

## THE GREAT GATSBY

John Harbison

**Act I.** Nick Carraway, a stockbroker who lives on West Egg, Long Island, visits old acquaintances from the Middle West, his distant cousin Daisy Buchanan and her husband, Tom, a wealthy sportsman, at their East Egg estate, across Manhasset Bay. Also present is Jordan Baker, a professional golfer and Daisy's girlhood friend, whom Daisy introduces to Nick in hopes of making a match between them. When Jordan mentions Gatsby (who lives next door to Nick), Daisy becomes flustered. Nick compliments the ladies, but Tom interrupts with his theories about civilization's decline. When the phone rings, Tom goes to answer it, followed anxiously by Daisy. Alone with Nick, Jordan reveals that Tom has a woman in New York. Daisy and Tom, somewhat ill at ease, return to the drawing room, and he takes Jordan to see his polo ponies. While they are gone, Daisy discloses to Nick that she is unhappy, because Tom mistreats her, and though she has become "sophisticated," she misses the "old, warm world" of her youth in Louisville.

Returning from the stables, Jordan reads aloud from *The Saturday Evening Post*. Nick expresses some misgivings about Eastern society, and Tom wonders who Gatsby is. The phone rings again. About halfway between West Egg and New York, the commuter train stops at a "valley of ashes." Tom drags a reluctant Nick to a nearby garage to meet Myrtle, whose husband, George Wilson, owns the place. Tom sends Wilson on an errand. Myrtle appears, and she and Tom dance to the radio. She describes her first meeting with Tom to Nick, who becomes increasingly embarrassed. Myrtle's insistence on talking about Daisy angers Tom, who hits her, bloodying her nose, then leaves.

In the early evening, Gatsby stands on his vast lawn, looking across the bay at a green light on Daisy's peer. He goes inside, and waiters, caterers, musicians and guests begin arriving for a party. Nick is among the guests; he dances with Jordan, the only person he knows at the party. They speculate about their mysterious host, then mingle separately. Nick begins talking to a man with whom he reminisces about the War; the stranger turns out to be Gatsby. About to ask Nick for a favor, Gatsby is called to the phone, and Jordan rejoins Nick. Sometime later, Gatsby comes outside again but remains apart. The party intensifies until sounds of an automobile crash disperse the crowd. In the ensuing confusion, a businessman with shady connections, Meyer Wolfshiem, appears; finding Gatsby, he tells him that their business ventures in Philadelphia and Detroit are in trouble and their debts must be paid in full. Shrugging off this unpleasant news, Gatsby sends him away. Turning to Nick, Gatsby asks his favor: could Nick arrange a meeting with Daisy? Nick leaves him alone by the dock. Gazing at Daisy's green light, Gatsby recalls their love five years ago in Louisville and confidently plans to win her back.

Nick has arranged a meeting between his neighbor and Daisy at his cottage. He and Jordan play a game of trying to name Gatsby's guests. Before departing, she tells Nick how Gatsby and Daisy fell in love, despite her parents' disapproval. While Gatsby was fighting in World War I, Daisy married Tom. Gatsby arrives, nervous and distracted, and waits for what seems an eternity to him. When Daisy's horn is heard outside, he slips away, then returns, pretending casually to have dropped by. Gatsby and Daisy remain almost silent, and Nick withdraws. Gradually, the former lovers re-establish their old feelings for each other. Standing at the window, they admire Gatsby's grand house across the lawn; he begins wildly to plan their future and invites her to tour the mansion. When Nick returns, they barely notice.

**Act II.** At another of Gatsby's parties, rumors about his past run rampant. The Buchanans arrive, and Tom is introduced to Gatsby. Gatsby dances with Daisy while a band vocalist sings. Seeing Nick, Gatsby excuses himself, leaving Daisy to dance by herself. Gatsby worries aloud to Nick that she isn't having a good time. Nick cautions him that the past cannot be repeated, and Gatsby goes into the house. Daisy asks Nick to distract her husband so that she can be alone with Gatsby, who tries to convince her that they can recapture the glow of their past relationship. Meanwhile, Nick defends his friend to a skeptical Tom, who is looking for his wife. Rumors about Gatsby's shady business continue to be heard among the guests. When Tom finds Daisy and Gatsby, he invites the latter to their house the following Sunday.

On a hot afternoon at the Buchanans', Daisy and Jordan — in white dresses — recline on chaises longues, listening to the radio, while Nick and Gatsby make nervous conversation. Daisy flirts with Gatsby, annoying her husband. When she suggests they all go into the city to escape the heat, Tom says he'll drive Gatsby's yellow car, telling the latter to take his blue coupé. Daisy decides to go with Gatsby. Tom vents his anger to Jordan and Nick.

Daisy, Gatsby, Tom, Nick and Jordan take a suite at the Plaza Hotel. Sounds from a wedding downstairs make Daisy think of her own nuptials in Louisville. When Tom begins to challenge Gatsby, Daisy turns on her husband, seeming to take his rival's part. Confronted with Gatsby's assertion that Daisy never loved him, Tom recalls the things that bind them together, forcing her to choose between them. Indecisive, Daisy longs for her simpler past. The two men try to persuade her, until she finally decides to stay with Tom. When she pleads to go home, Tom, exultant, contemptuously tells Daisy to return to Long Island with Gatsby in his yellow car, as Tom has nothing to fear. Nick suddenly remembers it is his thirtieth birthday.

That night, at Wilson's garage, Myrtle looks out the window at the road; she is lonely and longs for Tom. Her husband, suspicious and grim, works on his cars. Both feel desperately trapped in their marriage and in this place. Thinking she sees Tom, whom she saw at the garage that afternoon in a new yellow car, Myrtle rushes out. A crash is heard. Tom, Nick and Jordan, on their way back to Long Island, drive up to see what has happened and learn that Myrtle has been killed by a hit-and-run driver. Her body is brought into the garage. Tom identifies Gatsby as the owner of the yellow car. Wilson, grieving, is determined to find the driver.

Early the next morning, movers carry furniture out of Gatsby's house. Nick and Jordan arrive; as they look for Gatsby, she observes that all their dreams are over. He appears, and she leaves. When Nick accuses Gatsby of leaving the scene of the accident, he reveals that Daisy was behind the wheel of the car. After confirming his reluctant sympathy with Gatsby and his dreams, Nick departs. As Gatsby waits for Daisy to signal him with the green light, he recalls his youth and his love for her. Wilson appears and shoots Gatsby, killing him.

Nick and Jordan meet at Gatsby's house, before his funeral. Since their relationship has been neither deep nor destructive, they agree to go their separate ways without regret, and Jordan departs. Wolfsheimer drops by and looks around to assure himself that the house is "clean," leaving before the funeral. Gatsby's father arrives and introduces himself to Nick. The simple old man, awed by the splendor of the house, proudly produces his son's youthful manual of self-improvement, from which he and Nick read. Partygoers come, but finding no party, they move on, as a minister arrives to conduct a brief service, with only Nick and Gatsby's father present. After the funeral, Nick is left alone to reflect on what has happened. Daisy's green light is all that is visible.