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Tales of the Jazz Age

Written by F. Scott Fitzgerald

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Tales of the Jazz Age

F. Scott Fitzgerald



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A Table of Contents

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The Jelly Bean

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This is a Southern story, with the scene laid in the small city of Tarleton, Georgia. I have a profound affection for Tarleton, but somehow whenever I write a story about it I receive letters from all over the South denouncing me in no uncertain terms. 'The Jelly Bean', published in The Metropolitan, drew its full share of these admonitory notes.

It was written under strange circumstances shortly after my first novel was published, and, moreover, it was the first story in which I had a collaborator. For, finding that I was unable to manage the crap-shooting episode, I turned it over to my wife, who, as a Southern girl, was presumably an expert on the technique and terminology of that great sectional pastime.

The Camel's Back

24

I suppose that of all the stories I have ever written this one cost me the least travail and perhaps gave me the most amusement. As to the labour involved, it was written during one day in the city of New Orleans, with the express purpose of buying a platinum-and-diamond wristwatch which cost six hundred dollars. I began it at seven in the morning and finished it at two o'clock the same night. It was published in the Saturday Evening Post in 1920, and later included in the O. Henry Memorial Collection for the same year. I like it least of all the stories in this volume.

My amusement was derived from the fact that the camel part of the story is literally true; in fact, I have a standing engagement with the gentleman involved to attend the next fancy-dress party to which we are mutually invited, attired as the latter part of the camel – this as a sort of atonement for being his historian.

May Day

51

This somewhat unpleasant tale, published as a novelette in the Smart Set in July, 1920, relates a series of events which took place in the spring of the previous year. Each of the three events made a

great impression upon me. In life they were unrelated, except by the general hysteria of that spring which inaugurated the Age of Jazz, but in my story I have tried, unsuccessfully I fear, to weave them into a pattern – a pattern which would give the effect of those months in New York as they appeared to at least one member of what was then the younger generation.

Porcelain and Pink

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“And do you write for any other magazines?” enquired the young lady.

“Oh, yes,” I assured her. “I’ve had some stories and plays in the *Smart Set*, for instance—”

The young lady shivered.

“The *Smart Set*!” she exclaimed. “How can you? Why, they publish stuff about girls in blue bath tubs, and silly things like that!”

And I had the magnificent joy of telling her that she was referring to *Porcelain and Pink*, which had appeared there several months before.

Fantasies

The Diamond as Big as the Ritz

115

These next stories are written in what, were I of imposing stature, I should call my “second manner”. ‘The Diamond as Big as the Ritz’, which appeared last summer in the *Smart Set*, was designed utterly for my own amusement. I was in that familiar mood characterized by a perfect craving for luxury, and the story began as an attempt to feed that craving on imaginary foods.

One well-known critic has been pleased to like this extravaganza better than anything I have written. Personally I prefer ‘The Off Shore Pirate’. But, to tamper slightly with Lincoln: if you like this sort of thing, this, possibly, is the sort of thing you’ll like.

The Curious Case of Benjamin Button

154

This story was inspired by a remark of Mark Twain’s to the effect that it was a pity that the best part of life came at the beginning and the worst part at the end. By trying the experiment upon only one man in a perfectly normal world I have scarcely given his idea a fair trial. Several weeks after completing it, I discovered an almost identical plot in Samuel Butler’s *Notebooks*.

The story was published in *Collier’s* last summer and provoked this startling letter from an anonymous admirer in Cincinnati:

“Sir—

I have read the story Benjamin Button in Collier's and I wish to say that as a short-story writer you would make a good lunatic. I have seen many pieces of cheese in my life but of all the pieces of cheese I have ever seen you are the biggest piece. I hate to waste a piece of stationery on you but I will.”

Tarquin of Cheapside

180

Written almost six years ago, this story is a product of undergraduate days at Princeton. Considerably revised, it was published in the Smart Set in 1921. At the time of its conception I had but one idea — to be a poet — and the fact that I was interested in the ring of every phrase, that I dreaded the obvious in prose if not in plot, shows throughout. Probably the peculiar affection I feel for it depends more upon its age than upon any intrinsic merit.

“O Russet Witch!”

188

When this was written I had just completed the first draft of my second novel, and a natural reaction made me revel in a story wherein none of the characters need be taken seriously. And I'm afraid that I was somewhat carried away by the feeling that there was no ordered scheme to which I must conform. After due consideration, however, I have decided to let it stand as it is, although the reader may find himself somewhat puzzled at the time element. I had best say that however the years may have dealt with Merlin Grainger, I myself was thinking always in the present.

It was published in The Metropolitan.

Unclassified Masterpieces

The Lees of Happiness

221

Of this story I can say that it came to me in an irresistible form, crying to be written. It will be accused perhaps of being a mere piece of sentimentality, but, as I saw it, it was a great deal more. If, therefore, it lacks the ring of sincerity, or even of tragedy, the fault rests not with the theme but with my handling of it.

It appeared in the Chicago Tribune, and later obtained, I believe, the quadruple gold laurel leaf or some such encomium from one of the anthologists who at present swarm among us. The gentleman I refer to runs as a rule to stark melodramas with a volcano or the ghost of John Paul Jones in the role of Nemesis, melodramas carefully disguised by early paragraphs in Jamesian

manner which hint dark and subtle complexities to follow. On this order:

“The case of Shaw McPhee, curiously enough, had no bearing on the almost incredible attitude of Martin Sulo. This is parenthetical and, to at least three observers, whose names for the present I must conceal, it seems improbable, etc., etc., etc.”, until the poor rat of fiction is at last forced out into the open and the melodrama begins.

Mr Icky

242

This has the distinction of being the only magazine piece ever written in a New York hotel. The business was done in a bedroom in the Knickerbocker, and shortly afterward that memorable hostelry closed its doors for ever.

When a fitting period of mourning had elapsed it was published in the Smart Set.

Jemina, the Mountain Girl

250

Written, like ‘Tarquin of Cheapside’, while I was at Princeton, this sketch was published years later in Vanity Fair. For its technique I must apologize to Mr Stephen Leacock.

I have laughed over it a great deal, especially when I first wrote it, but I can laugh over it no longer. Still, as other people tell me it is amusing, I include it here. It seems to me worth preserving a few years – at least until the ennui of changing fashions suppresses me, my books and it together.

With due apologies for this impossible Table of Contents, I tender these tales of the Jazz Age into the hands of those who read as they run and run as they read.



F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896–1940)



Edward Fitzgerald,
Fitzgerald's father



Mary McQuillan Fitzgerald,
Fitzgerald's mother



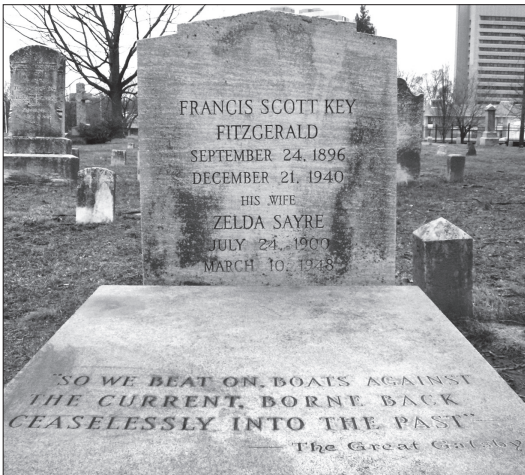
Ginevra King



Zelda Fitzgerald



The Fitzgeralds' house in Montgomery, Alabama



The Fitzgeralds' grave in Rockville, Maryland,
inscribed with the closing line from *The Great Gatsby*

TALES OF THE JAZZ AGE



By the Author of
THE BEAUTIFUL
AND DAMNED
F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

The original cover illustration for
Tales of the Jazz Age

Tales of the Jazz Age

QUITE INAPPROPRIATELY
TO MY MOTHER

My Last Flappers

The Jelly Bean

I

JIM POWELL WAS A JELLY BEAN. Much as I desire to make him an appealing character, I feel that it would be unscrupulous to deceive you on that point. He was a bred-in-the-bone, dyed-in-the-wool, ninety-nine-three-quarters-per-cent jelly bean and he grew lazily all during jelly-bean season, which is every season, down in the land of the jelly beans well below the Mason-Dixon line.

Now if you call a Memphis man a jelly bean he will quite possibly pull a long sinewy rope from his hip pocket and hang you to a convenient telegraph pole. If you call a New Orleans man a jelly bean he will probably grin and ask you who is taking your girl to the Mardi Gras ball. The particular jelly-bean patch which produced the protagonist of this history lies somewhere between the two – a little city of forty thousand that has dozed sleepily for forty thousand years in southern Georgia, occasionally stirring in its slumbers and muttering something about a war that took place sometime, somewhere, and that everyone else has forgotten long ago.

Jim was a jelly bean. I write that again because it has such a pleasant sound – rather like the beginning of a fairy story – as if Jim were nice. It somehow gives me a picture of him with a round, appetizing face and all sorts of leaves and vegetables growing out of his cap. But Jim was long and thin and bent at the waist from stooping over pool tables, and he was what might have been known in the indiscriminating North as a corner loafer. “Jelly bean” is the name throughout the undissolved Confederacy for one who spends his life conjugating the verb to idle in the first person singular – I am idling, I have idled, I will idle.

Jim was born in a white house on a green corner. It had four weather-beaten pillars in front and a great amount of lattice-work in the rear that

made a cheerful criss-cross background for a flowery sun-drenched lawn. Originally the dwellers in the white house had owned the ground next door and next door to that and next door to that, but this had been so long ago that even Jim's father scarcely remembered it. He had, in fact, thought it a matter of so little moment that when he was dying from a pistol wound got in a brawl he neglected even to tell little Jim, who was five years old and miserably frightened.

The white house became a boarding house run by a tight-lipped lady from Macon whom Jim called Aunt Mamie and detested with all his soul.

He became fifteen, went to high school, wore his hair in black snarls and was afraid of girls. He hated his home where four women and one old man prolonged an interminable chatter from summer to summer about what lots the Powell place had originally included and what sort of flowers would be out next. Sometimes the parents of little girls in town, remembering Jim's mother and fancying a resemblance in the dark eyes and hair, invited him to parties, but parties made him shy and he much preferred sitting on a disconnected axle in Tilly's Garage, rolling the bones* or exploring his mouth endlessly with a long straw. For pocket money, he picked up odd jobs, and it was due to this that he stopped going to parties. At his third party little Marjorie Haight had whispered indiscreetly and within hearing distance that he was a boy who brought the groceries sometimes. So instead of the two-step and polka, Jim had learnt to throw any number he desired on the dice and had listened to spicy tales of all the shootings that had occurred in the surrounding country during the past fifty years.

He became eighteen. The War broke out and he enlisted as a gob and polished brass in the Charleston Navy yard for a year. Then, by way of variety, he went north and polished brass in the Brooklyn Navy yard for a year.

When the War was over he came home. He was twenty-one, his trousers were too short and too tight. His buttoned shoes were long and narrow. His tie was an alarming conspiracy of purple and pink marvellously scrolled, and over it were two blue eyes, faded like a piece of very good old cloth long exposed to the sun.

In the twilight of one April evening when a soft grey had drifted down along the cotton fields and over the sultry town, he was a vague figure

leaning against a board fence, whistling and gazing at the moon's rim above the lights of Jackson Street. His mind was working persistently on a problem that had held his attention for an hour. The jelly bean had been invited to a party.

Back in the days when all the boys had detested all the girls, Clark Darrow and Jim had sat side by side in school. But, while Jim's social aspirations had died in the oily air of the garage, Clark had alternately fallen in and out of love, gone to college, taken to drink, given it up and, in short, become one of the best beaux of the town. Nevertheless Clark and Jim had retained a friendship that, though casual, was perfectly definite. That afternoon Clark's ancient Ford had slowed up beside Jim, who was on the sidewalk and, out of a clear sky, Clark had invited him to a party at the country club. The impulse that made him do this was no stranger than the impulse which made Jim accept. The latter was probably an unconscious ennui, a half-frightened sense of adventure. And now Jim was soberly thinking it over.

He began to sing, drumming his long foot idly on a stone block in the sidewalk till it wobbled up and down in time to the low throaty

“One mile from home in jelly-bean town,
Lives Jeanne, the jelly-bean queen.
She loves her dice and treats 'em nice;
No dice would treat her mean.”

He broke off and agitated the sidewalk to a bumpy gallop.

“Daggone!” he muttered, half aloud.

They would all be there – the old crowd, the crowd to which, by right of the white house, sold long since, and the portrait of the officer in grey over the mantel, Jim should have belonged. But that crowd had grown up together into a tight little set as gradually as the girls' dresses had lengthened inch by inch, as definitely as the boys' trousers had dropped suddenly to their ankles. And to that society of first names and dead puppy loves Jim was an outsider – a running mate of poor whites. Most of the men knew him, condescendingly; he tipped his hat to three or four girls. That was all.

When the dusk had thickened into a blue setting for the moon, he walked through the hot, pleasantly pungent town to Jackson Street. The stores were closing and the last shoppers were drifting homeward, as if borne on the dreamy revolution of a slow merry-go-round. A street fair farther down made a brilliant alley of vari-coloured booths and contributed a blend of music to the night – an oriental dance on a calliope, a melancholy bugle in front of a freak show, a cheerful rendition of ‘Back Home in Tennessee’* on a hand organ.

The jelly bean stopped in a store and bought a collar. Then he sauntered along towards Soda Sam’s, where he found the usual three or four cars of a summer evening parked in front and the little darkies running back and forth with sundaes and lemonades.

“Hello, Jim.”

It was a voice at his elbow – Joe Ewing sitting in an automobile with Marylyn Wade. Nancy Lamar and a strange man were in the back seat.

The jelly bean tipped his hat quickly.

“Hi, Ben...” Then, after an almost imperceptible pause: “How y’all?”

Passing, he ambled on towards the garage where he had a room upstairs. His “How y’all” had been said to Nancy Lamar, to whom he had not spoken in fifteen years.

Nancy had a mouth like a remembered kiss and shadowy eyes and blue-black hair inherited from her mother who had been born in Budapest. Jim passed her often in the street, walking small-boy fashion with her hands in her pockets, and he knew that with her inseparable Sally Carrol Hopper she had left a trail of broken hearts from Atlanta to New Orleans.

For a few fleeting moments Jim wished he could dance. Then he laughed and as he reached his door began to sing softly to himself:

“Her jelly roll can twist your soul,
Her eyes are big and brown,
She’s the queen of the queens of the jelly beans –
My Jeanne of jelly-bean town.”

II

AT NINE THIRTY Jim and Clark met in front of Soda Sam's and started for the Country Club in Clark's Ford.

"Jim," asked Clark casually, as they rattled through the jasmine-scented night, "how do you keep alive?"

The jelly bean paused, considered.

"Well," he said finally, "I got a room over Tilly's garage. I help him some with the cars in the afternoon an' he gives it to me free. Sometimes I drive one of his taxis and pick up a little that-a-way. I get fed up doin' that regular though."

"That all?"

"Well, when there's a lot of work I help him by the day – Saturdays usually – and then there's one main source of revenue I don't generally mention. Maybe you don't recollect I'm about the champion crap-shooter of this town. They make me shoot from a cup now, because once I get the feel of a pair of dice they just roll for me."

Clark grinned appreciatively.

"I never could learn to set 'em so's they'd do what I wanted. Wish you'd shoot with Nancy Lamar some day and take all her money away from her. She will roll 'em with the boys and she loses more than her daddy can afford to give her. I happen to know she sold a good ring last month to pay a debt."

The jelly bean was non-committal.

"The white house on Elm Street still belong to you?"

Jim shook his head.

"Sold. Got a pretty good price, seein' it wasn't in a good part of town no more. Lawyer told me to put it into Liberty bonds.* But Aunt Mamie got so she didn't have no sense, so it takes all the interest to keep her up at Great Farms Sanitarium."

"Hm."

"I got an old uncle upstate an' I reckon I kin go up there if ever I get sure enough pore. Nice farm, but not enough niggers around to work it. He's asked me to come up and help him, but I don't guess I'd take much to it. Too doggone lonesome—" He broke off suddenly. "Clark, I want to tell you I'm much obliged to you for askin' me out, but I'd be

a lot happier if you'd just stop the car right here an' let me walk back into town."

"Shucks!" Clark grunted. "Do you good to step out. You don't have to dance – just get out there on the floor and shake."

"Hold on," exclaimed Jim uneasily. "Don't you go leadin' me up to any girls and leavin' me there so I'll have to dance with 'em."

Clark laughed.

"'Cause," continued Jim desperately, "without you swear you won't do that I'm a-goin' to get out right here an' my good legs goin' carry me back to Jackson Street."

They agreed after some argument that Jim, unmolested by females, was to view the spectacle from a secluded settee in the corner where Clark would join him whenever he wasn't dancing.

So ten o'clock found the jelly bean with his legs crossed and his arms conservatively folded, trying to look casually at home and politely uninterested in the dancers. At heart he was torn between overwhelming self-consciousness and an intense curiosity as to all that went on around him. He saw the girls emerge one by one from the dressing room, stretching and pluming themselves like bright birds, smiling over their powdered shoulders at the chaperones, casting a quick glance around to take in the room and, simultaneously, the room's reaction to their entrance – and then, again like birds, alighting and nestling in the sober arms of their waiting escorts. Sally Carrol Hopper, blonde and lazy-eyed, appeared clad in her favourite pink and blinking like an awakened rose. Marjorie Haight, Marylyn Wade, Harriet Cary, all the girls he had seen loitering down Jackson Street by noon, now, curled and brilliantined and delicately tinted for the overhead lights, were miraculously strange Dresden figures* of pink and blue and red and gold, fresh from the shop and not yet fully dried.

He had been there half an hour, totally uncheered by Clark's jovial visits which were each one accompanied by a "Hello, old boy, how you making out?" and a slap at his knee. A dozen males had spoken to him or stopped for a moment beside him, but he knew that they were each one surprised at finding him there and fancied that one or two were even slightly resentful. But at half-past ten his embarrassment suddenly left him and a pull of breathless interest took