a century. The narrative captures the spirit of the 1920s, addressing the opulence of that era as well as the angst felt by members of Fitzgerald's generation. Fitzgerald uses various distinctive stylistic elements to create the story of Jay Gatsby and his ideal love, Daisy, and those characteristic elements of style are present in his entire body of work. This creative writing thesis attempts to emulate the style of F. Scott Fitzgerald in order to create a new narrative that follows the Buchanan family after the tragic death of Myrtle Wilson and the subsequent murder of Jay Gatsby.

The first portion of the thesis offers a narrative written from the first person perspective of Pammy Buchanan, who represents the next generation who dealt with many of the same social issues seen in Fitzgerald's works.

Description and Justification

With the release of Baz Luhrmann's filmed version of *The Great Gatsby*, public interest in F. Scott Fitzgerald's work has been renewed in a grand way. Despite this trend, as an educator I have seen students gravitating toward more modern works that have less literary depth than can be found in Fitzgerald and other authors of his caliber. The new movie focuses chiefly on the visual components of filmmaking, adding in modern music and other elements that do not highlight the literary value of the story. Continuing the story of Tom and Daisy Buchanan through the voice of their young daughter is a way to

capture the attention of a younger generation introduced to Fitzgerald by Hollywood rather than by his own writing.

No novelistic continuation of *The Great Gatsby* now exists. Fitzgerald chronicles a very important historical period in *Gatsby*, but the story ends before the stock market crash of 1929 changes everything. Following the crash, interest in Fitzgerald's work waned, partly because life had changed for his potential readers. Many of them no longer wished to read about opulence because they did not identify with it. Similarly, most people in today's society do not identify with the world of Jay Gatsby or Daisy Buchanan. This thesis, by following Tom and Daisy into the future, will open their story up to a larger audience, and in doing so will try to make Fitzgerald's work more appealing to a younger generation of readers. By focusing on the life and feelings of a teenager, the thesis may encourage teenaged readers to want to learn more about the "backstory" of this character. In other words, my continuation of Fitzgerald's book may inspire younger readers to take a greater interest in the original novel.

Because no continuation of *The Great Gatsby* now exists, this thesis is a literally unique undertaking. The story picks up shortly after the end of *Gatsby* and follows Pammy through her graduation from high school. The dysfunction in her family is addressed, along with her own emotional responses to events both past and present. Another child is introduced, and characters undeveloped in the original story are developed. Historical events that occurred after Fitzgerald's original story ended are introduced, and the element of religious faith is explored.

F. Scott Fitzgerald was a master of language who painstakingly worked and revised his writing to a point of perfection. In today's digital world, Hollywood

adaptations of literary masterpieces tend to overshadow such perfection by emphasizing lights, camera tricks, and computer-generated sound that distract viewers from the *words* of the work – from the art of writing. Skillful dialogue and intriguing plot developments take a back seat to scenery and sound effects. Of course, perfectly re-creating Fitzgerald’s characteristic style and voice in this thesis may not be entirely possible because genius cannot be copied, but the effort seems worth the potential achievement. This thesis tries to honor Fitzgerald’s talent by emulating it and thus renewing interest in his great style of writing.

Sample of New Narrative

Here is a sample of my attempt to emulate Fitzgerald’s style:

In my early, more defenseless years, there was really only one person around to give me advice, and I was never quite sure if I should heed it. My beloved nanny, Eva, was always filled with commentary on the lives of those around me, but she was a woman, and women are fools. I’d heard that from my own mother. Not only are women fools, but that’s the best thing we can be: “beautiful little fools.” I overheard her say that to Cousin Nick when she thought I was too young to understand. She told Eva that I could wear anything I wanted because I was a beautiful little fool. Being foolish was expected, tolerated, even encouraged.

Because of my mother’s remark, I placed little value on Eva’s advice, a habit that ultimately caused me secret griefs—griefs that were unexpected and shared with no one. Her observations, although often wise, were overshadowed by the eternal blindness of the cruel, imposed

superiority of the Nordic male. My father, Tom Buchanan, had pounded into the minds of anyone who would listen that the Nordic race was superior, and that man was dominant over woman.

And I listened. I listened because I saw what happened when my mother, Daisy, didn't listen. He thought I didn't see, just as my mother thought I didn't hear. But I saw—and heard. Although I was labeled a little fool and was decked out in pink and ribbons, I was no fool. I saw, just as the eyes of God saw everything.

Emulation of Fitzgerald's Style

The preceding excerpt, the beginning passage in the new narrative, starts much the same way *The Great Gatsby* starts:

In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since. "Whenever you feel like criticizing any one," he told me, "just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had."

He didn't say any more, but we've always been unusually communicative in a reserved way, and I understood that he meant a great deal more than that. In consequence, I'm inclined to reserve all judgments, a habit that has opened up many curious natures to me and also made me the victim of not a few veteran bores. The abnormal mind is quick to detect and attach itself to this quality when it appears in a normal person, and so it came about that in college I was unjustly accused of being a politician, because I was privy to the secret griefs of wild, unknown men.

Most of the confidences were unsought — frequently I have feigned sleep, preoccupation, or a hostile levity when I realized by some unmistakable sign that an intimate revelation was quivering on the horizon; for the intimate revelations of young men, or at least the terms in which they express them, are usually plagiaristic and marred by obvious suppressions. Reserving judgments is a matter of infinite hope. I am still a little afraid of missing something if I forget that, as my father snobbishly suggested, and I snobbishly repeat, a sense of the fundamental decencies is parcelled out unequally at birth.

In my own writing, I have tried to follow Fitzgerald's lead in many different ways. Thus, Pammy discusses her source of advice just as Nick does in the opening paragraph of *Gatsby*. She is looking back in retrospect, considering the value of that advice the same way Nick considers the value of his father's advice. The difference is that Pammy chooses not to heed the advice she receives because it comes from a woman. She has been indirectly taught, as in Fitzgerald's original tale, that women are (and should be) fools.

I have also attempted to mirror various stylistic traits of Fitzgerald's opening passage. For example, Fitzgerald's first line implies that Nick now sees his father's advice as quite relevant. Consequently, Fitzgerald creates suspense, leaving the reader to wonder about Nick's reasoning for recalling his father's words. What does his father's advice have to do with the story we are about to encounter? I have tried to generate the same type of expectation regarding Eva's advice, particularly by having Pammy say, "I was never quite sure if I should heed" Eva's words. My reason for writing this sentence

was to elicit two questions in the reader: (1) about what, exactly, was Eva trying to warn Pammy? and (2) why, precisely, is Pammy thinking about Eva and her advice at this moment?

Like Fitzgerald, I also used a first person narrative. This gives the reader a limited view of characters, their motives, and their actions. Just as Nick Carraway's telling of *Gatsby* is affected by his own moral convictions and upbringing, Pammy's understanding of those around her is limited and controlled by her youth and immaturity. Although Nick Carraway is an adult at the onset of *Gatsby*, the reader witnesses him gaining maturity throughout the novel. Likewise, Pammy gains partial understanding and maturity as the new narrative progresses. Both Nick and Pammy consider the advice of others, which implies that they are introspective people open to the ideas of those around them.

Furthermore, I used sentence structure resembling Fitzgerald's: Nick says, "In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since" (Fitzgerald 1). Similarly, Pammy Buchanan begins, "In my early, more defenseless years, there was really only one person around to give me advice, and I was never quite sure if I should heed it." Both sentences begin with prepositional phrases that imply the speaker is looking back into the past as the novel begins. I used dashes for emphasis, much as Fitzgerald uses them: "Most of the confidences were unsought—frequently I have feigned sleep, preoccupation, or a hostile levity when I realized by some unmistakable sign that an intimate revelation was quivering on the horizon" (Fitzgerald 1). In like fashion, Pammy says, "Because of my mother's remark, I placed little value on Eva's advice, a habit that ultimately caused me secret griefs—griefs

that were unexpected and shared with no one.” The dash signifies a pause: the speaker is thinking as he or she speaks, again indicating that both characters are thoughtful people.

According to M. Thomas Inge and Eric Solomon, Fitzgerald also uses repetition and careful construction that “lead the reader to read and reread sentences time and time again to catch the multi-level nuances of meaning” (3). Nick states, “I am still a little afraid of missing something if I forget that, as my father snobbishly suggested, and I snobbishly repeat, a sense of the fundamental decencies is parcelled out unequally at birth” (Fitzgerald 2). I have attempted to use repetition when Pammy talks about listening, hearing, and seeing. My reason for doing this, I believe, is the same as Fitzgerald’s: to add emphasis and draw attention to the topic at hand.

As in Fitzgerald’s *Gatsby*, the themes of maturity and social responsibility surface in this thesis. Nick considers early in the novel whether he has the right to criticize or judge other people who have not had his “advantages” (Fitzgerald 1). Later he deems Gatsby “worth the whole damn bunch put together” (Fitzgerald 154) when compared to Tom, Daisy, and their peers. He finds it necessary to judge them after all. In a similar way, Pammy feels responsibility for her young brother, and she feels anger and resentment toward her parents, whom she believes should pay more attention to both him and her. As she grows physically, mentally, and spiritually throughout this thesis, her perceptions of her parents change, also.

Working through this thesis has benefitted me in several ways. I think I have gained a better personal appreciation of Fitzgerald’s distinctive style. I have learned by imitation. I have immersed myself in Fitzgerald’s specific methods of writing. By learning to be a better writer, I hope I have also learned to be a better writing teacher.

Delving deeply into Fitzgerald's writing techniques should not only help me become a better teacher of Fitzgerald but should also help me make his writing seem more relevant to my students. I have tried to create a character and narrative that will both have much in common with their own personalities and circumstances.

Once We Were Great

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As I look back I realize that what I claim to know is actually a patchwork precariously stitched together. My early memories are hazy, clouded by the advantages of money and position. My parents are black and white images from photographs, clippings from the newspaper that Eva kept in a scrapbook for me. I recall glimpses of parties, music, and laughter, but Eva always whisked me off for a bedtime story or some other childish pursuit. The real roar of the twenties haunted me in my dreams and molded my character through the absence of parental guidance. My limited view of the world was from a single window. As I've grown older, I've come to realize that life in my home—

for my family—was never really what it seemed to the outside world. I can tell what I remember from inside those walls, but no two people see things through the same lens.

I've since conjectured that when I was almost four years old my mother had an extended stay in a sanitarium. Since Tom, my father, barely acknowledged my existence and my mother was away, the details about her illness and convalescence escaped my intelligence. On wandering through the extensive halls of my father's grand estate, I picked up whispered confidences and hushed tones that were nonsensical to a child of my age, but I perceived them, nonetheless.

Along the same time that my mother was resting at some healing resort, my nanny Eva was distracted by a newcomer in my world. Tom spoke of the newcomer as Junior with the same pride with which he discussed his estate, or his polo horses, or his automobile. When men came to hash out business details, Tom would say, "Did you hear about my boy Junior?" as he blew smoke and clinked ice in his glass of bourbon. I have since overheard him discussing the Nordic race with its contributions to society in the same boastful manner, striving toward some level of importance that seemed just beyond his grasp. Because I was, and still am, a beautiful little fool in both my parents' eyes, they never noticed when I hovered in the passageways, listening to their careless words. Father never spoke of me to his guests or showed any pride in me. His boasting about Junior sent me to Eva in tears, and she would always clean up the mess Tom Buchanan had made.

The advent of Junior was perplexing; I was given no warning. Later acquaintances in school spoke of the births of younger siblings with anticipation and joy, referring to secret moments spent with their mothers before the jubilant event. My mother

and I had no secret moments, no discussion of what was to come. Sometimes late at night I heard her crying, saying “Daisy’s change’ her mine,” and in response the gruff voice of my father would send me scurrying away to the cool comfort of my bed. Oftentimes, Eva would meet me in the hallway and stretch her arm protectively around me. I wouldn’t even know she was there, but she always seemed to be right around the corner waiting—like she knew something was about to ignite and burn. She knew that I needed a guardian angel; I couldn’t climb to a secret place above the trees and escape the turmoil of this life created for me by the mighty Buchanans.

Eva, not Daisy, formally introduced me to Junior, only she called him Thomas Jason. He was tiny, too tiny it seemed, and he made no sound, wrapped in a cloud of cotton so soft and white that Eva’s arms seemed to be the only thing that anchored him to earth. His smell was clean and pure, like he didn’t belong in the world that I knew; yet his presence gave me a kind of eternal reassurance that I did belong in this brutal, cold world. He was warmth, where before I had felt none. His green eyes focused their light on me with an overwhelming, unreasonable acceptance, and I felt loved. He seemed to understand me and believe in me like no one had ever done, which is an awesome feat for a little baby.

Thomas Jason became the sun in my small world and anchored me, although I don’t know what anchored him. A bustle of commotion encircled him as doctors visited the house and Eva struggled to get him to eat. Something was missing for him, something that could have linked him solidly to this earth. I couldn’t understand what that something was because I had never had that anchor myself. He had become my anchor, and as he drifted dangerously close to the heavens, I followed in childlike wonder.

As Thomas Jason drifted in and out of this realm without the attention of our mother, I wandered aimlessly about the property. Mother was institutionalized, Father was self-absorbed, and Eva was frantically trying to save my savior. An ethereal aura surrounded him and all that pertained to him, connecting us in the same way the sky is connected to the sea, or the moon is connected to the stars. We had always been intertwined in a maze of obscurity that began before the beginning of time—a riddle that no one had ever tried to explain to me. I didn't know that he was saving me or why I needed saving, but we both seem to have been fated before our births to spiral toward destruction.

The job of saving me was much too large for a small soul who had no ability to save himself, and my aimless wandering led me to dangerous paths. In the evenings when I meandered back to the nursery, Eva was always shocked at the thick layer of dust that had accumulated on my ostentatious dresses and undergarments. She was unaware that I had befriended the hired hand who fed my father's horses. I knew which horses liked carrots and which ones preferred sugar cubes, knew the gardeners by name, helped water the flowers, and had sneaked behind the baker to find where desserts were hidden until dinner was served. When she took a break, I sometimes got a taste of the forbidden sweets well before anyone else.

One afternoon after traipsing along the coast, collecting shells, I returned with my arms loaded with treasure. Sand coated my arms and legs, so I stepped into the pool area to wash it away. Some of what I recall is painted in my mind with broad, vivid brushstrokes on a shimmering canvas. Some blanks have been filled in with anecdotes from those who cared for me and watched me as I painted the canvas. The smooth, pink

surface of the shells glistened in the cool, blue water as I was enveloped in a void of time and space. Sound became muffled, and time floated along at a miniscule pace. I did not remember. I did not remember distinctly why I had stopped at the pool. I did not remember how many shells I had collected. I remembered nothing. I just existed, floating like Thomas Jason floated, and in that instant I was the closer to heaven.

Chapter 2

I drifted back slowly, like a kite on a warm summer day, the pull distinct yet tenuous. Warm blankets caressed my small body while murmurs surrounded me. Memories had not returned, and the feeling of security was new, unreal. Looking back, I imagine this is how a newborn baby feels when first cradled in his mother's arms, but I had no recollection or reminiscence of such a feeling before this moment.

Comfort and security vanished in the wake of my father's booming voice, as he demanded to know how I had ended up in the pool. He wanted someone to take responsibility for his near loss, like I was a car or a polo pony. There was a faint trace of something in his voice other than anger, but it was only a glimmer, and then it was gone. I might have benefited from the knowledge of what that something was. I needed to see something in my father other than anger, control, and pride. Anxiety welled in my chest as I breathed deeply and reluctantly opened my eyes to see a new set of eyes staring back at me.

I don't recall having ever seen these eyes before, but they were so familiar—welcoming and cool blue like a dream I'd once had. The skin around the eyes wrinkled up as the rest of the face smiled. "There you are," he said as he brushed the hair from my

eyes. No one else in the room seemed to notice that I was awake. They all bustled about, trying to calm the situation. I noticed that the man who peered intently into my eyes was dripping water all over my blanket. I must have had a puzzled look on my face, because he responded with a distraught chuckle that shook water droplets from his nose onto my face.

The room was instantly quiet as they realized that I was awake. My father mumbled something I didn't understand, and then he stepped out of the room in his usual fashion. A doctor came over and placed something on my forehead and my chest. Eva brought over a warm bowl of soup and a fresh blanket. Her face was smeared with tears, but her smile was luminous. A low hum returned as they made efforts to rectify the events of the past few minutes, but one thing did not change. Those blue eyes never looked away.

The following morning life was different. Eva was still hovering over my baby brother, but she was much more aware of my presence. Try as I might, I never managed to slip off to the horse stables again. It had been three months since Thomas Jason arrived, and I had gotten used to my freedom. My new routine involved people who heretofore had gone about me without my notice.

Some girl named Alice who worked in the kitchen took me for a walk around the garden after breakfast. When we came inside, Alice helped me wash my hands and face. Then we returned to the drawing room where there was a young lady who had been employed to teach me art and music. Miss Hilda Boulware was her name: someone in her family invented the Bowler hat, according to my father. He always knew the origins of people, or claimed to. If he couldn't trace them back through an important lineage he

wouldn't deal with them. He said that if Miss Boulware were as creative as her ancestors, I would become as accomplished as Beethoven. It was June 1923.

About three weeks after I started my artistic education, Daisy Buchanan returned to the estate. She waltzed in with such fanfare that for a moment I forgot that she was my mother. Behind her walked a dryer version of the man I had seen after my dip in the pool. His gaze fell on me immediately, and he smiled the most genuine smile I had seen in all my three and a half years. Mother was giving orders like she had never left the house: "Ferdie, put my bags in the master bedroom. Ferdie, I'll have tea in the garden. Ferdie, find Alice and request there be no onions served in the salad at dinner." If Daisy saw me, she didn't acknowledge it. She strolled through the house like a queen, snuffing out candles as she went. "Why candles?" she complained. "Always candles."

Looking back, I cannot explain why this memory is so vivid in my mind. I had dreamed about the moment she would return, and I watched as she breezed through the house, leaving an air of elegance in her wake like a sailboat gently parting the water, swaying the world around her. I waited for her to see me, to rush over to me and touch me. A child needs her mother, and I guess that is why this moment is another stone etching in my heart. I had allowed myself to build a colossal illusion that grew beyond everything I had previously known, but Daisy gently, unknowingly, and gradually smothered the hope inside me.

Feathers fluttered in my chest as Daisy glided upstairs, and I followed close behind. Thomas Jason was upstairs. I held a baseless hope, but my instinct was right. Daisy's easy stroll hesitated at the door to the nursery. The room was bright and open, as were the windows to the afternoon breeze that drifted through the sheer pink draperies.

The sound of ocean waves and seagulls created a soft lull as she slowly made her way across the lustrous tile to the elaborate crib that Tom had imported from France. The baby lay sleeping, half of his tiny body peeking from under the blanket. He had started to gain weight and had the plump little rolls of a healthy infant. I watched her tentatively reach down to brush a small curl that lay across his cheek, and those green eyes opened to her. Daisy gasped, pulling her hand back. It scared me, the way she seemed to fear such a small boy. I didn't know that at that fixed point in time Daisy's past, present, and future met and flooded her sensibilities, and a revelation unknown to me pushed her from the room. My hope, the hope of a desperate child longing for her mother, fled with her.

But hope is not easily destroyed in the mind of a child, and that night at dinner Daisy spoke to me for the first time in a long time. It was such a rare occurrence that I felt privileged each time she looked my way, and I remembered. The memories of a child are random and haphazard, with some being vivid while others are hazy and dreamlike. When my mother or father noticed my existence, God etched those memories in stone tablets like those He gave Moses. One such etching involved mother's friends—Cousin Nick, Aunt Jordan, and a man in a pink suit. I didn't understand why she wanted me to meet the man in the pink suit; I rarely understood Daisy's motives, but the air was heavy with the insincerity of them. Understanding, partial at best, would not come until I was an adult with secrets of my own.

“How's Mother's Bles-sed Pre-cious?” she crooned. “Now sit up dear, and look pretty.” She always called me that: not once do I recall her saying my name, at least to my face. Tom regarded me at his table in the same manner as he regarded the centerpiece. Daisy continued, “Eva tells me you are learning piano! Oh, what a fun girl you will be at

a party when you are old enough! Tom, we should throw a party to celebrate my homecoming. Wouldn't it be lovely?"

Tom slammed his fork down with a clatter and said, "A party? Your homecoming? You talk like you've been on holiday! You are in no condition to host a party! I'll not have it. Are you trying to cause a row, Daisy?" Daisy jumped and looked down at her plate, but said nothing. "Have you forgotten that you left a child when you went on *vacation*? Do you expect me to take care of your mess? This is a prime example Are you gonna' let underlings raise my son? You might as well hand him off to coloreds!" He sounded angry and impatient as he stomped from the dining room.

At just that moment Eva rushed in to take me to bed. The sun was still shining, but according to Eva, young children need their rest. As we climbed the stairs I saw and heard my mother's feeble attempts to protest the cruel voice and domination of my father, but she soon cowered down. Silence. I now see my father was desperate and inadequate, but my mother was shallow and weak.

Silence fled as Eva chattered while she filled the tub and gave me a bath. She read to me and tucked me in, filling the void in my life the only way she knew how. She talked and talked, spilling everything that was in her soul out for my inspection and perusal. That was the night I discovered what happened when I fell into the pool.

Eva told me all about Ferdie, my mother's driver. She has since told me the story over and over, so I remember every detail. It became my favorite bedtime story. Ferdie had heard the splash as he was working in the garage, and he ran right over and jumped into the pool, shoes and all. He carried me all the way up the stairs to the nursery where the doctors were already tending to Thomas Jason. Tom yelled at him for getting water

all over Mother's Italian rug and for leaving the automobile running in the garage, but Ferdie never blinked. He kept his eyes on me until I came around. Tom had ranted and raved for what seemed hours while I lay unconscious, and no one paid him any mind. He was an ineffectual man who used brute force to move those around him; Ferdie was immovable. Maturity has helped me to see that immovable quality as stability, a trait absent in those linked to me through the ancient bloodlines that Father endowed with such power. Money was what grounded Tom Buchanan, and that was the only stability he possessed. Daisy was ungrounded, as volatile as the dynamite that had created the valley of ashes under the all-seeing eyes of Dr. T. J. Eckleburg.

Chapter 3

The following morning, after Daisy was frightened from the nursery by a ghostly shadow of the past, Jordan Baker arrived. She didn't come with the same fanfare that Daisy commanded, but her arrival brought Daisy's confidence back. Daisy started instructing Eva in the same manner she directed Ferdie—matter-of-factly, as if the entire world should bow to her wishes. Eva became very busy with Thomas Jason, obeying my mother's every command.

My art and music lessons continued every morning, but my walks with Alice were replaced with a new pastime: swimming lessons. Daisy had been told about my water excursion and took it on herself to protect me in the way she knew best. She called upon Ferdie. What qualifications he had to be a swim instructor I know not, but he must have seemed the obvious choice because he had rescued me the first time I attempted aquatics on my own. My lessons were a family affair, with Jordan and Daisy sitting by the pool,

drinking icy drinks and discussing the latest party. Eva would bring Thomas Jason down in the pram to get a little sun, but Daisy seemed oblivious. She never looked at him or said his name, continuing with him the same estranged relationship that began when I was born. In my later years I came to understand that Daisy was a free spirit who couldn't be bothered with the inconveniences of maternity.

My yearnings for a relationship with my mother never went away, but Ferdie kept me preoccupied with splashing and making bubbles in the water. Just watching Ferdie took my mind from the real world. Before these trips into the pool I had only seen him in his chauffeur uniform behind the wheel of Father's car, and his lean frame in a fashionably striped swimsuit brought sincere giggles that caused my spirit to soar. He was surprisingly good at building my confidence. I felt safe in his arms as he told me to hold my breath and kick. I looked forward to the mornings with him, and I blocked out the ambivalent world as I floated safely in the encouraging nurture of a man, another experience that had been missing from my childhood.

Despite my age I learned a great deal that summer. Eva and Ferdie were no longer afraid of my curious wanderings, but truth be told, Daisy paid little attention to my efforts in the pool or my adventures around the house. She was preoccupied with something my young mind could not imagine. Years later I got a small glimpse of why she struggled, but the ordeal was something I would never truly grasp. She tried to distract herself, but she didn't know how. Quite by chance I overheard her tell Jordan, "Let's plan something. What can we plan? Do you know what people plan?" Jordan's eyes grew round; she looked as if she had seen a ghost or witnessed a murder, neither of which was far from accurate.

Jordan said, “Daisy, let’s play with Thomas Jason. He’s just scrumptious!” Jordan really seemed enamored with the child as she lifted him from the pram, but Daisy had still not held him in her arms once since she returned from the hospital. Questioningly, she looked at him as if she wanted to ask a deep question from her soul, but she never spoke it aloud. She just shook her head, cleared her expression, and followed some tangent that led anywhere but back to her children. In Daisy’s mind, she had no children. We were just apparitions from a life that she could have had if things had gone differently, if fate had spun a different yarn. The reality of Daisy Buchanan was that there was not a motherly instinct inside her. She was a woman of the hour, unable to see herself five minutes or five years into the future. She clearly saw the past, the present blurry and wild, but the future escaped her like the song of the nightingale swept away on the night winds or the flame of a candle snuffed out too soon.

The remainder of the summer went in much the same way, with Daisy distracted by images and voices from the past. By September, the baby was sitting up and seeing the world around him. Every few days I noticed Daisy staring at him wistfully, as if she would make a connection with him but something stood in her way. Tom would come in—hot, grimy, and brutal—from riding his polo ponies or playing golf and pick him up above his head. “How’s my boy?” he would bellow, and Thomas Jason would giggle and squirm happily. Daisy’s expression was phantasmagoric—enigmatic—and Tom was oblivious, walking in darkness through a forest germinated in his pathetic imagination and watered by his perverse desire for ascendancy. He was too simple to detect the churning under the surface, threatening to erupt and destroy his kingdom of

cards. He was the Great Tom Buchanan, master of money and women, and he would not fall.

Chapter 4

Furtively, time passed while Thomas Jason grew without the attentions of his mother. Eva tried to convince Daisy that he would not grow as he should without her care, but something was missing in Daisy's makeup. As a child I knew nothing of the conversations Eva attempted to have with Daisy on a daily basis, but later as I matured and questioned our upbringing, Eva tried to bring me understanding of a woman that no one really knew. Whatever maternal instinct Daisy had was smothered by a keen self-awareness that left no room for anyone else. The money in her voice kept her tied to some secret society where children didn't really belong.

By the time I was six, in 1926, Mother managed to whisk me off to a boarding school where I remained for several years. The separation from my parents was easy because my relationship with them was distant despite living under the same roof; however, I did miss Eva and Ferdie. They both wrote letters to me every week. Sometimes Eva's letters seemed like repeats of the previous week, but she kept things fresh in my memory. I wrote to my mother. The hope that she would see me, know me, had not died. I don't know if she ever read my letters; she didn't write back. I finally got to know my mother's parents through weekly correspondence. I had not spent much time with them, but their letters opened up a new world to me. I wish I could say that I got a better understanding of my mother, but that was a journey that would take my entire lifetime.

Academia became a great friend to me, and I learned a lot in school. The things I learned were not always from the books the sisters handed me, however. I learned about life from my classmates. One girl in particular, Betty Brown, became my roommate and my friend. Betty and I roomed together for three years, learning about one another the way I imagined sisters did. We studied together, and I even helped out in the kitchen with the nuns because Betty did. Tom paid for everything I needed at school so there was no need for me to work, but I wanted to do it because Betty did. She didn't have to, but she wanted to be like her grandmother.

As soon as the girls in my class could write well, Sister Mary encouraged us to start keeping a diary or journal. According to her, history was important. Knowing our own history would help us build solid futures. Betty said, "Sister Mary sounds like my grandmother," and she rolled her eyes and giggled.

"What do you mean, Betty?" I whispered.

"Oh, Grandma is always talking about how I should learn from what she has been through—like my life is gonna' be like hers somehow. I'm never going to be a poor girl working in a tobacco factory at 13 years old! My daddy's rich! I love to hear her stories, but they're just stories now. They won't make a difference for me; sure they're interesting, but"

"Ladies . . ." Sister Mary's voice boomed across the room, and every girl in the room sat stiff and rigid in her seat. "Because we are not all focused on our studies, let us quote the Beatitudes together."

“Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek . . . ,” we all spoke in unison.

That night in our room, Betty and I tried to write something monumental from lives that were just beginning. We had no real greatness to speak of, yet we were striving for greatness on paper. Sister Mary had given us a quote to ponder: “History is not a burden on the memory but an illumination of the soul” (Lord Acton, historian). She wanted us to learn who we really were by looking back at where we had been. We were nine years old, and the path we looked back upon was short at best. In hindsight I know she was trying to develop skills and habits in us that would make us better students, better people. At the time Betty and I wrote nonsense and frivolity, giggling as we did so.

Betty liked to laugh and play jokes on the other girls, and we would giggle long after the sisters called for lights out. We talked for hours about our dreams; she had the ability to imagine the impossible, but I was somehow stuck in the mire of the valley of ashes back home. For some reason I couldn’t rise above what I only partially knew: Daisy and Tom were miles away, but I was still shackled by my desire to feel love from them. I managed to giggle and get lost in childhood while I was away at school, but in the back of my mind I still saw my mother snuffing out candles and hiding away in her room while my father made jokes with a glass of bourbon in his hand. The history I should have been writing in my diary was a dark history of my parents; that is what shaped me and molded me, haunted me as I tried to escape.

Betty was my partner in crime. She helped me escape the invisible prison of my history. She told me story after story about her grandparents. Her grandfather was a

mining engineer who had struck gold, and her grandmother was this bold woman who spoke her mind despite the fact that she was a woman. How I admired the idea of a woman who was not relegated to the corner to watch as the men made all the decisions! Mrs. Margaret Brown worked in soup kitchens to help miners' families. She also worked for women's suffrage. I couldn't imagine the men in the world letting women vote in elections, but the idea gave me a kind of hope. Women already had the right to vote, but my mother never ventured to the polls. Tom Buchanan wouldn't allow it. Betty's grandma didn't think little girls were fools. She thought women had minds filled with ideas that were worthy of being heard. I wondered what my mother would think of such an idea.

Betty had an older brother named Pat who came to visit with her parents. I'd never been around boys other than Thomas Jason, and I was fascinated. Only two years older than Betty, he acted as if he were a man and we were mere children. Several times Betty's family invited me home with them for the weekend. On Saturdays we went sailing, played games, and went swimming. We attended church and ate meals together around the family table. They treated me like one of their own children. When I was with them, I couldn't help but think about my family, and Thomas Jay. They were so different from the Brown family. The Browns were people who made a way for things; if they wanted to see something happen, they went to work and made it happen. If my father wanted something to happen, he picked up the phone and called someone else to make it happen. If my mother wanted something to happen, she called Eva or Ferdie or Alice from the other room and instructed them to make it happen. My parents didn't dirty their

hands with a project, even when that project called them mother and father. They had people for that.

Being around Betty and her family stirred up a fire in my soul for something great, something monumental. At nine years old I really didn't understand what was happening to me, but I knew I was unsettled, uneasy, with my life. My family never came to visit. Letters came from Ferdie, Eva, and Grandma and Grandpa Fay, but never from Tom or Daisy. I wondered if they even knew I was gone; did they even remember me?

At six years old Thomas Jason was also sent to boarding school, and my contact with him was never consistent. We wrote to each other, and I loved him from afar, which was painful but gratifying. Again he was saving me from the deep abyss created in the absence of parental affection, something I felt but couldn't distinguish in my tumultuous being. Knowing Betty Brown had made my condition a little more apparent, but my inner denial was strong. I couldn't accept that my family was weak.

I did get to know Thomas Jason better, something that I didn't manage with my parents. On the weekends that I got to come home, I was shocked at how my baby brother was growing. Those weekends became a sort of tonic for me. Thomas Jason and I bonded secretly, forming our own partnership. We were a force, a team fighting against a reality that we didn't understand. We played games and visited the horse stable. We swam and toasted ourselves in the sun. We stayed away from the house for as long as Eva would allow, and then we would sneak in through the kitchen to avoid Tom's steely eyes condemning our tracks across the Persian rugs. When we could convince Alice to allow it, we would eat our dinner in the kitchen away from the stifling dining room. Sometimes she would let us have two desserts, and even play a hand of cards with us after she

cleared away the dishes. Those nights reminded me of weekends at the Brown household, and sadness would sweep over me like the shadow of a rogue cloud on a bright summer day. Alice was both a life-giving rain shower and a soul-killing drought, having no knowledge of my inner turmoil.

As soon as we were old enough to sneak away from Eva's watchful eye, we would commandeer one of Tom's sailboats and linger on the water for hours away from the cares and stresses of Daisy and Tom. I was almost ten, and T. J. was seven. Neither of us could have fought a fearsome storm in that sailboat, but the calm of the water beckoned us away from the storm in the house. As we drifted on the waves, Thomas Jason talked about his dreams of the future. He had big dreams for such a little boy, and his eyes lit up like a beacon when he talked. My heart melted as I began to understand that he longed for the same things that I was missing: love, affection, guidance, and a sense of belonging. He believed that things could be golden, almost perfect, if a person's heart were sincere, and no one had a more sincere heart than little Thomas Jason.

Neither of us really had a clue what love was, except for the love we felt for each other. For some reason it had to be secret; no one knew about the time we spent together. I think it was because we really shared no bond with our parents. A void existed that we desperately wanted to fill, but no connection can be made between people if both sides are not agreeable. Of course there was the stark realization that we would be in dire trouble if the great Tom Buchanan realized we had taken one of his sailboats, but the possibility that he would grant us his attention for long enough to make the discovery was slim. Tom and Daisy were oblivious to us most of the time. We could have gone anywhere, and they wouldn't have noticed.

I was tired of calling the boy Thomas Jason, and I didn't want to honor my father by calling my sweet brother by his father's name, either. They were so different. My father spent his free time involved in sports of some kind. My brother got lost in his own daydreams. My father was concerned with the stock market and capital gains. My brother wanted to sail the ocean and explore new places. They really seemed to share nothing but a name, and I refused to partake in that partnership, so I started calling him T. J. To his credit, Tom made an effort to form a connection with T. J., a foreign concept for Daisy. Unfortunately, it was misguided. He expected Thomas to be a brute athlete, and T. J. was anything but that. T. J. was a dreamer, a visionary. Where Tom wanted to rise above those around him as superior, T. J. wanted to experience love, happiness, peace—and then share that sweet milk of God with everyone around him. He believed in the possibility of hope, and he lacked the competitive spirit that Tom displayed so boldly.

My brother's hopeful spirit wafted after me, and my world blossomed in a way that was unexpected. I made friends at school, true friends who really knew nothing of my family. They were my friends because they valued me—not my father's money. It felt like something akin to the love that T. J. and I sought, and it was transcendent. I don't know that Thomas Jason found the same love and acceptance at boarding school that I did; he never mentioned it, but he never seemed to lose his belief in people and the potential for wondrous happiness. Time spent with T. J. was a balm for my wounded soul, and anything that Tom or Daisy said, or didn't say, to me was healed by my brother's spirit.

Thomas Jason was not the only healing spirit in my life. Betty Brown brought joy and laughter to a little girl who had known none. Eva and Ferdie continued to fill a role

that should have been filled by blood. I began to understand that they loved me, but I couldn't understand why. My own parents were oblivious to my presence, so the idea that the hired help would have any concern for me beyond the idea that I might provide a source of income was inconceivable. As an adult looking back I know that Eva and Ferdie are what kept us alive; they protected us, sadly, from our parents—and ourselves.

Eva tried to explain her love for me, and it was all mixed up with faith. Her ramblings reminded me of T. J. floating on the waves, talking of peace and joy. When I listened to my brother muse about love and the future, it was metaphysical, supernatural. When Eva talked about the same ideas, it seemed foolish—like just something a woman would say. How could she really believe in something she couldn't see? I couldn't justify my views—the way I saw her and T. J. so differently—but I felt right. I felt logical. I felt safe.

On the rare weekends when Eva would venture to take us to church, I noticed the rising smoke and crumbling buildings of the valley of ashes. My focus, however, was not on the urban ruin but on the mystery of the overseeing eyes. I felt I had seen those eyes peering into my soul many times before I ever saw the faded billboard that shadowed our path. Dr. T. J. Eckleberg never blinked as he watched Ferdie drive us through the valley. Was that how God saw me trying to get through the ruin of my parents' marriage, never blinking and all-knowing? Was God real, or was he just a creation of the mind of man—a fake like Dr. T. J. Eckleberg's eyes? I had no real knowledge of God. I know now that faith is something that is generally taught by a father, but my father's faith rested in the Almighty Dollar. I have no clue where my mother's faith rested, or if she had any faith at all. Ferdie drove us to church, T. J. and me, while Eva tried to show us faith—faith that

was just out of my reach. T. J. seemed to understand faith. Faith fed right into his dreams, his idea that life can be golden. It reinforced his daydreams of the future.

Certain moments in my life encouraged faith, but those moments were fragile and temporary. One such moment, the summer of 1929, was a blur. I went to stay with Betty for two weeks—two weeks that were like heaven on earth for me. My heart felt so light when I was with her family, and the cares of home were far from me. I could believe in God when I was with Betty and her family. They gave me a glimpse of hope that was elusive in my own home. What Thomas Jason was doing while I was away did not really cross my mind. We were nine years old, me and Betty, and we were enjoying our childhood without all the cumbersome cares that weighed me down when I was in the Buchanan home.

When I did come home, I discovered that my father had taken to drinking more heavily, and I also realized that he and T. J. were at odds. Thomas Jason was only six, but there was a real tension between the two that was tangible. Tom was grasping the fact that they weren't a lot alike, and he couldn't accept it. Their differences were like a personal affront to him. T. J. meant nothing harmful toward Tom. He was a child. He didn't have the capability to be cruel like his father, yet he was perceived as disobedient because he didn't take to his father's pastimes with joy and interest. The summer had been pure joy for me, and at the same time, pure pain for T. J.

The moment I walked into the house, I heard a commotion. Ferdie had driven me from the train station, so he came in behind me with my bags. I could hear T. J. crying and Daisy pleading with Tom to "leave him alone." Eva was pacing outside the rose-colored drawing room, and as I peered inside, I saw the billowy curtains drift in and out

with the breeze from the ocean. T. J. was standing in the center of the room, looking down as his tears made deep red stains on the wine-colored rug. Daisy also had tears in her eyes, but she was staring at the elaborately frosted, wedding-cake ceiling. My arrival seemed to cause time to stand still; for some odd reason, they noticed me. My father turned to face out the window toward the waves of the ocean.

I rushed to the center of the room to comfort my little brother. Ferdie stood in the doorway, still holding my bags. It was then that I noticed Eva had been crying as well. “Thomas Jay, what is wrong?” I quavered. He looked up at me, and I saw the handprint across his tiny, pale cheek and the fear in his green eyes—the eyes that before had always gleamed with hope.

Before I could react, Tom wheeled around with anger that showed in the whites of his eyes, the red of his cheeks. “Don’t call him that!” he roared. He advanced toward me with his hand outstretched, and there was Ferdie. He stood between us; Eva came in behind me, pulling T. J. and me from the room. I struggled to stay, to hear what happened next, but Eva was so much stronger and more determined than I had ever known her to be. I could hear Ferdie’s deep, calm voice, but the words were unintelligible. We went out the back kitchen door and somehow ended up by the pool. She scooped water from the pool and washed little T. J.’s red face. I opened my mouth to ask questions, but realized that I would only prolong his confusion and pain. He had no more comprehension about the past few moments in his life than I did. We were in a dark abyss, and Eva was our lifeline.

When things were quiet in the house, Eva snuck us back in and up the staircase to my room. As I walked in, I saw my bags on the bed and Ferdie sitting quietly beside

them. I ran over and was enveloped in a warm embrace that made some of the darkness dissipate. T. J. crawled up onto Ferdie's knee, and he began telling us a story about Br'er Rabbit, Br'er Fox, Br'er Bear and a bull. He had told us stories like this before, and they always made Thomas Jason laugh.

Eva returned to the room with a large suitcase. I watched as she moved across my room to the dresser and starting pulling drawers open. In a matter of moments, she had packed another bag and, giving Ferdie a quick glance, she stealthily made her way back downstairs. I looked back at T. J. as he stared up at Ferdie; the redness on his cheek was lighter, but I could see the outline of a large hand that reached from his small, pink lips to the blond curls that covered his ear.

When the story ended, Ferdie smiled at us and grabbed my bags from the bed. Eva came back in with a huge picnic basket and a bigger smile. She smuggled us back down stairs, through the kitchen, past the pool, and into the garage. My mother Daisy was already seated in the front seat of the car, and she turned to smile at us as we climbed in back. Her face was luminous and bright, with not a scar from the recent battle I had interrupted. Ferdie slid into the driver's seat, and Eva climbed in back with us.

We sped from the house like escaped convicts, but no one discussed where we were going or why. We were gone, without a word, like ghosts. When the house was well out of sight, Ferdie pulled the car over in a public beach area. How strange it was to walk the beach with other people; I was so accustomed to having the beach as a playground in my own yard that I never considered other people venturing out to the ocean side. Eva spread out a blanket, and we had a picnic. Daisy laughed and joked like this was a normal summer activity for us as a family, but the feeling was all too unfamiliar. I could still see

Tom's fingertips on T. J.'s cheek, and a small trickle of blood was coming from his ear that wasn't there before.

I turned my attention to the food because I couldn't bear to see the obvious. Eva had packed a meal for a royal family in all of five minutes, but I knew Alice was her accomplice: there were ten desserts in the basket. Hunger is a strange beast that lies dormant in wartime and resurfaces in peacetime. In a matter of minutes the picnic basket was liberated and lightened. We were all comforted superficially by Alice's culinary expertise. Eva packed up, and Thomas Jason and I headed to the water. There was something rejuvenating about my toes sinking into the sand, water rushing up to meet me. We splashed and giggled until Eva approached with towels. How she packed so much in such a short period of time

Then we were back on the road. I expected to head back toward the house, but we kept going. We headed through the valley of ashes with the eyes of God following. For hours we traveled, stopping to stretch our legs at intervals. Ferdie found a small restaurant run by farm folks around dinnertime; the picnic had long since become a memory. Sometime between dinner and sunrise the next morning I felt Ferdie's strong arms carry me to a soft bed in a dark place, and I drifted away.

Rising in an unfamiliar place is startling, but Eva woke me with a tray. There were biscuits, jams and jellies, grits, eggs, and bacon. I began to wonder if Eva had somehow packed Alice in the trunk of that car, but Alice had never served us grits. After I ate and dressed, she took me downstairs to meet my grandparents. Oh, I knew them from their letters, but I hadn't seen them since I was a baby, and I had no real memory of them. They hugged me and talked to me like I was the most important person in the

world. Their treatment of Thomas Jason was no different, except for the fact that they had never seen him, so he did get a little extra attention in the beginning. We had unexpectedly found home.

After three days Ferdie and Eva packed up the car, and we watched as our mother rode away with them back to the Nordic male domination of East Egg. We spent the rest of the summer with Grandpa and Grandma Fay, and I felt loved, accepted, safe, at home. When September came, we packed our bags and headed back to school. Eva had sent any belongings we needed ahead from the Buchanan Estate, so we were spared the pain of going back.

Every weekend that I came home from school was tumultuous. My parents vaguely acknowledged me, at least to make sure I was fed and housed. They usually had plans, and my arrival uprooted nothing. All went on as usual. One weekend sticks out in my mind as being more volatile than others. When I arrived, Ferdie took my bags, and Eva ushered me into the kitchen for a snack much as on any other weekend, but there was a different air about the house. The servants seemed rushed and nervous. Eva had on her normal guardian angel wings, so she seemed perfectly calm. She had made me a sandwich, a hearty snack to bridge the gap until dinner was served at 6:00 P.M. After some inquiry I discovered that T. J. had not come home for the weekend. I was disappointed, but I really needed to study, so it was for the best.

Eva was cheerily updating me on all the happenings in the community when I heard Tom's booming voice in the other room: "I'll not have it, Daisy! Not in my house!!"

Daisy laughed, but it was a nervous laugh that didn't seem natural. "Whatever are you blabbering about, Tom?"

"You know what I'm talking about, Daisy! Nobody, dead or alive, is going to make love to my wife! You're just getting foolish ideas into your head again. I love you, no matter if I go off on a spree!"

"Oh, God, Tom! You are disgusting," and with that she burst through the kitchen door. "Eva, where's Ferdie? We are going somewhere. Get your hat! Come on, darling! You're coming, too." I thought I saw a tear in her eye, but she always had a twinkle hovering at the edge of her lashes that could be a tear or a laugh at the drop of a hat. Daisy was an utter mystery every day of my life.

She walked out the back and headed to the car without delay. Tom pushed through behind her, but when he saw Ferdie approach the door with keys in hand, he mysteriously turned the other way. Ferdie was still a rock, immovable and stoic. I slid in beside my mother, and then I saw the tears. They were silent and profuse. She made no attempt to dry her eyes or blot her cheeks, and with that I began to see into my mother's soul. I still didn't know what I was seeing, but I was seeing, and it was oh so dark.

She never said where we were going, but Ferdie seemed to know. We dusted through the valley of ashes, leaving a cloud of smoke behind us. The cloud almost obscured Dr. T. J. Eckleburg from view, but the eyes of God still watched as we sped toward something that Daisy must have seen as redemption. As we pulled into the churchyard, I saw Eva's pale face. The hope was gone, but I didn't know why. I'm not sure Eva knew why. Sometimes hope just evaporates, like life. We are all just a vapor, and hope is even more fragile than we are.

Before Ferdie had the car completely stopped, Daisy was opening the door. He moved as quickly as possible to assist her as she hurriedly made her way to the church. She was so eager to get there, and then once we were inside, she simply sat. Eva asked if she wanted to make confession, but she never replied. She never took her eyes off the crucifix at the front of the sanctuary. She sat for hours, and so did we. We were her soldiers, bearing up the burden so she didn't have to bear it alone. Then suddenly she rose and walked to the front of the church. She turned to the confessional, leaving us in the midst of confusion. After a short time she returned, and the priest sained her and offered her the Holy Eucharist. She then turned and did something that I will never forget: she hugged me. It was quick, but the feeling was there. She took my hand and pulled me with her as she lit three candles as a vigil. I couldn't help myself; I asked, "What are you doing, Mother?"

She didn't take her eyes away from the flames as she said, "Pretending." Candles. . . . I don't ever remember Daisy lighting another candle. She always put them out. She complained about them. She would put them in drawers or the garbage can, but that day she lit three and said a prayer.

One day as she snuffed out candles that Alice had lit for the dinner table I asked, "Mother, why don't you like candles?"

Her eyes clouded as she thought. "Candles serve no purpose, Precious. They just burn—smoke—melt. People light them to change something, to cover up something, to pretend, but they do nothing. They burn." The mystery of my mother continued to get deeper and darker the closer I looked.

I continued to come home weekends, but Thomas Jason came home much less frequently. I had an idea that he didn't feel safe around our father, and he had reason for his uneasiness. I didn't feel safe, but Ferdie was always my rock and Eva was always my angel, so I kept coming home for Daisy. I didn't think she had anyone to be those things for her.

Our trips through the valley of ashes, the valley of death, became more frequent as the tension in my home increased. Every weekend I came home to find Daisy wafting through the halls of the incredible estate with a cigarette in her lips and a drink in her hand. When my father entered the house he was loud and domineering. Finding the nearest exit was a talent I quickly developed, and Eva was my teacher. She had been doing it for years. Oftentimes that exit led to the garage and a trip to the church. Sometimes I managed to take Mother with me, but she never lit another candle. I asked her about it once, and she said that she was no longer pretending.

Chapter 5

In October of 1929, when I was really settling into my studies and the leaves were changing, my life was turned upside down. Betty and I were struggling over math problems, stretched out on a blanket in the grass, when Sister Mary approached. She seemed distressed, which was really unusual for her. Of all the Sisters, she was always the one who seemed most genuine, most in touch with God. She rarely showed any negative emotion, but this day was different. "Betty, dear," she began, "your mother is on the telephone, and she says she must speak with you regarding a matter of utmost importance." Her voice quivered, which sent a chill through me.

As Betty ran for the convent, I gathered up our books and blanket, taking them back to the room. I didn't see Betty again until dinner, and she had been crying. It was so unusual to see her unhappy, so I didn't ask any questions. I knew she would tell me—we told each other everything now. We were sisters. She knew all about the hell in my home; she knew about my trips through the valley of death almost every weekend; she knew that my mother never spoke my name. She would tell me.

That night after lights out, as we lay silently in our beds, Betty started talking. She talked for a long time about things I didn't really understand, and she didn't either, but she talked. She said something about the bank, the stock market—some business her father had helped get started—and money. There was none. Not anymore. She was leaving after this week. She didn't know if she would be able to continue school. "It's happening," she whispered.

"What's happening, Betty?" I really didn't know what she meant.

"I'm becoming poor. Like my grandmother was—I'll end up hanging tobacco leaves in a barn somewhere. It doesn't make sense, Pammy. I'm not a poor girl." I couldn't see Betty's face, but I knew she was crying again. I crawled into bed beside her and wrapped my arms around her; that is what I would want someone to do for me.

The next three days were abysmal. Betty stopped doing her homework. She stared into space during class. When I asked her about it, she said, "Why does it matter? I'm leaving. My grades don't matter anymore." She packed a little every day, and some of the girls made her cards as going away presents. I learned the next week that we lost 23 girls with the Stock Market Crash. I didn't even know what the Stock Market was, but I knew

what a crash was. I witnessed them often at my house. I understood my house about as clearly as I did the Stock Market.

Watching Betty ride away from school in a car with her family was a deathblow for me. I had other friends at school, but no one like Betty. She inspired me, loved me, and understood me. She was worth all my other friends put together. I wanted to ride off with her and learn how to hang tobacco leaves like her grandmother. I wanted to be a thinker, a doer, like the entire Brown family. My family wrecked things, caused crashes like the Stock Market.

When Ferdie picked me up at the train station that weekend, things felt different. There was not a large crowd in the station like there had been before. It was quiet, eerie. I could hear the trains grinding to a stop and the air releasing from brakes, but the people had ceased their normal conversations. They moved with no sound, their heads turned toward the ground. I had seen this before, but my mind couldn't place the scene as yet. Ferdie was moving my bags, but I lingered behind, trying to recall where I had seen people like these, who seemed to have no direction. The eyes of Dr. T. J. Eckleberg flashed through my mind, and then I saw it. This was now the valley of ashes. The sights were different, and the people were different, but their demeanor was the same. They had lost hope.

Walking through the front door of my house was the same as almost every other weekend. Mother was sitting with a drink in her hand and a cigarette perched on her lips. She was dressed like she was attending a party instead of lounging at home, but she always dressed for an affair. Ferdie took my bags to my room, and I sat down beside my

mother. I hadn't really attempted to have a discussion with her since we talked about candles. She wasn't really a conversationalist, at least not with her children.

I slid closer to her and said, "Hi." She smiled a coy smile at me and blew smoke in my direction. I could smell her elegant cologne and hear the tinkle of her bracelets as she moved closer to me.

"Hello, darling." Her voice was low and quiet, commanding my attention for fear that it would blow away with the breeze toward the ocean. She waited with some expectation, puzzling because we rarely talked, but I grasped the opportunity.

"Mother," I couldn't tell her. How could I? She really knew nothing of my life. She was a distant observer, and I wasn't even sure she observed. I went on, "Betty's gone."

She looked up with surprise. "Who? Does she work in the kitchen?"

"Betty, Mother. My roommate at school." This conversation wasn't going well, but I had to try. "Her parents came and took her home."

"Who again, darling?"

I closed my eyes. I had to do this. I needed her. "Betty Brown. She and I have roomed together since I was six. Her grandmother was on the Titanic!" By this time I was crying.

That seemed to get her attention. "Oh. Is her mother an Astor?"

"No, Mother. Her grandmother is Margaret Brown. She survived, and she made the lifeboats go back and look for more survivors. They wrote about her in the paper," I ached as I tried to convey my misery to Daisy. "She was the first woman to run for the U.S. Congress in 1914!" Tears were streaming down my face now.

“Hmm. Never heard of her. She must be a fool to think that a woman could be a congressman.” She turned her attention toward me for a moment, wrinkled up her nose and said, “Oh, stop blubbering! It makes your face all puffy. A beautiful little fool gets nowhere in life with puffy eyes. Go ask Alice what she is making for dinner, would you dear?” And that was the end of our talk. My life was falling apart, and my mother wanted to know what was for dinner.

I left my mother to find the answer to her question, and as I made my way down the hall I overheard my father on the phone with some business contact. He was yelling. “I don’t care who you have to talk to. I want my money. I’ve never lost money before, and I don’t intend to start losing now.” There was a brief pause on the other end of the line. “Wolfsheim lost no money! He never loses money! Why do you think I pay you? Fix this!” He slammed the phone down and stormed out to check on his precious ponies.

At dinner that night—pheasant under glass—I listened as my father ranted about the idiocy of his employees, how they had caused his losses. He was unaware of those around him who had lost everything. His losses were miniscule, but he spoke as if his entire kingdom had been burned to the ground. “You watch,” he said to Mother and me. “I know how to run things. I’ll rise from these ashes like the Phoenix. That’s what Aryans do. We are the superior race, and we won’t go down.” Mother giggled as she snuffed out Alice’s candles and picked at the pheasant on her plate. “Daisy, you think this is funny? That bird on your plate didn’t fly in through the kitchen window, you know!” Tom was still in a fury, but that visual sent Daisy and me reeling. She laughed out loud, and I couldn’t suppress my giggles. She looked at me for the first time with a real connection, and then we really started laughing.

Mother looked over at me and said quietly, “We have to beat them down.” Her smile was sly and cunning, and I wanted to be a part of the inner workings of her mind. I began to see that though she professed that women should be fools, she was no fool at all. She was simply playing a part, caught in a web of dominion that she couldn’t escape.

My father was none the wiser, and he continued his speech. We continued to eat, because whether the bird flew in through the window or arrived on the back step with the grocery delivery boy, Alice had roasted him up quite nicely. We also had carrots and potatoes—Father made no comment about whether they “flew in through the kitchen window.” He was saying, “These nobodies from nowhere are the only ones who really lost, and it’s only fitting since their wealth is ill-gotten gain.” That part bothered me because it made me think of Betty. Her parents and grandparents started out as what my parents would call “nobodies,” although their wealth was hard earned. My mood was dampened, but the following comment is what ruined dinner: “It’s like that ‘Old Sport’ Gatsby. They got what they deserved.” Tom closed his mouth and returned to his pheasant, but Daisy calmly put down her fork. Something snapped; I saw it. The laughter was gone—the cunning remained. Something changed, and I had no idea about the crash that was coming.

Chapter 6

Returning to school without Betty was depressing, but all my life was depressing except for the few moments I spent with my brother. He had taken to staying on campus for weekends, so I hadn’t seen him since the end of summer. Due to the loss of students,

the Sisters moved us around and closed off some of the rooms. I was assigned a new roommate whose name was Dorothy. The other girls called her Dot. She didn't giggle like Betty, and she didn't think I was funny. We had classes together, but she didn't study with other people. She preferred to be alone. I no longer had a refuge at school; I was alone everywhere I went.

Over the next three years I gained a tentative grasp on faith, but it was shaky and uncertain. I had to grasp onto something. I never really had my parents, and after Betty left, I was alone in the world. Thomas Jason never came home anymore; his letters uplifted me, however absent he was, but I needed more. Both Ferdie and Eva seemed to accept impossibilities as possible through God, but I was still a disappointed child at heart who longed for her mother's love and her father's guidance. I couldn't see possible where I had only seen impossible. It was 1932.

At this low point in my life I received another blow. Sister Mary found me studying on a blanket where Betty and I used to do math. She had that same nervous demeanor she had had before when Betty was ripped away from me. I was 13 now: I couldn't believe Betty had been gone three years. I took my time gathering my belongings: why should I rush to destruction? I followed her into the convent where the phone waited. "Hello?"

Ferdie was on the other end of the line. "Pammy, baby? I'm going to come get you. Your grandmother has passed away." I dropped the phone. I thought I was ready to handle whatever happened. I wasn't ready for this. Thomas Jason and I had spent precious little time with our grandparents, but their house was the one place where we felt

at home. I never had my parents, I lost Betty, I never saw Thomas Jason, and now I lost my home.

I slowly trudged back to my room and went to bed. I heard Dorothy come in and get ready for dinner, but she never spoke to me. I missed Betty so much; she would have just known that I needed her. She would have helped me, comforted me. Again I was alone.

The following morning Ferdie and Eva arrived. Ferdie handled the paperwork with the nuns while Eva came in and got me out of bed. She packed and somehow forced me to perform the necessary toiletries to leave campus. I don't recall much from that day. We left my school and headed to get T. J. He was ready when we arrived, and his hugs renewed vitality that I thought would never return. On the drive home, T. J. put his head in my lap and fell asleep, and the distance between us vanished. I must have fallen asleep as well, because when we pulled into the garage at the Buchanan Estate the bump of the car jolted me awake.

We went inside, and Alice had dinner for us in the kitchen, complete with two desserts each. We didn't unload the car; Ferdie said we were leaving again in the morning. I didn't see my mother that night, but as I lay in bed trying to sleep, I heard her moaning. She cried through the night, and Tom ranted. I couldn't hear everything that he said. In the morning Daisy came to breakfast wearing sun cheaters. Her hair was tied in a scarf. She had a cup of coffee, silently stirring more than drinking. I never saw my father.

After breakfast we loaded up the car and made the long journey to Kentucky. We stopped at no beach, had no picnic basket. The last trip was a result of a tragic event, but we were headed to redemption. There awaited no comfort at this end of this trek.

Grandpa Fay met us when we arrived, and he silently carried our bags into the guestrooms that had been prepared for us. His hugs were touched by a deep sadness that was palpable. Mother never removed her glasses, yet tears escaped silently down her cheeks. She had spoken nothing since I arrived home the night before, and she spoke nothing to her father. She was devoid of whatever it was that moved her. Some unseen force was carrying her, and I expected her to fall at any moment.

That afternoon Mother left with Grandpa to make arrangements, and Ferdie, Eva, T. J. and I roamed around the family estate. Grandpa had more land holdings than Father did, and we could have spent days just surveying the land. We petted baby calves and collected eggs from the chicken pen.

When we came inside, Eva found a scrapbook with pictures of Mother from when she was younger. That is the first time I really saw Gatsby—the man in the pink suit—the man my father had insulted the night of the pheasant dinner. He was wearing an army uniform, and there were other soldiers, but it was he. I know because my mother, Daisy, had written his name under his picture. He was such a handsome man, and the way he looked at Daisy in the picture made my heart ache. Seeing him in the scrapbook was not a real surprise, but there was something about him that I just couldn't identify—something familiar.

When Grandpa came home that evening, he smiled a little. Mother had taken off her sun cheaters, and I could see the redness of her eyes. She also had bruising around her left eye. I wanted to ask her, but I didn't have to. I had lived in the Buchanan household long enough.

Some family I had never met came in and cooked. We had fried chicken and biscuits for dinner. They didn't comment on Mother's eye; there was an unspoken understanding that it wasn't their business. They had also done some cleaning to prepare for guests. I'd never been around death before, and everything was new. I didn't know what to do or say. I didn't know what to expect. It was solemn, watching people show up to remember my grandmother. Most of them knew her much more completely than I did, and I listened intently to their stories. She wasn't out fighting for suffrage or running for congress like Betty's grandmother, but she was a force that no man could dominate. I wondered how Daisy had come from such stock, since she cowered under my father's iron fist.

After dinner Grandpa looked through the scrapbook with us and talked about Grandma. Memories have a way of healing pain, and the night became a balm for the soul. We even laughed, a kind of laughter I'd only heard from Mother once, the night we ate pheasant under glass that flew in through the kitchen window.

As Grandpa flipped through the pages of the scrapbook, he paused at the picture of the soldiers I had seen before. A pensive look came over his face, and he looked up at Mother. Then his eyes drifted over to T. J. Grandpa's eyes widened, and his jaw became slack. "Daisy?" Mother didn't respond, but she turned the page of the scrapbook before Grandpa could say anything else.

The following day more family poured in, and I got to meet Cousin Nick. I vaguely remembered him from the day Daisy introduced me to the man in the pink suit, but that was ten years ago. I didn't know him. He was nice and calm, like Grandpa, nothing like my father Tom.

More and more family came in, and the wake was unlike anything I had experienced. My grandmother looked so different lying in that casket. Aunts and cousins came by, looking at her and talking about how good she looked, how natural. I guess my mother wasn't the only one who was skilled at lying. Maybe it ran in the family, like blond hair or brown eyes.

Thomas Jason avoided everyone and everything. I kept looking for him, but he never came into the room. I finally found him out in the barn, and he was looking through the scrapbook. He had gone farther back and was looking at pictures I had not seen before—pictures that looked like me. There was a single tear rolling down his cheek, and he looked at me with questioning eyes. “What’s wrong, T. J.?” I asked.

With wonder in his eyes he said, “None of these kids look like me, Pam.”

“Thomas Jason, maybe you look like Father.” I tried to console him, but I doubted my own words as I spoke them. Nothing about T. J. reminded me of Tom.

Time was passing quickly, and the barn was getting dark. I convinced him to come inside. Most of the family had left, and Grandpa was sitting in the dark beside the casket. He called Thomas Jason over to sit in his lap, and they looked at the scrapbook together. I watched over Grandpa’s shoulder, and when he came to the picture of the soldiers he paused to look at Thomas Jason. T. J. didn’t see it, but I did: the recognition in Grandpa’s eyes.

The next morning was cloudy, and after breakfast we all walked to the church under the cover of umbrellas. There was a slow drizzle that fit perfectly with saying goodbye. The church was crowded with people who felt that my grandmother was a monument. I listened to the pastor discuss faith and the afterlife, a possibility of seeing

Grandma again. Then we walked to the graveyard, a final resting place. Somehow I didn't feel that Grandma was resting. She was too cold to be resting. My grandma was gone.

As we walked, Cousin Nick came up beside Mother and took her hand. It was the first time I had seen them together. Thomas Jason was on the other side of Mother. We got to the grave before the pallbearers, so Nick leaned over to introduce himself to T. J. His smile changed almost instantly, and he looked at Daisy. There was no mistake; the same recognition I had seen in Grandpa's eyes existed in Nick's. Daisy donned her sun cheaters and shushed us as the casket approached.

After the service I caught Mother and Nick arguing on the back porch. Nick seemed more concerned than angry, not like Father when he argues with Mother. Daisy was saying, "It's not your concern, Nicky. Tom doesn't know. You have nothing to worry about."

"Daisy, I know Tom. I saw him break a woman's nose once just for saying your name. You aren't safe. Don't go back home. Stay here with your father. He could use your help. I've watched you be careless before. This is different. These are your kids, Daisy. You have to protect them," Nick pleaded.

"Pammy is smart. She can play the fool, just like I have. Thomas Jason is rarely home, and Tom is a dumb brute. He won't figure it out," Daisy said as she turned toward the night sky and took a drag from her cigarette.

"Oh, Daisy. I can't watch this. You have to come home. Don't take the risk that Tom will find out. Who knows what he could do?" Nick was pleading with Mother, and guilt washed over me, but I couldn't stop listening.

Mother's demeanor changed. "Whatever do you mean? I haven't a clue why you're rambling on so! . . . Wait! I know what this is. I've seen it before. Are you in love with me, Nicky?" Daisy started giggling in that frivolous way she did when she was avoiding something, hiding something. She was pretending again.

Chapter 7

The ride back to the Buchanan Estate was uneventful. My mind was filled with questions, but I couldn't ask them in front of anyone, especially T. J. I didn't know if I would ever ask them, or if they even mattered, but the mystery scared me. I'd seen my father angry, heard him raise his voice, and although I didn't see him do it, I saw his handprint across my little brother's face. What had driven him to break a woman's nose? Who was the woman? Why was Cousin Nick afraid? What did he think would happen? Why had my father not attended my grandmother's funeral? And why was he so angry when I called my brother Thomas Jay?

I didn't ask the questions. The time was never right; I never had my mother to myself. T. J. and I both went back to school, and things continued on as they had before. Thomas Jason started coming home more often on the weekends, and we started sailing again. Father was tied up with business, trying to make back what he lost in the Stock Market Crash. He noticed us even less than before.

By the spring of 1937, I'd forgotten about cousin Nick's pleading with Mother to leave my father. I was 17 years old, thinking about my own future and tired of thinking about my parents' past. T. J. was 14. I didn't expect any past problems to resurface; I'd

been told that we can't relive the past, but I'm not so sure that is true anymore. All the old questions resurfaced.

T. J. and I had been out sailing that weekend, and when we came into shore, Father was waiting for us. All the years we had been taking the sailboat with no notice, but this day was different. I didn't know why he was waiting for us, but there he was. Before T. J. could get the boat tied off, Father started beating him and yelling. We ran toward the house, and he was close behind. He was so loud that Mother and Eva met us at the door. Father pushed past them both as they tried to bar him from coming after T. J. The fury he exhibited surpassed all logic. This couldn't be about a boat. The more Father yelled, the more I realized that this wasn't about a boat.

T. J.'s school had sent home reports, and Father now knew what I had always known. Thomas Jason Buchanan was not going to play football like the Great Tom Buchanan. Father had signed him up, and T. J. had dropped the course in favor of an art class. As always, T. J. was dreaming, not playing sports. Father was yelling something about being a man, not a nobody. This time T. J. yelled back. I'd never heard him raise his voice, but he wasn't backing down. "I'm not a nobody! Just because I am not a hulking maniac like you . . ." T. J. was panting.

Tom was fuming now, veins bursting from his neck. "Well, you're no son of mine! How could you be? You don't even look like me!" Father spat the words with venom as Daisy came in between him and T. J. "You look like him. You act like him."

Just as fear began to overtake me, Ferdie stepped into the room. Tom lunged past Daisy toward T. J., and Ferdie stepped into Father's path. Daisy calmly said, "Tom, leave him alone."

The fury in his voice was clear: “I’ll discipline my boy as I see fit.”

Then it happened again—the snap. It happened just like the night we had pheasant under glass. My mother’s eyes glowed like molten lava as she rose up on her toes to meet Tom practically eye to eye. “He’s not your boy!” she said through gritted teeth, and then she spat in his face.

Ferdie wasn’t fast enough this time, and Father knocked her to the ground. With a deft hand, Ferdie grasped Father around the neck and pushed him against the wall. “You don’t touch Mrs. Daisy,” he growled lowly. His words were meant only for my father, but we all heard.

“This is none of your concern. Mind your station,” Father said as he pulled away from Ferdie’s grip. With a last glare at my mother who was still sprawled on the floor he stormed from the room, slamming doors as he went. We could hear the roar of the engine as he sped away in his coupé, probably to “go off on a spree.”

Ferdie wasted no time in picking Mother up from the floor. Eva was already hustling T. J. up the stairs. Ferdie carried her bruised body all the way up the stairs to her room where Eva helped her freshen up and recuperate. Ferdie and Eva encircled Mother, and there was an unmistakable presence of secrecy that led me to believe something drastic would happen now.

I left them to their conspiring and went to find T. J. He was pacing the floor in his room. Angry tears were streaming down his face when he saw me. “I don’t understand, Pammy! What have I done? He is always so angry. What does he want from me?” Then the look of anger changed to one of shock. “And what was Mother talking about? I’m not his boy.” He shook his head from side to side as he paced the floor. All those questions

from the past, from Grandma's funeral, were coming up again. I couldn't answer them. Only Daisy could answer those questions, and I didn't know if she would.

Suddenly Eva and Ferdie were in the room with us, and Eva was rummaging through T. J.'s dresser drawers. Ferdie sat on the bed and motioned for us to join him. I sat in the floor and looked up into those blue eyes that had been so steadfast for me all these years. T. J. sat on the bed, and I could see the green light of hope in his eyes. We listened intently as Ferdie explained the plan: T. J. was going to live with Grandpa Fay. He could help out around the house and attend a local school. It was the same school our mother had attended. When the time was right, he could contact his Mother and ask whatever questions he wanted to ask. Ferdie and Eva couldn't answer them. I was to return to the boarding school I already attended. It would be easier that way.

T. J.'s departure was swift. They left in the dead of night to avoid another encounter with Father. Ferdie drove him straight through without stopping so that he could return quickly. I could see the concern in his eyes; he was worried for Daisy. Eva called ahead to tell my grandfather that they were on the way. I could hear his voice on the other end of the line, and he was more than concerned for T. J., but also for me and Mother. He had ignored the bruises Mother had when we attended Grandma's funeral, but he had seen them. This development was not unexpected for him.

I didn't know it, but Mother had also called cousin Nick. Despite the fact that they were people of completely different character, Nick and Mother had a connection. They had spent a lot of time together growing up, and I believe bonds like that remain strong. Maybe she wanted him to know she was safe. Maybe she wanted him to watch out for T.

J. Maybe she wanted to tell him he was right. Whatever the reason, she called Nick, and he was there to meet T. J. and Ferdie when they arrived at Grandpa's house.

That Sunday was quiet. Father didn't return home, and Mother spent the day in bed nursing a sprained ankle. She and I talked briefly, but she didn't address any of the issues that had arisen the night before. She was back to her singsong voice and nonsensical foolishness. Alice brought our meals up on a tray, and we ate together. It wasn't the same as a family dinner around the table, but we didn't have to listen to Father discuss Nordic domination or the possibility of another Stock Market fiasco. It was quiet and pleasant. I left that afternoon to return to school, and I heard very little from the Buchanan Estate.

Chapter 8

The following summer was uneventful. Mother had taken to wandering about the house during the day in her lingerie. She was always nursing a drink or smoking a cigarette. Jordan Baker came over from time to time, and they would talk or play cards. Jordan had still not married, an idea that perplexed Daisy to no end. That in itself gave them much material for discussion.

I spent my time riding horses and pruning with the gardeners. I still loved the flowers like I did when I was a child. I helped Alice in the kitchen, which was rewarding, but it reminded me of my long lost friend Betty. In the evenings I wrote in my journal. The habit that Sister Mary had instilled in us girls kept my memory sharp and made me observant. It also caused me to reflect on things that I otherwise would have forgotten.

I had to make a conscious effort not to go back and read all my journal entries. Too many of them were dark, ominous recollections of life in the Buchanan house, and avoiding the emotions that surfaced when reading them was necessary for my sanity. So many of them made me hate my father or despise my mother's weakness. Many of them made me sorrowful over the absence of Betty, my grandmother, or my brother. My journal was better used as a tool for locking away my thoughts, not as a tool of remembrance.

Soon summer was over, and I headed back for my final year at boarding school. Since T. J. didn't come home on weekends anymore, I decided to stay at school. Ferdie, Eva, and even Alice wrote to me frequently. T. J. and Grandpa wrote me jointly, with a few notes from Nick from time to time. I immersed myself in study, and time ran swiftly by.

Nothing momentous happened that year at school. I studied. I became a better writer. I worked through some of the emotions chronicled in my journal and became a better person. That lesson that Sister Mary started when I was too young to understand was finally accomplished, and I would continue writing because it helped me to survive.

When graduation came, I received my diploma and came home. Mother threw me a party, but since the Stock Market crash nine years earlier, many people didn't feel the same way about celebrations. Attendance was low, and Mother let darkness surround her.

She started drinking more, and she started lighting candles. Nothing more unusual had I ever seen. My entire life I watched my mother blow out candles. The summer of 1938, every surface in the house had a flame, and Daisy Buchanan was striking the matches.

One day while she was lighting candles in the foyer I simply asked, “Why the candles, Mother?”

She had this wistful look in her eyes as she said, “There’s hope in the light, Precious—hope in the light.” It sounded like something she had heard at church and misconstrued. She was certainly behaving differently since that day she lit three candles as a vigil in the church. Again I was perplexed.

Another curiosity of that summer was that Father had taken up hunting and target practice. He was away even more than before. His absence did not bother me, but rather made home a slightly more peaceful place. For once I was enjoying being home. The strife seemed to be gone, and although a real sense of family did not replace it, the absence of strife was sufficient.

Mother’s wandering about the house did get a bit tedious, and she started mumbling as she wandered. At times I heard her giggle at inopportune times, which wasn’t totally out of character, but it was disconcerting. Then she started crying. Later in the day she cried more, and I finally linked it to the drink. On days when she didn’t drink as much, she didn’t cry as much, so I started trying to regulate her in some fashion. It wasn’t easy, but it was much better than dealing with her tears at night.

Something changed. I don’t know what exactly, but Father started coming home more often. Maybe he broke up with a girlfriend or the target range was closed, but whatever it was, Tom Buchanan was home. Mother’s nightly ritual of crying over a glass of wine or bourbon did not sit well with him. He griped and argued with her, and she cried more.

I locked myself away to avoid the drama of the evening, but it was not easy to ignore. As the summer wore on, the nightly warfare increased. I could no longer control my mother's consumption of alcohol because Father was right there consuming it with her. I was planning to start college in the fall, and their bickering encouraged me to find a campus that was distant and out of reach.

One hot night in August, Father came in later than usual. We had already eaten, and all the help had taken the night off. I was up in my room reading when I heard the commotion. I came out just in time to see my father slap my mother.

Reluctantly, I started down the staircase. Mother was drunk, and I couldn't leave her helpless at the hands of my brutal father. I couldn't determine the source of their argument, but I heard something about Thomas Jason that stopped me in my tracks. Was Father accusing my mother? He, who admitted to "going on a spree and acting a fool," was accusing my mother of infidelity. That's the moment that things started to make sense. Thomas Jason did not look like my father. Thomas Jason did not act like my father. Nick wanted my mother to leave my father to protect us from my father. I recalled my grandfather's look of recognition as he looked through Grandmother's scrapbook. Tom Buchanan was not Thomas Jason's father. Jay Gatsby was T. J.'s father.

I had stopped paying attention to my parents as this realization formed in my brain, and I felt a fog as I tried to refocus on the situation. Then my lungs started filling with smoke. It wasn't fog. Mother had caught one of the billowy curtains on fire with her candles. My father slapped her again, calling her a fool, and Daisy pulled out one of my father's pistols. The flaming curtain was blowing up against the wedding-cake ceiling. "And what are you gonna' do now, Daisy? Don't be ridiculous! Put that thing down so

we can put out this fire you started!” Father was reaching for the window to pull down the curtain before it ignited another. The breeze was blowing through the windows, and the fire spreading was imminent.

Daisy had snapped again, probably for the last time. She said, “Tom Buchanan, I’m through listening to you. You won’t tell me what to do anymore.” Father looked back at her just as she pulled the trigger. The look of shock on his face is etched into the stone of my memory. She walked over to where he fell to the floor and stood over him as the curtain billowed up and ignited a second curtain. She stared down at him and said with certainty, “I never loved you. It was always Jay.”

I ran to her and tried to pull her away, but she was watching the life go from my father’s eyes. She was immovable, a rock. By this time every curtain in the rosy-colored sitting room was ablaze, and I knew nothing. I ran upstairs to grab my journal, which I realized later was a foolish move.

When I came back downstairs, Mother lay on the floor very near my father. At first I thought she had shot herself because her pale pink negligee had started soaking up my father’s blood, but as I tried to revive her I became aware that the room had quickly filled with smoke. Then I fainted.

Sometime later I awoke on the lawn. I could see the entire house engulfed in flames. My journal lay beside me, and those steady blue eyes from my childhood held mine in their grasp. Mother lay beside me, and somehow she was in a different gown. The blood was gone. She was not yet awake, but I could see her chest rise and fall.

Ferdie helped me to the car, and then he went back for Mother. She was finally starting to come around, and she had that sly, cunning grin on her face that I had only

seen once before. She said, “I found a purpose for candles, Precious. They burn it all away.” I looked up to see if Ferdie had heard what she said, and I saw the pistol on the front seat. Ferdie didn’t have to hear Mother. He already knew. I looked back at the men who desperately tried to save the Buchanan Estate with a bucket brigade, but they didn’t realize the Buchanan Estate had been burning silently for years, from the inside out.

In the fall of 1938, I headed west to college away from the things that haunted me. I headed west to find my brother. I headed west to find some answers. I’d been told that nothing matters until a person is eighteen, and I was eighteen. My mother was again in a sanitarium, and my father was dead. The small window of opportunity had eluded them both, but I had learned from their mistakes. I could see straight into that window. I would run faster, stretch out my arms farther And one fine morning—

And so I pushed forward, bracing against the winds of change, defying the gravitational pull that strove to keep me in the past where lies, death, and deceit remain. I chose to have faith, to believe like my brother, that things could be golden.

Annotated Bibliography

Babb, Howard S. "The Great Gatsby and the Grotesque." *Criticism* 5.4 (1963): 336-348.

Rpt. in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*. Ed. Lawrence J. Trudeau. Vol. 311. Farmington Hills, MI: Gale, 2015. *Artemis Literary Sources*. Web. 14 July 2016.

Babb explores Fitzgerald's use of humor in relation to grotesque elements of society in the 1920s. He elaborates on many indications of violence or immorality in the novel that are tempered by Nick's perception of them or the party guests' reactions to them. Nick, the sympathetic narrator, calms the distortion in a way that makes it palatable for the reader. The story relates a world fundamentally like reality but ominous and alien to most readers. There is a level of abandon in this world that we don't condone. Nick's decision to head back west focuses the reader on his morality rather than the debauchery of Gatsby and the Buchanans.

Barrett, Laura. "From wonderland to wasteland: *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, *The Great Gatsby*, and the new American fairy tale." *Papers on Language & Literature* 42.2 (2006): 150+. *Artemis Literary Sources*. Web. 14 July 2016.

Laura Barrett examines parallels between Baum's *Wizard of Oz* and Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. She questions whether the genre of fairy tale writing is dead. Can authors really write about things they don't believe in? The American Dream is a common thread in both works of fiction, with both Nick Carraway and Dorothy Gale in search of that elusive dream. The article implies that Fitzgerald used Baum's fairytale as a model as he wrote. Barrett juxtaposes many characters from Fitzgerald's *Gatsby* with those of Baum's *Wizard* in order

to point out themes. A prominent theme in the article is that of belief. The original question about fairy tales and the death of Baum leads to a more important question: Barrett asks what happens to America when no one believes in her.

Frye, Steven. "Fitzgerald's Catholicism Revisited: The Eucharistic Element in *The Beautiful and the Damned*." *F. Scott Fitzgerald: New Perspectives*. Ed. Jackson R. Bryer, Alan Margolies, and Ruth Prigozy. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000. 63-77. Rpt. in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*. Ed. Kathy D. Darrow. Vol. 280. Detroit: Gale, 2013. *Literature Resource Center*. Web. 5 Feb. 2015.

Frye discusses the religious influence that can be seen in Fitzgerald's fiction, particularly *The Beautiful and the Damned*. He claims that Fitzgerald uses figurative language to suggest that the physical world exists simultaneously and alongside a spiritual, immaterial world. Frye explores the ways Fitzgerald uses female beauty in his novels to represent divinity. In particular, the character of Gloria in *The Beautiful and the Damned* is described as "a material manifestation of divinity," similar to the Eucharist. Physical beauty is symbolic of the mystical, and is secondary to it. For the character of Anthony Patch, experiencing beauty is synonymous with experiencing God. However, his attraction to Gloria is greatly diminished when he attains physical contact, which suggests Fitzgerald's personal spiritual dilemma. He was unable to separate the temporal from the transcendent, and he suggests through his fiction that the representation of the spiritual world through the physical world is a fragile link that is easily destroyed. According to Frye, Fitzgerald's view is tragic, showing his attraction to the temporal and his knowledge that life is short and spiritual experience is brief. Frye points out that

both Anthony Patch and Jay Gatsby entertain the dream that acquiring the beautiful woman will somehow be a euphoric, spiritual experience. Frye says that, “Fitzgerald was unable to separate his desire to apprehend a transcendent God from his desire to embrace the physical life.”

Inge, M. Thomas, and Eric Solomon. “F. Scott Fitzgerald: Overview.” *Reference Guide to American Literature*. Ed. Jim Kamp. 3rd ed. Detroit: St. James Press, 1994. *Literature Resource Center*. Web. 5 Feb. 2015.

Thomas Inge and Eric Solomon collaborate to create a work that explains F. Scott Fitzgerald’s place as an icon of the 1920s and his talent as a writer. They indicate that Fitzgerald uses autobiographical elements in many of his works. He also uses historical elements in a manner that implies prophecy about future events in history. According to Inge and Solomon, Fitzgerald showed great promise with his early works, but the American public was disappointed with later works. Inge and Solomon argue that *The Great Gatsby* shows his true talent and potential, but they suggest that his contemporaries did not realize that he would emerge as one of America’s foremost authors. The article summarizes the plots of several works, and it gives specific details about Fitzgerald’s writing style. The overview is quite thorough in all aspects except in regard to biography. There is very little information about Fitzgerald’s life.

Trudell, Scott. “Critical Essay on *This Side of Paradise*.” *Novels for Students*. Ed. Ira Mark Milne and Timothy Sisler. Vol. 20. Detroit: Gale, 2005. *Literature Resource Center*. Web. 5 Feb. 2015.

Trudell's commentary on Fitzgerald's novel *This Side of Paradise* mentions his use of Sigourney Fay, an intelligent priest with whom Fitzgerald shared a close friendship, as the foundation for building the character Monsignor Darcy. Trudell argues that Amory, the protagonist, gradually becomes distant in his relationship with Darcy, which serves as a metaphor for relations between Europe and the United States before, during, and after World War I. The devastation of the war negatively impacted Fitzgerald's generation, leading to a rejection of European politics, literary traditions, and religious beliefs. The death of Monsignor Darcy represents a rejection of previous generations and their ways, including their faith. Amory, the main character, comes to conclusions that have little basis or significance, but Trudell contends that the novel issues a sort of plea for the new or modern generation to abandon religion.

Vidal, Gore. "Scott's Case." *The New York Review of Books* 27.7 (1 May 1980): 12-20. Rpt. in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*. Ed. Sharon K. Hall. Vol. 6. Detroit: Gale Research, 1982. *Literature Resource Center*. Web. 5 Feb. 2015.

Gore Vidal claims that F. Scott Fitzgerald contributed no great value to the literary world. He states that his successes appealed to the superstitions and prejudices of the middle class during his time period, but that they serve as nothing more than a cautionary tale to readers. Vidal refers to comments by a Professor Bruccoli and Mr. James Dickey about *The Notebooks of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, but he disagrees with them about the value of these writings. Vidal states that Fitzgerald was very good at descriptions, but that these writings were useless when not connected to some action in the story. He states that some of

Fitzgerald's notebook entries are cryptic and meaningless; no humor or wit is present. Most of his entries are full of sorrow and not interesting, according to Vidal.

Voegeli, William. "Gatsby and the Pursuit of Happiness." *Claremont Review of Books* Winter 2003: 69+. *Literature Resource Center*. Web. 5 Feb. 2015.

William Voegeli explores the several thematic concepts that emerge in *The Great Gatsby*. Fitzgerald claimed that the Jazz Age generation had no interest in politics at all; they "were tired of great causes." However, Voegeli believes that *The Great Gatsby* delves into such issues as capitalism, personal freedom, the pursuit of happiness, equality, social class, morality, ideals, and democracy.

According to Voegeli, Fitzgerald's three main male characters in *Gatsby* clearly illustrate the financial differences between people that seem to be caused by a true democracy: "as the critic Ronald Berman put it, 'Nick rents, Gatsby buys, the Buchanans inherit.'" Nick's father's advice rings completely democratic and American, as he asserts that Nick should not judge other people because not all have the same advantages. The Declaration of Independence proclaims that "all men are created equal." However, in Voegeli's view, Nick's experience makes him realize that he is unable to withhold criticism as his father advised. He wants moral constraint. He does not want to see into the hearts of men. In a sense, Nick does take his father's advice about criticizing others. He judges each man independently, not against one another, but against what each has the privilege to experience.

Voegeli argues that Nick's observations focus on Gatsby as he pursues the American Dream in every aspect of his life. Voegeli notes that Alexis de Tocqueville makes the argument that democracy by nature leads man to look out for himself alone, thus isolating himself from those around him. It creates the loneliness felt by Gatsby and observed by Nick Carraway. Gatsby believes in new beginnings, even that he can change the past. An America filled with men like Gatsby would be chaos, but a world without Gatsbys would be hollow in a way. According to Voegeli, "The problem posed by Tocqueville remains: to make the world safe for a greatness like Gatsby's while keeping it safe from such a greatness."

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