There was music from my neighbor's house through the summer nights. In his blue gardens men and girls came and went like moths among the whisperings and the champagne and the stars. At high tide in the afternoon I watched his guests diving from the tower of his raft, or taking the sun on the hot sand of his beach while his two motor-boats slit the waters of the Sound, drawing aquaplanes over cataracts of foam. On week-ends his Rolls-Royce became an omnibus, bearing parties to and from the city between nine in the morning and long past midnight, while his station wagon scurried like a brisk yellow bug to meet all trains. And on Mondays eight servants, including an extra gardener, toiled all day with mops and scrubbing-brushes and hammers and garden-shears, repairing the ravages of the night before.

Every Friday five crates of oranges and lemons arrived from a fruiteller in New York—every Monday these same oranges and lemons left his back door in a pyramid of pulpless halves. There was a machine in the kitchen which could extract the juice of two hundred oranges in half an hour if a
little button was pressed two hundred times by a butler's thumb.

At least once a fortnight a crop of caterers came down with several hundred feet of canvas and enough colored lights to make a Christmas tree of Gatsby's enormous garden. On buffet tables, garnished with glistening hors d'oeuvre, spiced baked hams crowded against salads of harlequin designs and pastry pigs and turkeys bewitched to a dark gold. In the main hall a bar with a real brass rail was set up, and stocked with gins and liquors and with cordials so long forgotten that most of his female guests were too young to know one from another.

By seven o'clock the orchestra has arrived, no thin five-piece affair, but a whole pitful of oboes and trombones and saxophones and viol and cornets and piccolos, and low and high drums. The last swimmers have come in from the beach now and are dressing up-stairs; the cars from New York are parked five deep in the drive, and already the halls and salons and verandas are gaudy with primary colors, and hair worn in strange new ways, and shawls beyond the dreams of Castile. The bar is in full swing, and floating rounds of cocktails permeate the garden outside, until the air is alive with chatter and laughter, and casual innuendo and introductions forgotten on the spot, and enthusiastic meetings between women who never knew each other's names.

The lights grow brighter as the earth lurches away from the sun, and now the orchestra is playing yellow cocktail music, and the opera of voices pitches a key higher. Laughter is easier minute by minute, spilled with prodigality, tipped out at a cheerful word. The groups change more swiftly, swell with new arrivals, dissolve and form in the same breath; already there are wanderers, confident girls who weave here and there among the stouter and more stable, become for a sharp, joyous moment the center of a group, and then, excited with triumph, glide on through the sea-change of faces and voices and color under the constantly changing light.

Suddenly one of these gypsies, in trembling opal, seizes a cocktail out of the air, dumps it down for courage and, moving her hands like Frisco, dances out alone on the canvas platform. A momentary hush; the orchestra leader varies his rhythm obligingly for her, and there is a burst of chatter at the erroneous news goes around that she is Gilda Gray's understudy from the Folies. The party has begun.

I believe that on the first night I went to Gatsby's house I was one of the few guests who had actually been invited. People were not invited—they went there. They got into automobiles which bore them out to Long Island, and somehow they ended up at Gatsby's door. Once there they were introduced by somebody who knew Gatsby, and after that they conducted themselves according to the rules of behavior associated with an amusement park. Sometimes they came and went without having not Gatsby at all, came for the party with a simplicity of heart that was its own ticket of admission.

I had been actually invited. A chauffeur in a uniform of robin's-egg blue crossed my lawn early that Saturday morning with a surprisingly formal note from his employer: the honor would be entirely Gatsby's, it said, if I would attend his "little party" that night. He had seen me several times, and had intended to call on me long before, but a peculiar combination of circumstances had prevented it—signed Jay Gatsby, in a majestic hand.

Dressed up in white flannels I went over to his lawn a little after seven, and wandered around a little ill at ease among
swirls and eddies of people I didn’t know—though here and there was a face I had noticed on the commuting train. I was immediately struck by the number of young Englishmen doted about, all well dressed, all looking a little hungry, and all talking in low, earnest voices to solid and prosperous Americans. I was sure that they were selling something: bonds or insurance or automobiles. They were at least slyly aware of the easy money in the vicinity and convinced that it was theirs for a few words in the right key.

As soon as I arrived I made an attempt to find my host, but the two or three people of whom I asked his whereabouts stared at me in such an amazed way, and denied so vehemently any knowledge of his movements, that I slunk off in the direction of the cocktail table—the only place in the garden where a single man could linger without looking purposeless and alone.

I was on my way to get roaring drunk from sheer embarrassment when Jordan Baker came out of the house and stood at the head of the marble steps, leaning a little backward and looking with contemptuous interest down into the garden.

Welcome or not, I found it necessary to attach myself to some one before I should begin to address cordial remarks to the passers-by.

“Hello!” roared, advancing toward her. My voice seemed unnaturally loud across the garden.

“I thought you might be here,” she responded absently as I came up. “I remember you lived next door to—”

She held my hand impersonally, as a promise that she’d take care of me in a minute, and gave ear to two girls in twin yellow dresses, who stopped at the foot of the steps.

“Hello!” they cried together. “Sorry you didn’t win.”

That was for the golf tournament. She had lost in the finals the week before.

“You don’t know who we are,” said one of the girls in yellow, “but we met you here about a month ago.”

“You’ve dyed your hair since then,” remarked Jordan, and I started, but the girls had moved casually on and her remark was addressed to the premature moon, produced like the supper, no doubt, out of a caterer’s basket. With Jordan’s slender golden arm resting in mine, we descended the steps and sauntered about the garden. A tray of cocktails floated at us through the twilight, and we sat down at a table with the two girls in yellow and three men, each one introduced to us as Mr. Mumble.

“Do you come to these parties often?” inquired 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 on a chair, and he asked me my name and address—inside of a week I got a package from Croxier’s with a new evening gown in it.”

“Did you keep it?” asked Jordan.

“Sure I did. I was going to wear it tonight, but it was too big in the bust and had to be altered. It was gas blue with lavender beads. Two hundred and sixty-five dollars.”

“There’s something funny about a fellow that’ll do a thing like that,” said the other girl eagerly. “He doesn’t want my trouble with anybody.”

“Who doesn’t?” I inquired.
"Gatsby. Somebody told me—"

The two girls and Jordan leaned together confidentially.
"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. 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 had found little that it was necessary to whisper about in this world.

The first supper—there would be another one after midnight—was now being served, and Jordan invited me to join her own party, who were spread around a table on the other side of the garden. There were three married couples and Jordan's escort, a persistent undergraduate given to violent innuendo, and obviously under the impression that sooner or later Jordan was going to yield him up her person to a greater or lesser degree. Instead of rambling, this party had preserved a dignified homogeneity, and assumed to itself the function of representing the staid nobility of the countryside—East Egg condescending to West Egg, and carefully on guard against its spectroscopic gayery.

"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 undergraduate nodded in a cynical, melancholy way.
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 excitedly around and examined Jordan from head to foot.
"What do you think?" he demanded imperiously.
"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 book-cases and returned with Volume One of the "Stoddard Lectures."
"See?" he cried triumphantly. "It's a bona-fide 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. 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.

There was dancing now on the canvas in the garden; old men pushing young girls backward in eternal graceless circles, superior couples holding each other tortuously, fashionably, and keeping in the corners—and a great number of single girls dancing individually or relieving the orchestra for a moment of the burden of the banjo or the traps. By midnight the hilarity had increased. A celebrated tenor had sung in Italian, and a notorious contralto had sung in jazz, and between the numbers people were doing "stunts" all over the garden, while happy, vacuous bursts of laughter rose toward the summer sky. A pair of stage twins, who turned out to be the girls in yellow, did a baby act in costume, and champagne was served in glasses bigger than finger-bowls. The moon had risen

"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. 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 as far as you wanted to be understood, believed in you as you would like to believe in yourself, and assurred 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 roughneck, a year or two over thirty, whose elaborate formality of speech just missed being absurd. Some time before he introduced himself I'd got a strong impression that he was picking 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. 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."
The nature of Mr. Tostoff's composition eluded me, because just as it began my eyes fell on Gatsby, standing alone on the marble steps and looking from one group to another with approving eyes. His tanned skin was drawn attractively tight on his face and his short hair looked as though it were trimmed every day. I could see nothing sinister about him. I wondered if the fact that he was not drinking helped to set him off from his guests, for it seemed to me that he grew more correct as the fraternal hilarity increased. When the Jazz History of the World was over, girls were putting their heads on men's shoulders in a puppish, convivial way, girls were swooning backward playfully into men's arms, even into groups, knowing that some one would arrest their falls—but no one swooned backward on Gatsby, and no French bob touched Gatsby's shoulder, and no singing quartets were formed with Gatsby's head for one link.

"I beg your pardon."

Gatsby's butler was suddenly standing beside us.

"Miss Baker?" he inquired. "I beg your pardon, but Mr. Gatsby would like to speak to you alone."

"With me?" she exclaimed in surprise.

"Yes, madame."

She got up slowly, raising her eyebrows at me in astonishment, and followed the butler toward the house. I noticed that she wore her evening-dress, all her dresses, like sports clothes—there was a jauntiness about her movements as if she had first learned to walk upon golf courses on clean, crisp mornings.

I was alone and it was almost two. For some time confused and intriguing sounds had issued from a long, many-windowed room which overhung the terrace. Eluding Jordan's undergraduate, who was now engaged in an obstetrical conversation with two chorus girls, and who implored me to join him, I went inside.

The large room was full of people. One of the girls in yellow was playing the piano, and beside her stood a tall, red-haired young lady from a famous chorus, engaged in song. She had drunk a quantity of champagne, and during the course of her song she had decided, ineptly, that everything was very, very sad—she was not only singing, she was weeping too. Whenever there was a pause in the song she filled it with gasping, broken sobbing, and then took up the lyric again in a quavering soprano. The tears coursed down her cheeks—
not freely, however, for when they came into contact with her heavy-beaded eyelashes they assumed an inky color, and pursued the rest of their way in slow black rivulets. A humorous suggestion was made that she sing the notes on her face, wherever she threw up her hands, sink into a chair, and went off into a deep vinous sleep.

"She had a fight with a man who says he's her husband," explained a girl at my elbow.

I looked around. Most of the remaining women were now having fights with men said to be their husbands. Even Jordan's party, the quartet from East Egg, were rent asunder by dissension. One of the men was talking with curious intensity to a young actress, and his wife, after attempting to laugh at the situation in a dignified and indifferent way, broke down entirely and resorted to flank attacks—at intervals she appeared suddenly at his side like an angry diamond, and hissed: "You promised!" into his ear.

The reluctance to go home was not confined to wayward men. The ball was at present occupied by two deplorably sober men and their highly indignant wives. The wives were sympathizing with each other in slightly raised voices.
"Whenever he sees I'm having a good time he wants to go home."
"Never heard anything so selfish in my life."
"We're always the first ones to leave."
"So are we."
"Well, we're almost the last tonight," said one of the men sheepishly. "The orchestra left half an hour ago."

In spite of this wives' agreement that such malevolence was beyond credibility, the dispute ended in a short struggle, and both wives were lifted, kicking, into the night.

As I waited for my hat in the hall the door of the library opened and Jordan Baker and Gatsby came out together. He was saying some last word to her, but the eagerness in his manner tightened abruptly into formality as several people approached him to say good-by.

Jordan's party were calling impatiently to her from the porch, but she lingered for a moment to shake hands.

"I've just heard the most amazing thing," she whispered.
"How long were we in there?"
"Why, about an hour."
"It was... simply amazing," she repeated abstractedly.
"But I swore I wouldn't tell it and here I am tantalizing you." She yawned gracefully in my face. "Please come and see me... Phone book... Under the name of Mrs. Sigourney Howard... My aunt..." She was hurrying off as she talked—her brown hand waved a jaunty salute as she melted into her party at the door.

Rather ashamed that on my first appearance I had stayed so late, I joined the last of Gatsby's guests, who were clustered around him. I wanted to explain that I'd hunted for him early in the evening and to apologize for not having known him in the garden.
nized first the unusual quality of wonder, and then the
man—it was the late patron of Gatsby's library.

"How'd it happen?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I know nothing whatever about mechanics," he said
decisively.

"But how did it happen? Did you run into the wall?"

"Don't ask me," said Owl Eyes, washing his hands of the
whole matter. "I know very little about driving—next to
nothing. It happened, and that's all I know."

"Well, if you're a poor driver you oughtn't to try driving at
night."

"But I wasn't even trying," he explained indignanty. "I
wasn't even trying."

An awed hush fell upon the bystanders.

"Do you want to confess suicide?"

"You're lucky it was just a wheel! A bad driver and not
even trying!"

"You don't understand," explained the criminal. "I wasn't
driving. There's another man in the car."

The shock that followed this declaration found voice in a
sustained "Ah-h-h!" as the door of the coupé swung slowly
open. The crowd—it was now a crowd—stepped back invol-
untarily, and when the door had opened wide there was a
ghostly pause. Then, very gradually, part by part, a pale, dan-
gling individual stepped out of the wreck, pawing tentatively
at the ground with a large uncertain dancing shoe.

Blinded by the glare of the headlights and confused by the
incessant groaning of the horns, the apparition stood sway-
ing for a moment before he perceived the man in the duster.

"What's matter?" he inquired calmly. "Did we run outa
gas?"

"Look!"

Half a dozen fingers pointed at the amputated wheel—he
stared at it for a moment, and then looked upward as though
he suspected that it had dropped from the sky.

"It came off," some one explained.

He nodded.

"At first I din' notice we'd stopped."

A pause. Then, taking a long breath and straightening his
shoulders, he remarked in a determined voice:

"Wonder if tell me where there's a gas-line station?"

At least a dozen men, some of them a little better off than
he was explained to him that wheel and car were no longer
joined by any physical bond.

"Back out," he suggested after a moment. "Put her in
reverse."

"Bu' the wheel's off!"

He hesitated.

"No harm in trying," he said.

The caterwauling horns had reached a crescendo and I
turned away and cut across the lawn toward home. I glanced
back once. A wafer of a moon was shining over Gatsby's
house, making the night fine as before, and surviving the
laughter and the sound of his still glowing garden. A sudden
emptiness seemed to flow now from the windows and the
great doors, endowing with complete isolation the figure of
the host, who stood on the porch, his hand up in a formal
gesture of farewell.

Reading over what I have written so far, I see I have given
the impression that the events of three nights several weeks
apart were all that absorbed me. On the contrary, they were
merely casual events in a crowded summer, and, until much
time for a solitary restaurant dinner—young clerks in the
dusk, wasting the most poignant moments of night and
life.

Again at eight o'clock, when the dusk lanes of the Forties
were five deep with throbbing taxicabs, bound for the
theater district, I felt a sinking in my heart. Ferns leaned together
in the taxis as they waited, and voices sang, and there
was laughter from unheard jokes, and lighted cigarettes
outlined unintelligible gestures inside. Imagining that I, too, was
hurrying toward gayety and sharing their intimate excitement,
I wished them well.

For a while I lost sight of Jordan Baker, and then in mid-
summer I found her again. At first I was flattered to go
places with her, because she was a golf champion, and every-
one knew her name. Then it was something more. I wasn't
actually in love, but I felt a sort of wonder and curiosity. The bored
haughty face that she turned to the world concealed some-
thing—most affections conceal something, even
though they don't in the beginning—and one day I found
what it was. When we were on a house-party together up in
Warwick, she left a borrowed car out in the rain with the top
down, and then lied about it—and suddenly I remembered
the story about her that had eluded me that night at Daisy's.
At her first big golf tournament there was a row that nearly
reached the newspapers—a suggestion that she had moved her
ball from a bad lie in the semi-final round. The thing
approached the proportions of a scandal—then died away. A
caddy retracted his statement, and the only other witness
admitted that he might have been mistaken. The incident and
the name had remained together in my mind.

Jordan Baker instinctively avoided clever, shrewd men,
and now I saw that it was because she felt safer on a plane
where any divergence from a code would be thought impossible. She was incurably dishonest. She wasn’t able to endure being at a disadvantage and, given this unwillingness, I suppose she had begun dealing in subterfuges when she was very young in order to keep that cool, insolent smile turned to the world and yet satisfy the demands of her hard, jaunty body.

It made no difference to me. Dishonesty in a woman is a thing you never blame deeply—I was casually sorry, and then I forgot. It was on that same house-party that we had a curious conversation about driving a car. It started because she passed so close to some workmen that our fender flicked a button on one man’s coat.

“You’re a rotten driver,” I protested. “Either you ought to be more careful, or you oughtn’t to drive at all.”

“I am careful.”

“No, you’re not.”

“Well, other people are,” she said lightly.

“What’s that got to do with it?”

“They’ll keep out of my way,” she insisted. “It takes two to make an accident.”

“Suppose you met somebody just as careless as yourself.”

“I hope I never will,” she answered. “I hate careless people. That’s why I like you.”

Her gray, sun-strained eyes stared straight ahead, but she had deliberately shifted our relations, and for a moment I thought I loved her. But I am slow-thinking and full of interior rules that act as brakes on my desires, and I knew that first I had to get myself definitely out of that tangle back home. I’d been writing letters once a week and signing them: “Love, Nick,” and all I could think of was how, when that certain girl played tennis, a faint mustache of perspiration appeared on her upper lip. Nevertheless there was a vague understanding that had to be tactfully broken off before I was free.

Every onesuspects himself of at least one of the cardinal virtues, and this is mine: I am one of the few honest people that I have ever known.