



*Nick has been invited to  
Gatsby's party. He has never  
seen him and meets a friend  
there.*

"Do you come to these parties often?" inquired<sup>1</sup> Jordan of the girl beside her.

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

It was for Lucille, too.

"I like to come," Lucille said. "I never care what I do, so I always have a good time. When I was here last I tore my gown<sup>2</sup> on a chair, and he asked me my name and address--inside of a week I got a package from Croirier's with a new evening gown in it."

"Did you keep it?" asked Jordan.

"Sure I did. I was going to wear it to-night, but it was too big in the bust and had to be altered. It was gas blue with lavender beads<sup>3</sup>. Two hundred and sixty-five dollars."

"There's something funny about a fellow<sup>4</sup> that'll do a thing like that," said the other girl eagerly. "He doesn't want any trouble with ANYbody."

"Who doesn't?" I inquired.

"Gatsby. Somebody told me----"

The two girls and Jordan leaned together confidentially.

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<sup>1</sup> Asked

<sup>2</sup> Dress

<sup>3</sup> Pearls

<sup>4</sup> Man

"Somebody told me they thought he killed a man once."

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

"I don't think it's so much THAT," argued Lucille sceptically; "it's more that he was a German spy during the war."

One of the men nodded in confirmation.

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

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

She narrowed her eyes and shivered<sup>5</sup>. Lucille shivered. We all turned and looked around for Gatsby. It was testimony to the romantic speculation he inspired that there were whispers about him from those who found little that it was necessary to whisper about in this world.

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

We got up, and she explained that we were going to find the host: I had never met him, she said, and it was making me uneasy.

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

A stout, middle-aged man, with enormous owl-eyed spectacles, was sitting somewhat drunk on the edge of a great table, staring with unsteady concentration at the shelves of books. As we entered he wheeled<sup>6</sup> excitedly around and examined Jordan from head to foot.

"What do you think?" he demanded impetuously.

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<sup>5</sup> Frissonna

<sup>6</sup> Turned around

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

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

"The books?"

He nodded.

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

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

"See!" he cried triumphantly. "It's a bona-fide<sup>1</sup> piece of printed matter. It fooled me. This fella's a regular Belasco. It's a triumph. What thoroughness! What realism! Knew when to stop, too--didn't cut the pages<sup>2</sup>. But what do you want? What do you expect?"

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

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

Jordan looked at him alertly, cheerfully, without answering.

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

"Has it?"

"A little bit, I think. I can't tell yet. I've only been here an hour. Did I tell you about the books? They're real. They're----"

"You told us." We shook hands with him gravely and went back outdoors. We were sitting at a table with a man of about my age and a rowdy little girl, who gave way upon the slightest provocation to uncontrollable

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<sup>1</sup> Genuine

<sup>2</sup> Pages from books had to be cut to read the book. Gatsby never cut his.

laughter. I was enjoying myself now. I had taken two finger-bowls of champagne, and the scene had changed before my eyes into something significant, elemental, and profound.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"What time?"

"Any time that suits you best."

It was on the tip of my tongue to ask his name when Jordan looked around and smiled.

"Having a gay time now?" she inquired.

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

"I'm Gatsby," he said suddenly.


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

"I thought you knew, old sport<sup>3</sup>. I'm afraid I'm not a very good host."

He smiled understandingly--much more than understandingly. It was one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it, that you may come across four or five times in life. It faced--or seemed to face--the whole external world for an instant, and then concentrated on you with an irresistible prejudice in your favor. It understood you just so far as you

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<sup>3</sup> Vieux frère



wanted to be understood, believed in you as you would like to believe in yourself, and assured you that it had precisely the impression of you that, at your best, you hoped to convey. Precisely at that point it vanished--and I was looking at an elegant young rough-neck, a year or two over thirty, whose elaborate formality of speech just missed<sup>1</sup> being absurd. Some time before he introduced himself I'd got a strong impression that he was picking<sup>2</sup> his words with care.

Almost at the moment when Mr. Gatsby identified himself, a butler hurried toward him with the information that Chicago was calling him on the wire<sup>3</sup>. He excused himself with a small bow that included each of us in turn.

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

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

"Who is he?" I demanded. "Do you know?"

"He's just a man named Gatsby."

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

"Now YOU'RE started on the subject," she answered with a wan smile.

"Well, he told me once he was an Oxford man." A dim background started to take shape behind him, but at her next remark it faded away.

"However, I don't believe it."

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


Something in her tone reminded me of the other girl's "I think he killed a man," and had the effect of stimulating my curiosity. I would have accepted without question the information that Gatsby sprang from the swamps of Louisiana or from the lower East Side of New York. That was comprehensible. But young men didn't--at least in my provincial

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<sup>1</sup> More elaborateness of speech would have been absurd

<sup>2</sup> choosing

<sup>3</sup> telephone



inexperience I believed they didn't--drift coolly out of nowhere and buy a palace on Long Island Sound.

### Reading guide

- pick out information people tell about Gatsby
  - pick out information you know about Gatsby
  - pick out the impression given by Gatsby and his environment
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