



CHAPTER I

In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since. "Whenever you feel like criticizing any one," he told me, "just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had." He didn't say any more but we've always been unusually communicative in a reserved way, and I understood that he meant a great deal more than that. In consequence I'm inclined to reserve all judgments, a habit that has opened up many curious natures to me and also made me the victim of not a few bores. Only Gatsby, the man who gives his name to this book, was the exception, Gatsby who represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn. If personality is an unbroken series of

successful gestures, then there was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life. This responsiveness was an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness such as I have never found in any other person and which it is not likely I shall ever find again.

My family, the Carraways, have been prominent, well-to-do people in this middle-western city for three generations. The founder of my line was my grandfather's brother who came here in fifty-one, sent a responsiveness to the Civil War and started the wholesale hardware business that my father carries on today.

I participated in the Great War and came back restless. Instead of being the warm center of the world the middle-west now seemed like the ragged edge of the universe - so I decided to go east and learn the bond business. Everybody I knew was in the bond business so I supposed it could support one more single man. All my aunts and uncles talked it over as if they were choosing a prep-school for me and finally said, "Why... ye-es" with very grave, hesitant faces. Father agreed to finance me for a year and after various delays I came east, permanently, I thought, in the spring of twenty-two.

The practical thing was to find rooms in the city but it was a warm season and I had just left a country of wide lawns and friendly trees, so when a young man at the office suggested that we take a house together in a commuting town it sounded like a great idea. He found the house, a weather beaten cardboard bungalow at eighty a month, but at the last minute the firm ordered him to Washington and I went out to the country alone. I had a dog, at least I had him for a few days until he ran away, and an old Dodge and a Finnish woman who made my bed and cooked breakfast and muttered Finnish wisdom to herself over the electric

stove. And so with the sunshine and the great bursts of leaves growing on the Trees, just as things grow in fast movies, I had that familiar conviction that life was beginning over again with the summer.

There was so much to read for one thing and so much fine health to be pulled down out of the young breathing air. I bought a dozen volumes on banking and investment securities and they stood on my shelf in red and gold like new money from the mint, promising to unfold the shining secrets. And I had the high intention of reading many other books besides. I was rather literary in college and now I was going to bring back all such things into my life and become again the "well-rounded man."

It was a matter of chance that I should have rented a house in one of the strangest communities in North America. It was on that slender riotous island which extends itself east of New York and where there are, among other natural curiosities, two unusual formations of land. Twenty miles from the city a pair of enormous eggs, identical in contour and separated only by a bay, jut out into Long Island Sound. They must be a source of perpetual confusion to the gulls that fly overhead.

I lived at West Egg, the less fashionable of the two. My house was squeezed between two huge places that rented for fifteen thousand a season. The one on my right was a colossal affair with a tower on one side and a marble swimming pool and more than forty acres of lawn and garden. It was Gatsby's mansion. Or rather, as I didn't know Mr. Gatsby, it was a mansion inhabited by a gentleman of that name. My own house was an eye-sore, but it was a small eye-sore, and it had been overlooked, so I had a view of the water, a partial view of my neighbor's lawn, and the consoling proximity of millionaires - all for eighty dollars a month.

Across the bay the white palaces of fashionable East Egg glittered along the water, and the history of the summer really begins on the evening I drove over there to have dinner with Tom Buchanans. Daisy was my second cousin once removed and I'd known Tom in college. And just after the war I spent two days with them in Chicago.

Her husband, among various physical accomplishments, had played football at New Haven – a national figure in a way, one of those men who reach such an acute limited excellence at twenty-one that everything afterward savors of anti-climax. His family were enormously wealthy – even in college his freedom with money was a matter for reproach – but now he'd left Chicago and come east in a fashion that rather took your breath away. It was hard to realize that a man in my own generation was so wealthy.

Why they came east I don't know. They had spent a year in France, for no particular reason, and then drifted here. I felt that Tom would drift on forever seeking a little wistfully for some irrecoverable football game.

And so it happened that on a warm windy evening I drove over to East Egg to see two old friends whom I scarcely knew at all. Their house was even more elaborate than I expected, a cheerful red and white Georgian Colonial mansion overlooking the bay. The lawn started at the beach and ran toward the front door for a quarter of a mile. The front was broken by a line of French windows, glowing now with reflected gold, and wide open to the warm windy afternoon, and Tom Buchanan in riding clothes was standing with his legs apart on the front porch.

He had changed since his New Haven years. Now he was a sturdy, straw-haired man of thirty with a