

**VARIATIONS ON THE  
DEATH OF GATSBY**  
by  
**Danielle Moore**

# VARIATIONS ON THE DEATH OF GATSBY

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## VARIATIONS ON THE DEATH OF GATSBY

*For my husband, Nick,*

Without whom I never would have properly experienced  
the riotous island inhabited by these characters  
(or finished writing my first play).

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### CHARACTERS

NICK CARRAWAY, A writer-turned-banker from the Midwest.

TOM BUCHANAN, A Yale graduate and former polo player. Daisy's husband.

DAISY BUCHANAN, A flapper-turned-housewife on the Long Island sound. Tom's wife.

JORDAN BAKER, A champion golfer summering with Daisy and Tom.

JAY GATSBY, A known bootlegger famous for giving large parties at his mansion.

MYRTLE WILSON, A sultry Queens resident who is involved with Tom.

GEORGE B. WILSON, A mechanic with religious fervor. Myrtle's husband.

MEYER WOLFSHEIM, A gambler who fixed the 1919 world series.

*May be doubled with GEORGE B. WILSON and JETHRO.*

HENRY GATZ, A humble Minnesotan. Gatsby's father.

*May be doubled with JAY GATSBY.*

JETHRO, Gatsby's right hand.

ASSORTED OTHERS of the 1920s New York glitterati, who populate Gatsby's parties.

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## ACT I SCENE 1

*A sonorous crack of thunder and a flash of lightning bring up the lights on an empty stage, save for a coffin and a small podium. NICK CARRAWAY, dark circles around his eyes, approaches the podium. Pulling a small leather notebook from his jacket pocket, he begins to eulogize, to no one at all.*

**NICK.** It is with a heavy heart that I speak today on behalf of all those who had the privilege of knowing the deceased. *(He looks around self-consciously at the empty funeral.)* Even though so few of us are in attendance today. Anyone who enjoyed the warmth of his extravagant hospitality can attest to the fact that he wouldn't want us to mourn. He'd want us to celebrate. Carouse. To live. All in spite of whatever—of whoever—decided to rob him so swiftly of his ability to do just that. He had an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness to recreate what others would assume was gone forever that I've never found in any other person. One that I'll probably never find again. *(He flips suddenly to the cover of his notebook, staring at it.)*

And that readiness appears to have led him down a path that had unintended consequences. How unfair it seems to lay him to rest without true clarity of the events surrounding his untimely death. Without justice.

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*(As he speaks, Nick rips open the notebook, which now throws a harsh column of light on his face as behind him, on different regions of the stage, tableaux unfold in reverse. Each is briefly illuminated before vanishing into darkness. A hand holding a revolver peeks out from the wings, and a bullet, piercing the top of the coffin, whizzes back into the barrel of the gun. A well-dressed man disentangles from an embrace with another in coveralls. A mangled woman's wounds heal and she stands again, waving her arms. Shards of glass, seemingly from all corners of the stage, assemble the windshield of a car that is suspended above Nick. The face of a grandfather clock lights up and begins to spin backwards, landing on 3 O'Clock in the morning. A young man in a military uniform and a young woman in a flowing white dress kiss, then unwind the kiss to the moment that it becomes apparent that they will kiss, then back away from each other as if pulled by invisible wires.)*

You can't repeat the past. But you can tell the truth. *(Nick flips to the beginning of the notebook.)* April 1st, 1925. My father always taught me to be mindful of those who haven't had the advantages that I've had. You see, I'm the descendant of some well-to-do people from the Middle West. But it was no sooner that I arrived in New York than I realized that...those advantages? *(He pauses, turning and gesturing to a gated mansion that has appeared behind him, with good-humored frustration at the fact that it is blocking his last few minutes of sunlight for reading.)*

Well...some people just don't need them. *(This is the cue for the party to start. A flash of lights, extremely loud jazz music, and confetti erupt from behind the gates. Nick jumps up, startled; he's now living in the moment while narrating it. As soon as the music strikes up, a stream of chatty and gaudily dressed people start flowing in—and drunkenly pouring out—of the mansion, criss-crossing the stage, including what little lawn to which*

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*NICK might lay claim, in the process. The lights shift to indicate the passage of time from dusk to evening.)*

Nearly nightly, my mysterious new neighbor would draw crowds of people from all walks of life to his palace. As they tumbled in—and stumbled out—I couldn't help but wonder: just who was I living next door to? *(As Nick says this, JETHRO promptly walks out of the gate and up to the cottage porch on which Nick stands; like many things associated with GATSBY, he appears out of nowhere.)*

**JETHRO.** Mr. Carraway. *(Nick shrieks and jumps a foot in the air.)*

**NICK.** I'm sorry, you—

**JETHRO.** Mr. Carraway: Mr. Gatsby, your neighbor, requests the pleasure of your company this evening. *(Jethro hands NICK an envelope, complete with a "JG" initialed gold seal. This should be just big enough that the audience can see that it's a flashy yet formal invitation.)*

**NICK.** *(Bewildered)* Th-thank you. *(Jethro turns on his heel, and walks back through the gates into the mansion. Nick watches him go, then pries open the invitation and reads it aloud.)* Dear Mister Carraway, You are cordially invited to a first-rate soiree this evening. 390 Lily Lane, 7PM. Signed, Jay Gatsby. *(Nick hastily checks his watch, glances hopefully at the mansion, then rushes inside his cottage. His cottage and the gates are pulled away to reveal the backyard setting of Gatsby's mansion, where guests of all walks of life have assembled: a GOSSIP COLUMNIST looks around skeptically, perhaps accompanied by a PHOTOGRAPHER whose camera is ever at hand. A FILM STARLET and her DIRECTOR flirt in the corner. BROADWAY DANCERS mingle with POLITICIANS, and HEIRESSSES are surrounded by doting COLLEGE BOYS. Somewhere in the mix is ADOLFA, the operatic soprano, and KLIPSPRINGER, Gatsby's*

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*eccentric live-in organist. They dance a rousing Charleston as an orchestra plays. Nick re-enters energetically, sporting a tux.)*

**NICK.** Pardon me, does anybody know the host? *(The crowd laughs at his interjection, as if on cue.)*

**ADOLFA.** Only by reputation!

**NICK.** You mean...you didn't get an invitation? *(Nick re-inspects the envelope and frowns, quickly exiting as though to look for Gatsby in another area. The dancing continues, the music growing louder and faster.)*

**KLIPSPRINGER.** And now, for your listening pleasure, the Jazz History of the World! *(He raises his baton and cues the orchestra into a series of mysterious jazz sequences, just as Nick, slightly disheveled and downing a drink that is clearly not his first, re-enters, and the partygoers assemble to hear the performance, making room for the real audience to see the band, and dotting the staircase, which NICK reluctantly begins to ascend. He stops mid-way down as he locks eyes with another descender, a MAN in the poshest of tuxes and a wide-brimmed fedora. A mixture of fear and surprise passes from one to the other like a wildfire spreading from tree to tree.)*

**MAN.** *(To Nick.)* Your face is familiar. Weren't you in the Third Division during the war?

**NICK.** Wh—Yes, I was in the ninth machine-gun battalion.

**MAN.** I was in the Seventh Infantry until June of 1918. I knew I'd seen you somewhere before. *(A beat.)* Having a gay time?

**NICK.** Why, yes, but—This is an unusual party for me. I live next door and I haven't even met the host. A Mr. Gatsby—do you know him? *(The MAN smiles a familiar smile.)*

**MAN.** I'm afraid I'm not a very good host, Old Sport. *(The MAN turns and removes his hat, facing the audience for the first time, just as the "Jazz History of the World" reaches its musical peak, smiling and raising*

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*his glass and nodding as if to toast not only his party guests, but also the audience.) I'm Gatsby. (The crowd has all raised their glasses to him admiringly as the music crescendos. GATSBY nods and raises the glass to his guests below, so as to acknowledge the compliment. All but Nick freeze.)*

**NICK.** *(To the audience.)* But Gatsby had really begun to reveal himself to me some time before that. *(Spotlight on Nick as the party scene, in darkness, disassembles itself around him.)* April 1st, 1925. My cousin Daisy invited me to dinner with her husband, Tom, who I knew in college. After their wedding down South, they had moved to France for a year, then Chicago, drifting unrestfully to wherever people played polo and were rich together. Their house was on the opposite side of the bay, in East Egg—perhaps the last bastion of old money in the new New York.

### SCENE 2

*As the lights come up, we are now outside of the esteemed Buchanan residence, or in a foyer of sorts. Nick removes his hat so as to signal his arrival. TOM BUCHANAN, a force of nature in a fitted white polo ensemble, enters, slapping Nick on the rear before shaking his hand. Nick winces a little too painfully to be reacting to this alone.*

**TOM.** *(Roaring.)* NICK! Glad to see you. It's been too long.

**NICK.** Indeed. How has the East been treating you?

**TOM.** Can't complain. This place used to belong to Demaine, the oil man. It's nice and spacious.

**NICK.** Yes, I see you even have a stable of ponies. How's the polo career?

**TOM.** Stalled, for the moment. How's your novel coming along?

**NICK.** I'm afraid those days are behind me. I came east to join the bond business.

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**TOM.** Bonds? Nonsense! You wrote a marvelous opinion column in the *Yale Daily News*! Why—you even wrote our *class song*!

**NICK.** Composed it, yes, but I can't take credit for some of the...*stronger* lyrics.

**TOM.** Ah, but don't you see, Nick? We're *Yale* men! Our glory days are always still ahead of us.

**DAISY.** Tom, who's there? Is that you, Nick? *(We reveal, either through a change of set or lighting, the living/dining area of the Buchanan residence, featuring a table and chairs set for four and outfitted with all the necessities of fine dining, as well as two chaises. Across one is strewn the languid, but luminous, DAISY BUCHANAN; on the other, the athletic and disinterested JORDAN BAKER. Several SERVANTS fan them.)*

**NICK.** I'm afraid so! *(Nick moves briskly to the sofa, beaming, to greet her. DAISY makes an apparent effort to move from the couch, but then collapses, laughing at herself in the process and grasping Nick's hand.)*

**DAISY.** I'm p-paralyzed with happiness. *(Tom, Daisy, and Jordan soft freeze as NICK turns to the audience:)*

**NICK.** Daisy Buchanan: The very sound of her voice promised that there was no one in the world she so much wanted to see, alternating between a singing compulsion and a low, thrilling murmur, which some said was only to make people lean closer to her—an irrelevant criticism that made it no less charming.

**DAISY.** Nick, this is Jordan Baker, the famous golfer.

**JORDAN** *(Not even looking in Nick's direction.)* How do you do.

**DAISY.** Now Nick, tell me everything! Do they miss me in Chicago?

**NICK.** Miss you?

**DAISY.** Yes, yes!

**NICK.** The whole city is desolate.

**DAISY.** How *gorgeous*.

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**NICK.** They've painted their back wheels black in protest, and gone on hunger strike until you return.

**DAISY** (*Laughing, to Nick.*) It sounds *perfectly* dismal—Tom, we must go back tomorrow! (*Tom grunts his humorless acknowledgement from behind his drink.*)

**JORDAN.** You live in West Egg, Mr. Carraway?

**NICK.** Yes.

**JORDAN.** I know someone there.

**NICK.** I don't know a single—

**JORDAN.** You *must* know Gatsby.

**DAISY.** (*Suddenly startled, forlorn.*) Gatsby? What Gatsby?

**SERVANT.** Your drinks, madam. (*The SERVANT places a tray of drinks in front of them.*)

**DAISY.** Thank you. (*A beat.*) In two weeks it'll be the longest day of the year. Do you always watch for the longest day of the year and then miss it? I always watch for the longest day of the year and then miss it.

**JORDAN.** We ought to plan something.

**DAISY.** All right, what'll we plan? (*To Nick, adorably hopeless.*) What do people plan? (*Brandishing her pinky finger.*) Look! I hurt it. You did it, Tom. I know you didn't mean to, but you did do it. That's what I get for marrying a brute of a man, a great big, hulking physical specimen of a—

**TOM.** I hate that word, "hulking."

**DAISY.** *Hulking.*

**NICK.** You make me feel uncivilized, Daisy. Can't we talk about crops or something? (*Daisy laughs enthusiastically at Nick's attempt at wit and his mock Midwestern charm.*)

**TOM.** Civilization's going to pieces. Have you read *The Rise of the Foreign Empires*, Nick?

**NICK.** Why, no, I haven't.

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**TOM.** Well it's a fine book, everybody ought to read it. The idea is, if we don't look out, the whole race will be—will be utterly *submerged*. It's all scientific stuff; it's been proved.

**DAISY.** (*Tongue in cheek, to Nick.*) Tom's getting very profound. He reads deep books with long words in them.

**TOM.** This fellow, Goddard, has worked the whole thing out. It's up to us to watch out, or these outsiders will have control of things.

**JORDAN.** You oughta live in California—

**TOM.** The idea is that we're Nordics. I am, and you are, and you are, and... (*Daisy winks at Nick.*)

**TOM.** And we've produced all the things that make civilization what it is—science, and art and all that. You see? (*The telephone rings. It is a shrill, blaring sound.*)

**TOM.** Excuse me. (*Daisy eyes him suspiciously, then rises abruptly and follows him. As Tom answers the telephone in the living room, she slowly tiptoes up the stairs, without being seen.*)

**NICK.** This neighbor of mine that you spoke of—

**JORDAN.** Don't talk. I want to hear what happens.

**NICK.** Is something happening?

**JORDAN.** (*Whispering.*) Tom's got some woman in New York.

**NICK.** Some woman...

**JORDAN.** She might have the decency not to telephone at dinner time, don't you think? (*The phone rings again.*)

**TOM.** (*Into the receiver.*) I told you not to call me here. Yes, yes, I understand. We'll discuss the matter in the near future. (*Tom hangs up the phone, only to have it start ringing again. He hesitates as to whether or not to answer it. The phone rings again just as Daisy has reached the top of the stairs, where a second telephone sits on an end table. She stealthily picks up the receiver just as Tom does with the downstairs phone. Because Daisy is listening in, we can now hear the other half of the conversation,*

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*which introduces MYRTLE WILSON, spotlighting her in red, talking on a phone on the other side of the stage.)*

**TOM.** I told you NOT to call—

**MYRTLE.** But I had to!

**TOM.** Especially *not* during the dinner hour. What's the issue?

**MYRTLE.** The *issue* is I miss you.

**TOM.** Yes, I understand. But I can't talk right now. Don't call this number again, you understand? *(He slams down the phone, which immediately rings again, sounding more dangerous and seductive than before.)*

**JORDAN.** Nicky, since you're new: Here's some Long Island trivia for you. Around here, if you've got a Missus, what is it all but guaranteed that you'll also have?

**NICK.** *(Gamely.)* A marriage license?

**JORDAN.** No. A mistress. *(She lights a cigarette and takes a disinterested drag. Daisy hurries downstairs so Tom doesn't realize she's been listening in on the call.)*

**TOM.** Couldn't be helped!

**JORDAN.** Well, I should turn in. I'm absolutely in training.

**TOM.** Me too. Nick, we should lunch at the Yale Club. How's tomorrow?

**NICK.** Fine. *(Jordan and Tom exit, leaving Daisy and Nick alone. A beat of silence.)*

**DAISY.** We don't know each other very well, Nick. Even if we are cousins.

**NICK.** That's true.

**DAISY.** You didn't come to my wedding.

**NICK.** I wasn't back from the war.

**DAISY.** That's true.

**NICK.** How's the baby?

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**DAISY.** Oh, she's fine. She talks, and eats, and everything...But, you see Nick, ever since before she was born I've had a very bad time. I'm pretty cynical about everything. You see, I think everything's terrible anyhow.

**NICK.** How do you mean?

**DAISY.** On the day she was born, just as I was coming out of the ether—when Tom was god knows where, with Lord knows who—I asked the nurse, “Boy or girl?” The nurse smiled and said, “Honey, she looks just like you.” And I said “Good, I had hoped she would be a girl. A beautiful little fool.” That's the best thing a girl can be in this world, you know?  
*(The lights fade down.)*

### SCENE 3

*The stage is black, save for a spotlight on Nick. As the lights come up slowly, the gas station scene that he describes begins to unfold around him, with the space underneath the double-stair set from Gatsby's house transforming into WILSON's gas station, with a weathered sign, advertising oculist Dr. T.J. Eckleberg, suspended above it.)*

**NICK.** *(To the audience.)* The next day I found myself with Tom—whose desire to have my company bordered on violence—not at the Yale Club as promised, but reluctantly en route to meet the uninvited guest whose presence had caused such a stir the night before. She lived about half way between West Egg and New York, where the motor road hastily joins the railroad and runs beside it for a quarter of a mile, so as to shrink away from a certain desolate area of land. This is the Valley of Ashes—a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills, of men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air. She was the wife of one such man, the proprietor of a gas station. The operation was watched over forebodingly by the giant eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg, an oculist whose

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practice had closed, or moved away. (*Tom descends from his vehicle, a dark blue roadster, and approaches WILSON. Nick follows reluctantly.*)

**TOM.** Hello Wilson, old man. (*He slaps Wilson on the shoulder.*) How's business? That new billboard you've got out front there is damn ugly, I'm sure it's not helping. (*Nick looks up at the sign.*)

**WILSON.** I can't complain. The oculist pays me monthly for that advertisement. (*He looks up at the T.J. Eckleburg sign, wiping his hands on a rag.*) Bein' a God-fearin' man myself, I'm kinda partial to it. Reminds you that someone's *always* watching. (*Returning his focus to Tom.*) Say, when are you going to sell me that car?

**TOM.** Next week; I've got my man working on it now.

**WILSON.** Works pretty slow, don't he?

**TOM.** No, he doesn't. And if you feel that way about it, maybe I'd better sell it somewhere else after all.

**WILSON.** I don't mean that, I just meant—(*He is interrupted by footsteps. MYRTLE WILSON descends the stairs, smouldering. Her eyes lock on Tom and vice versa.*)

**MYRTLE.** (*To Wilson, without looking at him.*) Get some chairs, why don't you, so somebody can sit down.

**WILSON.** Oh, sure. (*He exits momentarily. Myrtle sidles up to Tom. They embrace.*)

**TOM.** (*Still entwined.*) Myrtle, this is Mr. Nick Carraway. Nick, Myrtle Wilson.

**MYRTLE.** (*False warmth, perfunctory.*) How are ya? (*She quickly turns her attention back to Tom without so much as attempting a handshake, setting the tone for the evening.*)

**TOM.** I want to see you. Get on the next train.

**MYRTLE.** All right. I'll telephone the McKees, and invite my sister Catherine! (*To Nick.*) She's said to be very beautiful, by people who oughta know.

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**TOM.** I'll meet you by the news-stand on the lower level. *(She nods and disentangles from Tom as Wilson returns with chairs.)*

**WILSON.** *(Setting down the chairs.)* Here ya go.

**TOM.** *(Eyes on Myrtle.)* I'll see about that car next week, Wilson. *(He nods and tips his hat to Myrtle.)* Mrs. Wilson. Nick?

**NICK.** Pleasure to meet you both. *(Nick and Tom drive off. Myrtle starts up the stairs, leaving Wilson alone in the garage.)*

**WILSON.** Isn't anybody gonna sit down?

### SCENE 4

*The stage is black save for a spotlight on NICK, once more. As the lights come up, Tom and Myrtle's West Harlem love nest assembles around him.*

**NICK.** I have been drunk just twice in my life, and the second time was that afternoon; so everything that happened has a dim, hazy cast over it. Mr. McKee was an artist, a photographer, and Mrs. McKee was his shrill, languid wife. And Catherine was...something, but not nearly as attractive as her sister had claimed. *(MYRTLE enters ceremoniously in a gaudy, feathered dress.)*

**LUCILLE MCKEE.** *(To Myrtle.)* My dear, I love your dress!

**MYRTLE.** What, this? It's just a crazy old thing. I just slip it on sometimes when I don't care what I look like.

**LUCILLE.** But it looks wonderful on you, if you know what I mean. If Chester could only get you in that pose, I think he could make something out of it. *(Myrtle strikes a pose. CHESTER MCKEE, bespectacled and slight, kneels and frames her with his fingers.)*

**CHESTER.** I should change the light.

**LUCILLE.** Oh, I wouldn't think of it, I think she looks—

**CHESTER.** Shh!

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**TOM.** We need some more ice and mineral water, Myrtle, before everybody goes to sleep. You McKees have some more to drink! Catherine, you too!

**CATHERINE.** I feel just as good on nothing at all.

**MYRTLE.** I told that boy about the ice. These people! You have to keep after them all the time.

**TOM** Fine—I'll run out and get some. (*He exits.*)

**CATHERINE.** Do you live on Long Island, too?

**NICK.** I live in West Egg.

**CATHERINE.** Really? I was down there at a party about a month ago. A man named Gatsby's. Do you know him?

**NICK.** I'm afraid I don't.

**CATHERINE.** Well, they say he's a nephew or a cousin of Kaiser Wilhelm's. That's where all his money comes from.

**NICK.** Really?

**CATHERINE.** (*Nodding solemnly.*) I'd hate to have him get something on me.

**LUCILLE.** (*In the direction of Catherine.*) Chester, I think you could do something with *her*! (*Chester nods in a bored way.*)

**MYRTLE.** (*Drunk, to no one in particular.*) I'll bet you could do something with my husband. (*She snorts.*)

**CATHERINE.** (*Whispering to Nick.*) Neither of them can stand the person they're married to.

**NICK.** Can't they?

**CATHERINE.** Can't *stand* them. What I say is, why go on living with them if they can't stand them?

**NICK.** Doesn't she like Wilson either?

**CATHERINE.** It's really his wife that's keeping them apart. She's a Catholic, and they don't believe in divorce.

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**NICK.** (*To the audience.*) Daisy was not a Catholic, and I was a little shocked at the elaborateness of the lie.

**LUCILLE.** I almost made that mistake, too, marrying the wrong type. I almost married a little Jew who'd been after me for years. I knew he was beneath me. But if I hadn't met Chester, he'd have got me, for sure.

**MYRTLE.** Yes, but listen: at least you didn't marry him.

**LUCILLE.** I know, I didn't.

**MYRTLE.** Well, *I* married him. That's the difference between your case and mine.

**CATHERINE.** Why did you, Myrtle? Nobody forced you.

**MYRTLE.** I thought he was a gentleman, thought he knew something about breeding. Turns out he wasn't fit to lick my shoe. Did you know that he borrowed somebody's best suit to get married in? And he never even returned it!

**CATHERINE.** (*To Nick.*) She really ought to get away from him. And Tom's the first sweetie she ever had.

**MYRTLE.** (*Overhearing, then to Nick.*) It's true. And I'll be damned if he ain't the last. The first time I saw him was on the commuter train. He had a freshly pressed suit, and spats on...I knew I could love him from the first moment I laid eyes on him. But that didn't mean I was going to let him off easy. He'd look at me, I'd almost look back, but instead pretend to read the ad above his head. Cat and mouse stuff, you know? But by the time the train came to a stop, he pressed his white shirtfront against me. I said, "I oughta call a policeman." Before I knew it, we were in the back of a black taxi. The only thought that went through my mind that night was "You can't live forever!" Because you can't. Life is for the living. (*Tom re-enters with the ice.*) But it was all for nothing. He's never gonna leave her, his cold-hearted bitch of a—

**TOM.** Come now Myrtle, you know that Daisy—

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**MYRTLE.** Dai-sy, Dai-sy, Dai—(*Tom interrupts Myrtle with a sickeningly loud backhanded slap to her face, cutting off the music and toppling her. Catherine rushes to her side. Myrtle nose is bleeding. They both stare up at Tom, fearful.*) You're fucking crazy!

**TOM.** Get out. (*Although it's unclear who he's talking to, Nick and the McKees exit, startled. Nick takes a protective look back at Myrtle, and a bewildered look back at Tom, before departing. Blackout.*)

### SCENE 5

*Lights up on the Harlem street onto which Nick and the McKees have been unceremoniously thrust. The McKees giggle drunkenly at each other, arms looped over shoulders. A single horn, as though from a balcony above them, plays a solo that starts slowly gathering speed. The two of them begin to dance to it as Nick addresses the audience once more.*

**NICK.** High over the city that night, our line of yellow windows must have contributed their share of human secrecy to the casual watcher in the darkening streets. And I was him too, looking up and wondering. I was within, and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life. (*Lucille and Chester exchange a look. Lucille wanders into Nick's pool of light, grabbing his hand and beginning to twirl him around to the rhythm of the horn solo. They dance for a few bars, until Lucille expertly passes him off to Chester. Nick is startled at first, but his intrigue prevails. The lights fade as he and Chester kiss.*)

### SCENE 6

*We return to Gatsby's party, at the same moment upon which we froze earlier, repeating the final bars of "Jazz History of the World" to remind*

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*the audience that the preceding sequence was all a flashback. NICK and Gatsby stand atop the steps.*

**NICK.** *(To the audience.)* And that's how I ended up here—finally meeting my mysterious neighbor. Except, it wasn't the first time I laid eyes on him. And now it seems safe to reveal that the conversation went a little more like...*(Gatsby and Nick lock eyes as they did in the previous incarnation of this scene. But the tone is markedly different. This time, instead of fear, amazement at the recognition of one another in this foreign context passes between them. And longing. And lust.)*

**GATSBY.** *(To Nick.)* Your face is familiar. Weren't you in the Third Division during the war?

**NICK.** Wh—Yes, I was in the ninth machine-gun battalion.

**GATSBY.** I was in the Seventh Infantry until June of 1918. I knew I'd seen you somewhere before. *(A beat.)* Having a gay time?

**NICK.** Why, yes, but—This is an unusual party for me. I live next door and I haven't even met the host. A Mr. Gatsby—do you know him? *(Gatsby smiles a familiar smile.)*

**GATSBY.** I'm afraid I'm not a very good host, Old Sport. *(GATSBY turns and removes his hat, facing the audience for the first time, just as the "Jazz History of the World" is about to peak, smiling and toasting the same way as before.)* I'm Gatsby. *(Gatsby and the partygoers lower their glasses and applaud the band. Gatsby's eyes return to Nick's, locked there. Jordan enters in a teal flapper dress, stopping in her tracks when she sees Nick and Gatsby. Gatsby's eyes remain locked on Nick's until Jethro approaches Gatsby on the stairs.)*

**JETHRO.** Philadelphia is on the phone, sir. *(Gatsby nods, as if shaken from a trance. Apologetically he turns to Nick.)*

**GATSBY.** Excuse me, Old Sport. *(Nick nods slowly. Gatsby exits. Nick has barely a moment to survey the crowd before the band strikes up again.)*

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*Jordan climbs to the top of the steps wearing a teal satin flapper dress. Having shed the indifference from when we last saw her, she is now energetic and ready for a party. She is quickly flanked by a phalanx of well-groomed young men.)*

**KLIPSPRINGER.** Look alive fellas, it's Jordan Baker!

**JORDAN.** I do love large parties, they're so intimate. At small parties, there's hardly any privacy.

**STARLET.** You said it, sis! *(Jordan and the STARLET, along with several other women at the party, engage in a dance that involves them passing a full glass of champagne from one end of a line to the other without using their hands. Keeping the space between their bodies to a bare minimum, they spill hardly a drop. After this concludes the crowd applauds, and Nick approaches her, surprised and delighted by her metamorphosis from wholly indifferent to the life of the party.)*

**NICK.** Hello, Jordan!

**JORDAN.** Nick! I thought you might be here. I remembered you lived next door.

**NICK.** That's right. And I just met the infamous Mr. Gatsby himself.

**JORDAN.** Did you?

**NICK.** Indeed. We were just chatting.

**JORDAN.** I saw. Only, it seemed quite apparent to me that the two of you had met before. *(NICK is taking a gulp of champagne and nearly chokes. Recovering:)*

**NICK.** We were acquainted during the war. But I didn't know him by that name. Or by this...*(He gestures around at the rollicking party.)*

...Reputation.

**JORDAN.** Now *you're* started on the subject. He told me once he was an Oxford man. However, I don't believe it.

**NICK.** Why not?

**JORDAN.** I don't know. I just don't think he went there.

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**NICK.** Well, in my experience, young men don't just drift coolly out of nowhere and buy a palace on the Long Island Sound. (*Jethro, once again, appears seemingly out of nowhere.*)

**JETHRO.** Miss Baker?

**JORDAN.** Yes.

**JETHRO.** I beg your pardon, but Mr. Gatsby would like to speak to you alone.

**JORDAN.** With me?

**JETHRO.** Yes. (*Jordan gives Nick a surprised look as she follows Jethro. At this point, the party is clearly winding down. Adolfa is drunkenly singing an aria to wave the guests goodbye. They pair off and exit in a deeply unserious ballet. Just as Nick resigns himself to leaving without her, Jordan reappears. Nick approaches her, but she's in a rush to leave. All amusement has left her body and, in its place, rage simmers.*)

**JORDAN.** (*Sardonically.*) I've just heard the most amazing thing. Simply amazing!

**NICK.** What is it?

**JORDAN.** (*Deadpan*) I swore I wouldn't tell. And yet here I am tantalizing you.

**NICK.** But what—(*Gatsby re-enters. Jordan sees him approaching, and is determined to hush Nick on the matter.*)

**JORDAN.** I have to run—but it will all make sense soon, Nick. Good night. (*Jordan exits quickly. Nick is flustered by Gatsby's re-entrance. They lock eyes once more.*)

**NICK.** Mr. Gatsby! Why, I'm sorry I didn't know you earlier. I'd been meaning to—

**GATSBY.** Don't give it another thought, Old Sport. (*He hesitates. Then, with the slightest hint of sheepishness:*) Say, would you like to come out in my hydroplane with me? Tomorrow, at nine o'clock?

**NICK.** (*Surprised, but flattered*) Why, sure.

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**JETHRO.** Chicago wants you on the phone, sir.

**GATSBY.** In a minute. Good night, Old Sport...Good night. (*Gatsby exits.*)

**NICK.** Good night.

### SCENE 7

*Blackout, save for another spotlight on NICK. The scene unfolding around him, this time, is a representation of GATSBY's yellow car on a road, en route to New York City.*

**NICK.** (*To the audience.*) The next morning, I overslept and missed the hydroplane. But Gatsby insisted on taking me into town for lunch.

**GATSBY.** Say Old Sport, what's your opinion of me anyhow?

**NICK.** I suppose I haven't formed one.

**GATSBY.** Well, I don't want you to get the wrong impression of me. I'll tell you God's truth about myself. I'm the son of some well-to-do people from the middle West, all dead now. I earned several medals for extraordinary valor during the war—even one from little Montenegro on the Adriatic sea, you see? (*Gatsby brandishes a flashy medal, which Nick approvingly inspects.*)

**NICK.** Impressive.

**GATSBY.** Then after the armistice, I was educated...(*He coughs slightly.*) At Oxford. Before I came east, here, to start a new enterprise of sorts.

**NICK.** I see.

**GATSBY.** Ah! Here's the place. (*We are now in the interior of a speakeasy, complete with decked-out dancers. As GATSBY enters with NICK, he is met by a parade of well-wishers lining up to greet him. He subtly gives each of the following cash as they shake hands.*) Mr.

Commissioner. How's the family? Mr. Senator, my condolences regarding

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your wife's illness. (*MEYER WOLFSHEIM enters, dressed in fur in 90-degree weather.*)

**GATSBY.** Nick, this is my friend, Meyer Wolfshiem. (*Wolfshiem shakes Nick's hand while speaking to Gatsby.*)

**NICK.** (*Extending his hand to Wolfshiem, who ignores it.*) How do you—

**WOLFSHEIM.** So I took one look at him, and what do you think I did? (*Gatsby gestures to the nearest table, and the three of them sit.*)

**NICK.** (*Politely*) What?

**WOLFSHEIM.** I handed the money to Katzpaugh, and I said, "All right, Katzpaugh, don't pay him a penny until he shuts his mouth." He shut it, then and there.

**WAITRESS.** Highballs?

**GATSBY.** Yes, thank you.

**WOLFSHEIM.** This is a nice restaurant here, but I like across the street better.

**GATSBY.** It's too hot over there.

**WOLFSHEIM.** Hot, sure, but full of memories.

**NICK.** What place is that?

**WOLFSHEIM.** The old Metropole. Filled with friends...now gone forever. (*Wolfshiem sighs, reminiscing.*) I'll never forget the night they shot Rosy Rosenthal there. The waiter came up to him with a funny look and says somebody wants to speak to him outside. "Don't take away my coffee!" he said. Then he went out on the sidewalk and they shot him three times in his full belly and drove away.

**NICK.** (*Snapping his fingers, remembering the news story.*)

Why, four of them were electrocuted!

**WOLFSHEIM.** That's right. So, Mr. Carraway...I understand you're looking for a business connection.

**GATSBY.** (*Protectively*) Oh no! This isn't the man, Meyer.

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**WOLFSHEIM.** I beg your pardon. I had the wrong man. (*Wolfsheim rises to cavort with the cabaret dancers.*)

**NICK.** Who is Wolfsheim anyhow...An actor?

**GATSBY.** No...

**NICK.** A... (*He gestures to Wolfsheim's molar-shaped cufflinks.*)...dentist?

**GATSBY.** Wolfsheim? No Old Sport, Wolfsheim's a gambler. (*Gatsby looks around to see if anyone is listening, then leans closer to Nick.*) Meyer Wolfsheim fixed the World Series back in 1919.

**NICK.** (*Outburst.*) Fixed the *World Series!*

**WOLFSHEIM.** It wasn't broken. But hey, it didn't hurt! (*The whole restaurant laughs with Wolfsheim, except Nick and Gatsby. Gatsby leans unnecessarily close to Nick's ear to say.*)

**GATSBY.** What do you say the three of us paint the town red tonight? (*Nick gestures around at the restaurant's scarlet velvet-covered walls and chairs.*)

**NICK.** This place is plenty red already. But I suppose another coat couldn't hurt. (*Gatsby and Nick grin at one another. Blackout.*)

### SCENE 8

*The tearoom of the Plaza Hotel. Spotlight on Jordan, just as we've had on Nick before. Nick sits at a two-top table behind her, which holds a bouquet of flowers and some teacups. Though measured in her delivery, and attempting to sound off-the-cuff, so apparent are her feelings for the subject of her monologue that she may as well be holding a torch.*

**JORDAN.** One breezy October day in nineteen-seventeen, I was wandering the streets of Louisville, testing my new English golf shoes. The red, white, and blue banners in front of all the houses blew in the

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wind, stretching out as if to say *tut-tut-tut-tut* in a disapproving way. The largest of the lawns belonged to Daisy Fay's house. She was just eighteen, two years older than me, and by far the most popular of all the young girls in Louisville. She dressed in white, and had a little white roadster, and all day long the telephone rang in her house and excited young officers from Camp Taylor demanded the privilege of monopolizing her that night—for an hour or two, anyway. When I came opposite her house that morning her white roadster was beside the curb, and she was sitting in it with a lieutenant I had never seen before. They were so engrossed in each other that she didn't see me until I was five feet away. "Hello, Jordan," she called to me. "Come here." I was flattered that she wanted to speak to me, because of all the older girls I admired her most. She asked me if I was going to the Red Cross to make bandages. I was. Well, then, would I tell them that she couldn't come that day? The officer looked at Daisy while she was speaking, in a way that every young girl wants to be looked at, and because it seemed romantic to me I have remembered the incident ever since. His name was Jay Gatsby, and I didn't lay eyes on him again for over four years—even after I'd met him on Long Island I didn't realize it was the same man.

**NICK.** So Daisy knew Gatsby before the war...What are the odds?

**JORDAN.** That was nineteen-seventeen. By the next year I had a few beaux myself, and I began to play in tournaments, so I didn't see Daisy very often. Wild rumors were circulating about her—how her mother had found her packing her bag one winter night to go to New York and say good-bye to a soldier who was going overseas. She didn't speak to her family for weeks, and after that she didn't play around with the soldiers any more. By the next autumn she was gay again, gay as ever. She had a debut after the Armistice, and in February she was presumably engaged to Tom Buchanan of Chicago, and their wedding was set for June, with more pomp and circumstance than Louisville ever knew before. He came down

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with a hundred people in four private cars, and hired a whole floor of the Seelbach Hotel. The day before the wedding he gave her a string of pearls valued at three hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

**NICK.** *(Cynical.)* And she forgot all about Gatsby?

**JORDAN.** Not quite. Half an hour before the ceremony she received a letter. *(Jordan picks the bouquet up off the table, stepping into the flashback. It's now apparent to us that she's wearing what could be understood as a bridesmaid dress. She enters the room to find a younger Daisy, signified by her long hair, disheveled in a wedding gown. Drunk as a monkey, she holds a bottle of Sauterne in one hand and a letter in the other.)*

**JORDAN.** Hurry up Daisy, it's quarter to five!

**DAISY.** Congrat'ulate me!

**JORDAN.** What for?

**DAISY.** I've never had a drink before, but oh how I do enjoy it. *(Daisy hiccups.)*

**JORDAN.** I'll congratulate you once you're married. *(She swipes the bottle of Sauterne that is swinging lazily from Daisy's hand.)*

**DAISY.** That won't be necessary. *(A glimmer of hope flickers sub-momentarily across Jordan's face as:)*

**JORDAN.** Why? *(Daisy pauses as though she's remembering something, and holds up a finger. She then removes the strand of pearls from her neck.)*

**DAISY.** Here, deares'. Take 'em downstairs and give 'em back to whoever they belong to. Tell 'em all that Daisy's changed her mind, say "Daisy's changed her mind!"

**JORDAN.** Jesus, Daisy, what's gotten into you?

**DAISY.** *(Staring off into the distance.)* He's alive.

**JORDAN.** *He* who?

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**DAISY.** *You know who. My favorite lieutenant. The one I nearly eloped with before he went off to war. (Daisy brandishes the letter, which Jordan grabs and skims).*

**JORDAN.** Jay Gatsby... Well I'll be...

**DAISY.** *(Between sniffles.)* I can't do it. Now that I know, I can't marry someone else... All this time I've been wishing it was him, instead of Tom. But Jay was supposed to be dead. Do you know what it feels like to love someone who couldn't possibly love you back?

**JORDAN.** I do... certainly imagine it's horrible.

**DAISY.** But he's *not* dead, and he sent for me!

**JORDAN.** Daisy—

**DAISY.** Don't use that tone with me, Jordan. You can't possibly know what it feels like, you just can't. *(Jordan grabs Daisy's wrists and looks into her eyes. It is the softest expression we've seen her wear yet.)*

**JORDAN.** I can. Trust me. But, listen... walking out on an arrangement this big could only spell disaster for you. It's social suicide.

**DAISY.** But he's—

**JORDAN.** Daisy. Half an hour ago you were over the moon to be marrying Tom. You forgot Jay once. You can forget again. With Tom, you have the chance to have a *big* life. To see the world outside of Louisville. And you should take that chance. For yourself, and... for all those who don't have that chance. *(Daisy slowly nods and begins to dry her tears. Jordan fixes her veil. A tuxedoed Tom and wedding guest appear. Jordan, the maid of honor, walks down the aisle first.)* So at five-fifteen, after a slight delay, Daisy Fay married Tom Buchanan. And I'm afraid to say that, for the second time that day... Daisy changed her mind. *(As the guests turn to see Daisy walk down the aisle, Tom smiles at her. The flashback disassembles in a change of lighting. Jordan walks back to the table and places her bouquet on it. NICK instantly grabs her hand and gives her an expression of understanding. He, too, is made every-so-slightly crestfallen*

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*by this information. Her look back at him in response conveys that her suspicions about him were correct, and her relief at feeling seen by him. There is a sense of kindredness between them.)*

**NICK.** *(Gently.)* It's a strange coincidence, the both of them ending up on Long Island.

**JORDAN.** *(Jaded.)* But it wasn't a coincidence at all. Gatsby bought that house so that Daisy would be just across the bay. *(Nick laughs, a little surprised, but more impressed with Gatsby now than he was before.)* And he wants to know if you'll invite Daisy to your house some afternoon and then let him come over.

**NICK.** *(To the audience.)* The modesty of the demand shook me. He had waited five years and bought a mansion where he dispensed starlight to casual moths—all so that he could “come over” some afternoon to a neighbor's garden. *(To Jordan, shaking his head.)* Did I have to know all this before he could ask such a little favor?

**JORDAN.** He's afraid...He's waited so long. He thought you might be offended. You see, he's a regular tough underneath it all.

**NICK.** Why didn't he ask you to arrange a meeting?

**JORDAN.** He wants her to see his house. And your house is right next door. I think he half expected her to wander into one of his parties some night, but she never did. Then he began asking people casually if they knew her. I was the first one he found. I guess it's true, what they say.

**NICK.** What's that?

**JORDAN.** There are only the pursued, the pursuing, the busy, and the tired. *(She pauses. Her annoyance turns to sadness.)* And even if this plan has one iota of a chance of getting her away from a husband who treats her like his personal punching bag...Daisy ought to be one of them. *(A beat. Nick rises and arches an eyebrow.)*

**NICK.** So do we. *(He grabs Jordan's hand, pulling her out of her chair, spins her around and playfully dips her. She laughs hysterically, as the*

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*union is all wrong for both of them, but the perfect pretense between fast friends. For a summer, at least.)*

### SCENE 9

*Lights up on Nick's front porch and the gated area outside Gatsby's mansion. Gatsby paces there. Nick enters.*

**NICK.** *(To the audience.)* That evening when I arrived home, Gatsby's house was lit up like a Christmas tree, but no partygoers were in sight. *(To Gatsby.)* Your place looks like the World's Fair!

**GATSBY.** Does it? I've just been glancing into some of the rooms. Let's go to Coney Island, Old Sport. In my car.

**NICK.** It's too late.

**GATSBY.** Well, suppose we go for a swim?

**NICK.** I've got to get to bed. But—Jay?

**GATSBY.** Yes? *(It is now Nick's turn to put on a happy face.)*

**NICK.** I talked with Jordan. I'm going to call up Daisy tomorrow and invite her to tea.

**GATSBY.** Oh, I don't want to put you to any trouble, Old Sport!

**NICK.** What day would suit you?

**GATSBY.** What day would suit *you*? I don't want to put you to any trouble, you see.

**NICK.** How about the day after tomorrow?

**GATSBY.** *(Hesitating.)* I want to get the grass cut.

**NICK.** *(To the audience.)* I suspected that he meant my grass.

**GATSBY.** There's another little thing.

**NICK.** Would you rather put it off for a few days?

**GATSBY.** Oh, it isn't about that. At least... Look here, Old Sport, you don't make much money, do you?

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**NICK.** Not very much.

**GATSBY.** I thought you didn't if you'll pardon my...you see, I was just wondering if you thought about my offer earlier today. You see, I carry on a little business on the side. And I thought that if you don't make very much, you're selling bonds, aren't you?

**NICK.** Trying to.

**GATSBY.** Well, this might interest you. It wouldn't take up much of your time, and you might pick up a nice bit of money. It'd be a rather...confidential sort of thing—

**NICK.** I've got my hands full. I'm much obliged, but I couldn't take on any more work.

**GATSBY.** I see.

**NICK.** But, Jay? *(Gatsby looks up.)* It's no trouble at all. I'm happy to help. Good night.

**GATSBY.** Good night. *(Gatsby exits. Spotlight on Nick as the interior of his cottage assembles around him.)*

**NICK.** *(To the audience.)* The day agreed upon was pouring rain. At eleven o'clock a man in a raincoat, dragging a lawn-mower, was indeed sent by Gatsby to mow my lawn, and at two o'clock...*(A knock at the door, which Nick opens to allow a parade of Gatsby's servants, carrying flowers, to enter his house. They struggle to find space for all of them.)*...a greenhouse arrived. And an hour later...*(Gatsby bursts into Nick's cottage, looking pristine in a white flannel suit, silver shirt, and gold tie, but tired and on edge.)*

**GATSBY.** Is everything ready?

**NICK.** The grass looks fine, if that's what you mean.

**GATSBY.** *(He doesn't look.)* Looks very good. Do you have everything you need in the shape of...tea? *(Nick gestures to his measly teapot and lemon cakes, now dwarfed by the massive floral arrangements surrounding them.)*

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**NICK.** Will they do?

**GATSBY.** Of course, of course! They're fine... *(Nervously.)* Old Sport. *(He plucks an economics book off Nick's shelf and sits in one of Nick's chairs to begin reading it. Nick stands, watching him, for 30 seconds or so before Gatsby snaps the book closed and jumps up.)* I'm going home!

**NICK.** Why?

**GATSBY.** Nobody's coming to tea. It's too late! I can't wait all day!

**NICK.** Don't be silly! It's just two minutes to four. *(Gatsby exhales impatiently and sits down again, miserable, like a little boy who's just been punished. A horn honks, signaling Daisy's arrival. Nick walks towards to open the door just as Gatsby bolts silently in the opposite direction, exiting the stage.)*

**DAISY.** Is this absolutely where you live, my dear? *(Nick laughs. They hug. She turns to call to her driver.)* Come back in an hour, Ferdie! *(To Nick.)* His name is Ferdie. *(Nick turns to find the room empty.)*

**NICK.** Well, that's funny.

**DAISY.** What's funny? *(Daisy removes her coat, then turns around and sees the gorgeous floral arrangements. She gasps and begins to examine them.)* Are you in love with me, or why did I have to come alone? *(There's a light knock at the door, which Nick opens. Gatsby is standing there, soaking wet and looking like death. He walks in, reclaiming his composure. Daisy gasps at the sight of him. A beat.)*

**DAISY.** I certainly am awfully glad to see you again.

**GATSBY.** We've met before.

**NICK.** *(In pain.)* Excuse me for a moment.

**GATSBY.** *(Breaking composure.)* Where are you going?

**NICK.** I'll be back. *(Gatsby drags Nick a few feet out of Daisy's earshot. She admires the flowers as they sidebar.)* What's the matter?

**GATSBY.** This is a *terrible* mistake.

**NICK.** You're just embarrassed, that's all. Daisy's embarrassed, too.

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**GATSBY.** She's embarrassed?

**NICK.** Just as much as you are.

**GATSBY.** Don't talk so loud.

**NICK.** You're acting like a little boy. Not only that, you're being rude.

Daisy's sitting there all alone. *(This is exactly what Gatsby needed to hear; he holds up a hand to shush Nick and turns on his heel, and Nick drifts a few feet from the two of them, mimicking privacy. Turning back to Daisy, Gatsby coughs to get her attention. She turns toward him and smiles shyly.)*

**DAISY.** We haven't met for many years.

**GATSBY.** Nine, next November.

**DAISY.** Has it really been... *(She laughs, embarrassed.)* Well, it must be all these gorgeous flowers, but suddenly I can hardly think straight...

**NICK.** *(To the audience.)* They talked for an hour or so by themselves, and by the time I returned, the room was warm with Daisy's laughter.

Gatsby insisted that Daisy see his house, and insisted that I, the reluctant chaperone, accompany them. *(The location shifts to Gatsby's house, his master bedroom specifically. There's a four-poster bed, a wardrobe, and a bureau, at the very least. Gatsby leads the tour.)*

**GATSBY.** And this is the master bedroom. *(Daisy walks over to the dresser and admires a gold toilette set on the bureau, brushing her hair with the comb.)*

**GATSBY.** *(He watches Daisy. To Nick, who is standing back with him.)* It's the funniest thing, Old Sport. *(He laughs.)* I can't—when I try to—*(Gatsby trails off, moving closer to Daisy.)*

**NICK.** *(To the audience.)* He had passed visibly through two states and was entering a third. After his embarrassment and his unreasoning joy, he was consumed with wonder at her presence. He had been full of the idea for so long, dreamed it right through to the end, waited with his teeth set,

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so to speak, at an inconceivable pitch of intensity. But now he was running down like an overwound clock.

**GATSBY.** *(To Daisy, pointing out the window.)* If it wasn't for the mist we could see your home across the bay. You always have a green light that burns all night at the end of your dock.

**NICK.** At that moment it seemed to occur to him that the colossal significance of that light had now vanished forever. His count of enchanted objects had diminished by one. *(Gesturing to a portrait of a ruddy, bearded man.)* Who's this?

**GATSBY.** That's Mr. Dan Cody, Old Sport. He's dead now. One of my greatest friends.

**DAISY.** Oh, look at this one! *(She clutches a framed photo of Gatsby at age 18 in boating clothes.)* The pompadour! You never told me you had a pompadour...Or a yacht.

**NICK.** *(To the audience.)* I was tempted to ask to see the rubies.

**GATSBY.** Take a look at this. *(He hands her a book of newspaper clippings, large enough that the audience can see the headlines. Each and every one are about her: her debut, engagement to Tom, their wedding, etc.)*

**DAISY.** *(Stunned, shaking her head.)* Why Jay, they're all about me...*(The telephone rings, cutting her off. Gatsby answers the one beside his bed.)*

**GATSBY.** Yes...Well, I can't talk now...I can't talk now, Old Sport...I said a *small* town...He must know what a small town is...Well, he's no use to us if Detroit is his idea of a small town. *(He hangs up, then snaps his fingers as though getting an idea.)*

**GATSBY.** I know what we'll do. Klipspringer! *(Klipspringer, a slight young man with shell-rimmed glasses, appears.)* Klipspringer plays the piano. Don't you Ewing, old sport?

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**KLIPSPRINGER.** I don't play well. I don't—I hardly play at all. I'm all out of pract—

**GATSBY.** Nonsense—play for us! (*Klipspringer shrugs, and sits down to play “Ain't We Got Fun.” Gatsby grabs Daisy, who laughs, and they begin to dance.*)

**NICK.** (*To the audience.*) There must have been moments, even that afternoon, when Daisy tumbled short of his dreams—not through her own fault, but because of the colossal vitality of his illusion. He had thrown himself into it with a creative passion, adding to it all the time, decking it out with every bright feather that drifted his way. No amount of fire or freshness could challenge what man will store up in his ghostly heart.

**GATSBY.** (*To Daisy.*) There's something else I want to show you. (*He leads her to his wardrobe, and opens it.*) I've got a man in England who buys me clothes. He sends over a selection of things at the beginning of each season, spring and fall. (*He begins to throw piles of the colorful shirts—in coral and apple-green and lavender and faint orange, with monograms of Indian blue—in the direction of the bed, which Daisy admires. Suddenly, she leans into the heap of shirts and begins to cry stormily. Gatsby rushes to her side. She explains to Gatsby as though she feels silly for crying:*)

**DAISY.** They're such beautiful shirts! It makes me sad because I've never seen such—such beautiful shirts before. (*A lie, but Gatsby senses the truth: she knows that all of this was lost long ago. He can't bear to see her cry, though, so he kisses her. Spotlight on Gatsby and Daisy, leaving Nick, literally and figuratively, in the dark. Blackout.*)

### SCENE 10

*The backyard of GATSBY's mansion, the same place the earlier party took place. After a rousing horn solo, partygoers start to file in. Nick enters, far*

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*less energetically than he did for the first party. One by one, each of the significant characters Nick elaborates on will take center stage and perform their non-talent in carnivalesque fashion.*

**NICK.** Once I wrote down on the empty spaces of a time-table the names of those who came to Gatsby's house that summer. They will give you a better impression than my generalities of those who accepted Gatsby's hospitality and paid him the subtle tribute of knowing nothing whatsoever about him. From East Egg came the Chester Beckers and the Leeches, and Doctor Webster Civet who was drowned last summer up in Maine. (*The good DOCTOR, dressed in his hospital whites, takes center stage and looks around nervously as two THUGS size him up from several feet away.*) Clarice Endive was from East Egg. She came only once, in white ermine, and had a fight with a bum named Etty in the garden. (As a boxing match bell sounds, *CLARICE and ETTY fight, center stage.*) From farther out on the Island came Ripley Snell. Snell was there three days before he went to the penitentiary, so drunk on the gravel that Mrs. Ulysses Swett's automobile ran over his right hand. (*The fight is broken up by a drunk SNELL, who promptly collapses, but while still prone foists his glass in the air, gesturing for a refill. Clarice and Etty then drag him off.*) From West Egg came Cecil Roebuck, and Gulick, the state senator, and Newtown Orchid, who controlled Films Par Excellence, And Eckhaust and Clyde Cohen and Arthur McCarty, all working in the movies in some way or another.

**COHEN.** Working? (*These three gather around ORCHID, one of them holding a film camera, smoking cigars. They all laugh out loud, in obnoxious Hollywood fashion, slapping each other in amusement, at Nick's suggestion that they actually do any work.*)

**NICK.** Of theatrical people, there were Gus Waize and Harriet O'Donavan, the composing team; (*WAIZE and O'DONAVAN take center*

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*stage, bickering loudly.) Lester Meyer, the producer... (MEYER joins them and looks on exhaustedly, unwilling to intervene.) and Frances Bull, the star of their newest show. (BULL, full of herself, takes center stage and performs a tap solo to the annoyance of Waize, O'Donovan and Meyer.)* Also from New York were the Dewars and the Scullys and the young Quinns, divorced now, and Henrietta L. Palmetto, who killed herself by jumping in front of a subway train in Times Square. In addition to all these came Adolfa, the famed operatic soprano, and young Brewer, who had his nose shot off in the war; *(Adolfa takes center stage majestically, and opens her mouth as though ready to sing, before BREWER, whose nose is comically obscured by a large bandage, his military uniform decorated with medals, claps his hand over her mouth as if to say, "Not today, buddy.")* And a prince of something, whom we called Duke, and whose name, if I ever knew it, I have forgotten. *(The DUKE, wearing a lopsided crown and drinking from a chalice, parts the crowd to take center stage. Everyone fawns over him, but you would only be conned into thinking this guy was royalty if you weren't sober.)* And that night, for the first time ever, there were Daisy and Tom, the latter of whom balked at being introduced by Gatsby as...

**GATSBY.** *(Introducing Tom and Daisy to a guest.)* Mrs. and Mr. Tom Buchanan, the polo player. *(Gatsby enjoys saying this just a tad too much. The other guest shakes Tom's hand and nods politely.)*

**TOM.** *(To Gatsby.)* I'd rather not be "the polo player."

**DAISY.** I've never met so many celebrities! I liked that man, what was his name? With the sort of blue nose?

**GATSBY.** That's Cecil B. DeMille. He's a small film director.

**DAISY.** Well, I liked him anyhow.

**NICK.** *(To the audience.)* But the rest offended her. She was appalled by West Egg, this unprecedented "place" that Broadway had begotten upon a Long Island fishing village—appalled by its raw vigor that chafed under the

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old euphemisms and by the too obtrusive fate that herded its inhabitants along a shortcut from nothing to nothing.

**GATSBY.** Shall we? *(Daisy takes his arm, and they descend to the dance floor for a foxtrot. Tom watches them on the balcony with Nick.)*

**TOM.** Who is this Gatsby, anyhow? Some big bootlegger?

**NICK.** Where'd you hear that?

**TOM.** I didn't hear it; I just imagined it. A lot of these newly rich people are just big bootleggers, you know.

**NICK.** Not Gatsby.

**TOM.** Well, he certainly must have strained himself to get this menagerie together. *(Jethro enters and approaches Gatsby and Daisy on the dance floor.)*

**JETHRO.** Mr. Gatsby, a phone call. *(Gatsby kisses Daisy's hand apologetically, and fades into the crowd. Tom sees this, and wastes no time elapsing the distance between himself and Daisy.)*

**TOM.** I've had enough of this for one night. We're leaving. *(A glittering Starlet brushes past him with a furtive glance, and his gaze lingers in her direction. Daisy observes this.)*

**DAISY.** That's fine Tom, you go ahead. In fact—here. *(She brandishes a tiny gold pencil from her purse.)* Why don't you take my little gold pencil? You can write down any names or numbers you require on your way out.

**TOM.** *(Defensive, in an anger-stifling hiss.)* Get your things. *(Daisy glares at him, but eventually retreats to where Nick is standing to retrieve her fur stole.)*

**DAISY.** Nick, I'm afraid I have to go—Tom's being a bore. You'll send my love to Jay, won't you? *(Nick nods. She kisses him on the cheek appreciatively, then follows Tom out, just as Gatsby re-enters on from the opposite side of the stage, joining Nick. He watches Daisy and Tom as they leave.)*

**GATSBY.** She didn't like it.

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**NICK.** Of course she did.

**GATSBY.** She didn't like it. She didn't have a good time. (*He pauses, walking a few paces from Nick.*) I feel far away from her. It's hard to make her understand.

**NICK.** You mean about the party?

**GATSBY.** The party? Old Sport, the party is unimportant.

**NICK.** (*To the audience.*) He wanted nothing less of Daisy than that she should go to Tom and say: "I never loved you." After she had obliterated three years with that sentence, they could decide upon the more practical measures to be taken. One of them was that, after she was free, they were to go back to Louisville and be married from her house—just as if it were nine years ago.

**GATSBY.** And she doesn't understand. She used to be able to understand. We'd sit for hours...

**NICK.** I wouldn't ask too much of her. You can't repeat the past.

**GATSBY.** Can't repeat the past? Why, of course you can! I'm going to fix everything just the way it was before. She'll see.

**NICK.** (*To the audience.*) He talked a lot about the past, and I gathered that he wanted to recover something, some idea of himself perhaps, that had gone into loving Daisy. His life had been confused and disordered since then, but if he could once return to a certain starting place and go over it all slowly, he could find out what that thing was.

### SCENE 11

*The Valley of Ashes. The town residents are lamenting the tragedy of the extreme heat in an assemblage of handkerchiefs, hand fans, and languid poses. On one side of the stage, in Wilson's auto shop, Wilson and Myrtle are playing a game of cat and mouse in which Wilson is clearly suspicious of his wife, but has yet to find proof that she's had an affair. He watches*

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*her each and every move with eagle eyes. Each time he swoops in to observe her, she swoops out of his gaze and goes to do something else. On the opposite side of the stage, a few chaise lounges represent the Buchanan's living room. Daisy and Jordan are strewn across the couches. Tom clenches and unclenches his fist anxiously just before Gatsby and Nick enter.)*

**TOM.** Mr. Gatsby! *(Tom shakes his hand with well-concealed dislike.)*  
Glad to see you. Nick. *(Nick nods.)*

**DAISY.** Tom, make us a cold drink! *(Tom exits to do just that. Daisy rushes to where Gatsby is seated.)* You know I love you.

**JORDAN.** *(Stony.)* You forget there's a lady present.

**DAISY.** Oh, you kiss Nick, too! *(Daisy begins to dance around, giddy, then remembers the heat and plops down again.)* What'll we do with ourselves this afternoon, and the day after that, and the next thirty years?

**JORDAN.** Don't be morbid. Life starts all over again when it gets crisp in the fall.

**DAISY.** But it's so hot! And everything's so confused...Let's all go to town! *(Daisy locks eyes with Gatsby. They are alone together. Tom returns with the drinks, and clocks this.)*

**DAISY** *(To Gatsby.)* You look so cool. You always look so cool. *(Tom is astounded. He slams his drink on the table.)*

**TOM.** You want to go to town? All right, I'm perfectly willing to go to town.

**GATSBY.** Shall we all go in my car?

**TOM.** I'll drive—I'd like to take your circus wagon for a spin.

**DAISY.** You take Nick and Jordan, we'll follow you in the coupé. *(Lights down on the Buchanan living room as, on the opposite side of the stage, Wilson catches Myrtle in the act of covertly attempting to use the phone, and before she can scream, he locks her in the room above the garage.)*

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*Tom, Jordan, and Nick roll up to Wilson's gas station in Gatsby's yellow car.)*

**TOM.** Did you see that?

**JORDAN.** (*Irritated.*) See what?

**TOM.** I've been making a small investigation of this fellow...

**JORDAN.** (*Matter of fact.*) And you found he was an Oxford man?

**TOM.** An Oxford man! Like hell he is. He wears a pink suit!

**JORDAN.** Nevertheless, he *is* an Oxford man.

**TOM.** Oxford, New Mexico! (*Snorts.*) Or something like that.

**JORDAN.** Listen, Tom, if you're such a snob, then why did you invite him to lunch?

**TOM.** Daisy invited him...She knew him before we were married, from God knows where! (*Yelling, to Wilson.*) Let's have some gas! What do you think we stopped for, to admire the view?

**WILSON.** (*Coughing.*) Sorry, Mr. Buchanan. I've been sick. But I was wondering what you were going to do with your old car.

**TOM.** How do you like this one? Bought it last week. Say, what do you need money for all of a sudden?

**WILSON.** Well you see, my wife and I want to go west—

**TOM.** Your wife!

**WILSON.** She's been talking about it for ten years and now, God-willing, she's going whether she wants to or not. (*The coupé with Daisy and Gatsby passes them with a honk and a peal of Daisy's laughter. The noise alerts Myrtle to look out the upstairs window, and seeing Tom, she begins pounding on it in an attempt to get his attention.*)

**WILSON.** That's why I've been bothering you about selling me that car.

**TOM.** I'll send the car over tomorrow afternoon. (*He tosses Wilson some coins and roars off, leaving him coughing in the dust. The scene shifts to a suite at the Plaza Hotel, where Nick, Jordan, Daisy, Jordan, and Tom have reconvened. All but Tom are seated uneasily. The air is thick, and the*

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*atmosphere tense. The women fan themselves. Music swells from a record player. Even the sound seems sweaty.)* By the way Mr. Gatsby, I understand you're an Oxford man.

**GATSBY.** Well, not exactly.

**TOM.** Oh, yes, I understand you went to Oxford.

**GATSBY.** It was in 1919. I only stayed five months. That's why I can't really call myself an Oxford man. It was an opportunity they gave to some of the officers after the armistice.

**DAISY.** I'll make you a mint julep, Tom. Then you won't seem so stupid to yourself.

**TOM.** Wait a minute. I want to ask Mr. Gatsby one more question.

**GATSBY.** *(Confrontational.)* By all means. *(Gatsby stands, and he and Tom approach one another until their noses are practically touching.)*

**TOM.** What kind of a row are you trying to cause in my house, anyway?

**DAISY.** *You're* causing a row, Tom. Have a little self-control.

**TOM.** Self-control! I suppose the latest thing is to sit back and let Mr. Nobody from nowhere make love to your wife. What's next...you want to go live in a tenement in the trash?

**JORDAN.** We're all rich *here*.

**NICK.** *(To the audience.)* Flushed with impassioned gibberish, he saw himself standing alone on the last barrier of civilization. It was hard not to laugh every time he opened his mouth. The transition from libertine to prig was so complete.

**GATSBY.** Is that so, Old Sport? Well I've got something to tell you...

**DAISY.** Please, don't! Why don't we all go home?

**GATSBY.** *(Exasperated.)* Daisy! *(Tom moves to strike him, but Daisy jumps in front of Gatsby to protect him.)*

**DAISY.** *(To Tom.)* You're revolting. *(To the others.)* Do you know why we left Chicago? I'm surprised they didn't treat you to the story of *that* little spree. Or the one before it.

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**GATSBY.** Daisy, it's all over now. Just tell him the truth, and it's all wiped out forever.

**DAISY.** Why, how could I love him?

**GATSBY.** You never did.

**TOM.** Not the day I married you? Not the day I carried you home to keep your shoes dry?...Daisy...Daisy... *(She trembles, attempting to light a cigarette.)*

**DAISY** *(Dropping the cigarette.)* Oh, you want too much, Jay! I love you now, isn't that enough? You can't help what's past. I did love him once. But I loved you, too.

**GATSBY.** You loved me...TOO?

**DAISY.** I can't say I never loved Tom...it wouldn't be true.

**TOM.** Of course it wouldn't.

**DAISY.** *(Snaps.)* Like it matters to you.

**TOM.** Of course it matters. I'm going to take better care of you from now on.

**GATSBY.** You don't understand, Old Sport. You're not going to take care of her anymore.

**TOM.** Why's that?

**GATSBY.** Daisy's leaving you.

**TOM.** No she's not.

**DAISY.** *(With visible effort.)* I am, though!

**TOM.** Certainly not for a common bootlegger who sold grain alcohol over the counter of drugstores.

**GATSBY.** Your friend Walter Chase certainly wasn't too proud to come on board.

**TOM.** *(Angered.)* You'd have to steal the ring you put on her finger. *(Gatsby wells up with rage.)*

**NICK.** *(To the audience.)* I turned back to Gatsby, and was startled at his

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expression. He looked—and this is said in all contempt for the babbled slander of his garden—as if he had “killed a man.”

**GATSBY.** *(Menacing.)* Now see here, Old Sport...

**DAISY.** Oh, please, let's get out!

**TOM.** You two start on home in Mr. Gatsby's car. I think he realizes this presumptuous little flirtation is over. *(Gatsby and Daisy exit. Tom brandishes a bottle of whiskey.)* You want any of this...Jordan? Nick?...Nick?

**NICK.** I just remembered. Today is my 30th birthday. *(Blackout.)*

### SCENE 12

*Wilson's garage, nighttime. A trembling Myrtle cowers, while Wilson hovers over her, brandishing the telephone.*

**WILSON.** Who is he? Who is the man you've been talking to at all hours on the telephone?

**MYRTLE.** He means nothing to me, I told you—

**WILSON.** You can lie to me, you know, but not to God! *(He grabs her by the hair and presses her face against the window, pointing to the T.J. Eckleburg oculist sign seems to glow outside.)* He's always watching! *(Myrtle escapes his grasp and runs to the opposite side of the room.)* Don't you hide from me woman...Stop! Stop running, you hear! *(She runs down the stairs, and in front of the oncoming traffic. From the window, seeing one about to hit her, Wilson yells.)* STOP! *(The yellow car strikes Myrtle with a screech, then speeds away. Wilson rushes down the stairs to Myrtle's body.)* No, God, NO! *(He retreats up the stairs, sobbing and stumbling. Several passersby rush to Myrtle's side just as Nick, Tom, and Jordan drive up to the scene in Tom's dark blue convertible.)*

**JORDAN.** Careful, up ahead!

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**TOM.** Looks like a wreck. Maybe it'll finally bring Wilson some business. *(The car pulls over by the body, and the passengers alight. Tom elbows through the gathered crowd out of instinctive roughness, but staggers back when he sees the blood-strewn body. Spotlight on the corpse of Myrtle.)*

**CARMICHAEL.** *(Making sympathetic clicking noises.)* What a damn tragedy.

**MCKEE.** Never even stopped the car.

**TOM.** *(A whisper, or a whimper.)* Myrtle. *(Nick moves to grab Tom as he staggers backward in shock.)*

**KOWALSKI.** That yeller car came blazin' through here faster than a streak of lightning. *(Wilson re-enters, still sobbing, with a Bible, and hears this announcement. He sees Tom, connects the two, and together:)*

**WILSON and TOM:** Yellow! *(Tom grabs Wilson by his collar, dragging him away from the crowd that still looks on.)*

**TOM.** Now listen to me Wilson, that car I was driving earlier is NOT mine, do you hear?

**WILSON.** *(Spitting with anger.)* Then just *who-in-the-hell's* was it? *(Blackout.)*

### SCENE 13

*The exterior of Nick & Gatsby's houses. Nick, fuming, enters to find Gatsby pacing nervously. Cicadas chirp loudly.*

**NICK.** What are you doing?

**GATSBY.** Just standing here, old sport. Did you see any trouble on the road?

**NICK.** Yes. *(A beat of silence between them.)*

**GATSBY.** Was she killed?

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**NICK.** Yes.

**GATSBY.** I thought so. I told Daisy I thought so. It's better that the shock should

come all at once. She stood it pretty well. I got to West Egg by a side road and left the car in my garage. I don't think anyone saw us, but of course I can't be sure.

**NICK.** *(To the audience.)* I disliked him so much by this time that I didn't find it necessary to tell him he was wrong.

**GATSBY.** Who was the woman?

**NICK.** Her name was Wilson, her husband owns the garage. How the hell did it happen?

**GATSBY.** Well...*(He pauses, looking at his feet.)* I tried to swing the wheel—

**NICK.** Daisy was driving, wasn't she?

**GATSBY.** *(Hesitating.)* Yes, but of course I'll say I was. She was so anxious when she left, she thought it would steady her to drive—and this woman rushed out at us just as we were passing a car coming the other way. It all happened so fast but it seemed to me that she wanted to speak to us, thought we were somebody she knew. Daisy turned away from the woman toward the other car, but lost her nerve and turned back. The second my hand reached the wheel I felt the shock—it must have killed her instantly.

**NICK.** *It ripped her open—*

**GATSBY.** Don't tell me, Old Sport. Daisy stepped on it. I tried to make her stop, but she couldn't so I pulled on the emergency brake. I drove the rest of the way home. *(Nick shakes his head in disbelief. Then, in a burst of protectiveness.)*

**NICK.** You ought to go away. It's pretty certain they'll trace your car.

**GATSBY.** Go away NOW, Old Sport?

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**NICK.** To Atlantic City for a week, or up to Montreal.

**GATSBY.** I can't leave now, Old Sport.

**NICK.** But what if they—

**GATSBY.** Don't you see? She needs me now...more than she'll ever need me again. (*Gatsby crosses downstage, then pauses. He exhales.*) When I was 15 years old, I found myself in a rowboat in the middle of a brutal storm. As I rowed frantically back to shore, I was astonished to come across a yacht. On that yacht was a man by the name of Dan Cody. He was drunk, Old Sport—always drunk. He fell overboard, and I saved his life. I saved his life, and he made mine. I traveled around the world with him for the rest of that summer, meeting all manner of moneyed people that I never could have even dreamed existed. He taught me nearly everything I know, Old Sport. He showed me that life could be extraordinary, and from that day on I knew I had to make something of myself, *become* someone. I was never a stranger to women, but Daisy...she...she was kind to me...even though she knew I had nothing. The moment I met her I felt as if I didn't need to be *someone* anymore. In her eyes, I already was. So there I was, way off my ambitions, getting deeper in love every minute, and all of a sudden I didn't care. What was the use of doing great things if I could have a better time telling her what I was going to do? (*Nick and Gatsby sit in silence for a few moments.*)

**NICK.** I hate to leave, but it's twelve minutes 'til my train. (*Jethro enters.*)

**JETHRO.** I'm going to drain the pool today, Mr. Gatsby. Leaves will start falling soon, and there's always trouble with the pipes.

**GATSBY.** (*To Jethro.*) Don't do it today. (*To Nick.*) You know Old Sport, I haven't used that pool all summer. I think I'll go for a swim.

**NICK.** I'll call you up.

**GATSBY.** Do, Old Sport. I suppose Daisy'll call, too.

**NICK.** I suppose so.

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**GATSBY.** Well—Goodbye. *(They shake hands. Nick slowly starts to walk away, but then suddenly turns on his heels, flooded with energy and emotion.)*

**NICK.** Jay?

**GATSBY.** Yes?

**NICK.** They're a rotten crowd. You're worth the whole damn bunch of them put together. *(Gatsby at first nods politely, then his face breaks into a radiant smile.)*

**GATSBY.** Thanks, Old Sport. *(Nick exits. An understanding has passed between them. Gatsby prepares to go for a swim. Just as he moves to dive in, three gunshots send his limp body falling into the pool with a sickening splash. Wilson enters, holding a pistol, admiring his work. He lifts the pistol to his own head. Wilson shuts his eyes and squeezes the trigger. His body falls to the ground with a second gunshot, this time to his temple. The music swells as the lights on the scene shift to an eerie green. Slowly but noticeably, the surface of the pool begins to bubble like a witch's cauldron. Suddenly, with an unexpected splash, a flailing arm emerges, grabbing the ledge. A second arm follows suit. Then finally, after what feels like an eternity, a sputtering, gasping Gatsby—bloody and wounded, but very much alive—maroons himself on the concrete. Nick re-appears in a spotlight, addressing the audience.)*

**NICK.** I'm not a liar. But I may have left a few things out. To protect the innocent. And the guilty. *(Blackout.)*

### **END OF ACT ONE**

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