A Constant Love (based on *The Great Gatsby* Chapter 7)

Dramatic personae [pər-sō′niː]

Nick Carraway: a 30-year-old bond salesman; Yale alumnus

Jordan Baker: a professional golfer

Jay Gatsby: a man trapped inside his own fantasies

Tom Buchanan: a millionaire vulgarian

Daisy Buchanan: a shallow but vivacious young wife and mother

A waiter

Locale: a suite in the Plaza Hotel, New York City

Time: the hottest day in 1922, which happens to be Nick’s birthday

Jordan (*whispering respectfully in an ironic tone*): It’s a swell suite.

*(Everybody laughs)*

Daisy *(in a commanding tone without turning around*): Open another window.

Tom: There aren’t any more.

Daisy: Well, we’d better telephone for an axe--.

Tom *(impatiently)*: The thing to do is to forget about the heat. You make it ten times worse by

crabbing about it. *(He unrolls the bottle of whiskey from the towel and puts it on the table.)*

Gatsby *(chivalrously*): Why not let her alone, old sport? You’re the one that wanted to

 come to town.

*(There is a moment of silence. The telephone book slips from its nail and splashes to the floor.)*

Jordan *(whispers)*: Excuse me.

*(This time nobody laughs.)*

Nick: I’ll pick it up.

Gatsby: I’ve got it*. (examines the parted string and mutters)* Hum! *(and tosses the book on a chair.)*

Tom *(sharply)*: That’s a great expression of yours, isn’t it?

Gatsby: What is?

Tom: All this “old sport” business. Where’d you pick that up?

Daisy *(turning around from the mirror)*: Now see here, Tom. If you’re going to make personal

 remarks I won’t stay here a minute. Call up and order some ice for the mint julep.

*(As Tom takes up the receiver the compressed heat explodes into sound with the portentous chords of Mendelssohn’s Wedding March that is played in the ballroom below.)*

Jordan *(crying dismally)*: Imagine marrying anybody in this heat!

Daisy: Still—I was married in the middle of June . . . Louisville in June! Somebody fainted. Who

 was it fainted, Tom?

Tom *(tersely*): Biloxi.

Daisy: A man named Biloxi. “blocks” Biloxi, and he made boxes—that’s a fact—and he was

 from Biloxi, Tennessee.

Jordan: They carried him into my house because we lived just two doors from the church. And

he stayed three weeks, until Daddy told him he had to get out. The day after he left Daddy died. *(after a moment she adds as if she might have sounded irreverent)* There wasn’t any connection.

Nick: I used to know a Bill Biloxi from Memphis.

Tom: That was his cousin. I knew his whole family history before he left. He gave me an

 aluminum putter that I use to-day.

*(The music dies down as the ceremony begins and now a long cheer floats in at the window, followed by intermittent cries of “Yea-ea-ea!” and finally by a burst of jazz as the dancing begins.)*

Daisy: We’re getting old . . . If we were young we’d rise and dance.

Jordan *(in a warning tone to Daisy)*: Remember Biloxi. *(to Tom)* Where’d you know him, Tom?

Tom *(concentrating with an effort):* Biloxi? I didn’t know him. He was a friend of Daisy’s.

Daisy: He was not. I’d never seen him before. He came down in the private car.

Tom: Well, he said he knew you. He said he was raised in Louisville. Asa Bird brought him

 around at the last minute and asked if we had room for him.

Jordan *(with a knowing smile)*: He was probably bumming his way home. He told me he was

 president of your class at Yale.

Tom and Nick *(looking at each other blankly)*: Biloxi?

Nick: First place, we didn’t have any president . . .

*(Gatsby’s foot beats a short, restless tattoo and Tom eyes him suddenly.)*

Tom: By the way, Mr. Gatsby, I understand you’re an Oxford man.

Gatsby *(measuring his words*): Not exactly.

Tom: Oh, yes, I understand you went to Oxford.

Gatsby: Yes — I went there.

*(A pause)*

Tom *(incredulous and contemptuous)*: You must have gone there about the time Biloxi went to

 New Haven.

*(Another pause. A waiter knocks and comes in with crushed mint and ice but, the silence is unbroken by his “thank you” and the soft closing of the door. This tremendous detail is to be cleared up at last.)*

Gatsby: I told you I went there.

Tom: I heard you, but I’d like to know when.

Gatsby: It was in nineteen-nineteen, I only stayed five months. That’s why I can’t really call

 myself an Oxford man.

*(Tom glances around to see if the others mirror his unbelief. But they avoid looking at Gatsby.)*

Gatsby: It was an opportunity they gave to some of the officers after the Armistice. We could go

 to any of the universities in England or France.

*(Nick seems to feel a sudden urge to get up and slap Gatsby on the back as a gesture of renewed complete faith in Gatsby.)*

Daisy *(rises, smiling faintly, and goes to the table)*: Open the whiskey, Tom, and I’ll make you a

 mint julep. Then you won’t seem so stupid to yourself. . . . Look at the mint!

Tom *(snapping)*: Wait a minute! I want to ask Mr. Gatsby one more question.

Gatsby *(politely):* Go on.

Tom: What kind of a row are you trying to cause in my house anyhow?

*(Now it is open at last and Gatsby seems content.)*

Daisy *(looking desperately from one to the other):* He isn’t causing a row. You’re causing a row.

 Please have a little self-control.

Tom *(repeating it incredulously)*: Self-control! I suppose the latest thing is to sit back and let Mr.

Nobody from Nowhere make love to your wife. Well, if that’s the idea you can count me out. . . . Nowadays people begin by sneering at family life and family institutions, and next they’ll throw everything overboard and have intermarriage between black and white. *(Flushed with his impassioned gibberish, he now sees himself standing alone on the last barrier of civilization.)*

Jordan *(murmuring)*: We’re all white here.

Tom: I know I’m not very popular. I don’t give big parties. I suppose you’ve got to make your

 house into a pigsty in order to have any friends — in the modern world.

*(Nick seems angry but also tempted to laugh whenever Tom opens his mouth. He finds the transition from libertine to prig to be so absurd and asinine.)*

Gatsby: I’ve got something to tell you, old sport ——.

Daisy *(helplessly interrupting)*: Please don’t! Please let’s all go home. Why don’t we all go

 home?

Nick: That’s a good idea. Come on, Tom. Nobody wants a drink.

Tom: I want to know what Mr. Gatsby has to tell me.

Gatsby: Your wife doesn’t love you. She’s never loved you. She loves me.

Tom *(exclaiming automatically)*: You must be crazy!

Gatsby *(springing to his feet, vivid with excitement):* She never loved you, do you hear? She

 only married you because I was poor and she was tired of waiting for me. It was a

terrible mistake, but in her heart she never loved anyone except me!

*(At this point Jordan and Nick try to go, but Tom and Gatsby insist with competitive firmness that they remain — as though neither of them has anything to conceal and it will be a privilege to partake vicariously of their emotions.)*

Tom *(unsuccessfully groping the paternal tone*): Sit down, Daisy. What’s been going on? I want

 to hear all about it.

Gatsby: I told you what’s been going on. Going on for five years — and you didn’t know.

Tom *(turning sharply to Daisy)*: You’ve been seeing this fellow for five years?

Gatsby: Not seeing. No, we couldn’t meet. But both of us loved each other all that time, old

 sport, and you didn’t know. I used to laugh sometimes . . . *(with no laughter in his eyes)*

 to think that you didn’t know.

Tom *(tapping his thick fingers together like a clergyman and leaning back in his chair)*: Oh —

that’s all. *(then he explodes)* You’re crazy! I can’t speak about what happened five years ago, because I didn’t know Daisy then — and I’ll be damned if I see how you got within a mile of her unless you brought the groceries to the back door. But all the rest of that’s a God damned lie. Daisy loved me when she married me and she loves me now.

Gatsby *(shaking his head)*: No.

Tom *(nodding sagely)*: She does, though. The trouble is that sometimes she gets foolish ideas in

her head and doesn’t know what she’s doing. And what’s more, I love Daisy too. Once in a while I go off on a spree and make a fool of myself, but I always come back, and in my heart I love her all the time.

Daisy: You’re revolting*. (turns to Nick and her voice, dropping an octave lower, fills the room*

*with thrilling scorn)* Do you know why we left Chicago? I’m surprised that they didn’t treat you to the story of that little spree.

Gatsby *(walks over and stands beside Daisy.)*: Daisy, that’s all over now. It doesn’t matter any more. Just tell him the truth — that you never loved him — and it’s all wiped out

 forever.

Daisy *(looking at Gatsby blindly):* Why — how could I love him — possibly?

Gatsby: You never loved him.

(*hesitantly, Daisy’s eyes falls on Jordan and Nick with a sort of appeal, as though she realizes at last what she was doing — and as though she never, all along, intended doing anything at all.)*

Daisy (*with perceptible reluctance*): I never loved him.

Tom (*demandingly*): Not at Kapiolani?

Daisy: No.

*(From the ballroom beneath, muffled and suffocating chords are drifting up on hot waves of air.)*

Tom *(with a husky tenderness in his tone*): Not that day I carried you down from the Punch

 Bowl to keep your shoes dry? . . . Daisy?

Daisy *(with a cold voice from which the rancor has already started to dissipate*): *(to Tom)* Please

don’t. *(looking at Gatsby)* There, Jay. *(she tries to light a cigarette but her hand is trembling. Suddenly she throws the cigarette and the burning match on the carpet.)* Oh, you want too much! I love you now — isn’t that enough? I can’t help what’s past*. (she begins to sob.)* I did love him once — but I loved you too.

Gatsby (*opens his eyes and then closes them*): You loved me too?

Tom (*savagely*): Even that’s a lie. She didn’t know you were alive. Why — there’re things

 between Daisy and me that you’ll never know, things that neither of us can ever forget.

*(Tom’s words seem to bite physically into Gatsby.)*

Gatsby: I want to speak to Daisy alone. She’s all excited now ——

Daisy *(in a pitiful voice)*: Even alone I can’t say I never loved Tom. It wouldn’t be true.

Tom: Of course it wouldn’t.

Daisy *(turning to her husband)*: As if it mattered to you.

Tom: Of course it matters. I’m going to take better care of you from now on.

Gatsby *(with a touch of panic)*: You don’t understand. You’re not going to take care of her

 anymore.

Tom *(opens his eyes wide and laughs. He can afford to control himself now):* Why’s that?

Gatsby: Daisy’s leaving you.

Tom: Nonsense.

Daisy *(with a visible effort*): I am, though.

Tom (*bearing down on Gatsby with his words*): She’s not leaving me! Certainly not for a

 common swindler who’d have to steal the ring he put on her finger.

Daisy: I won’t stand this! Oh, please let’s get out.

Tom (*breaking out*): Who are you, anyhow? You’re one of that bunch that hangs around with

Meyer Wolfsheim — that much I happen to know. I’ve made a little investigation into your affairs — and I’ll carry it further to-morrow.

Gatsby (*steadily*): You can suit yourself about that, old sport.

Tom (*turning toward Nick, Jordan, and Daisy*): I found out what your “drug-stores” were. He

and this Wolfsheim bought up a lot of side-street drug-stores here and in Chicago and sold grain alcohol over the counter. That’s one of his little stunts. I picked him for a bootlegger the first time I saw him, and I wasn’t far wrong.

Gatsby (*politely*): What about it? I guess your friend Walter Chase wasn’t too proud to come in

on it. And you left him in the lurch, didn’t you? You let him go to jail for a month over in New Jersey. God! You ought to hear Walter on the subject of you. He came to us dead broke. He was very glad to pick up some money, old sport.

Tom (*crying out*): Don’t you call me “old sport”! Walter could have you up on the betting laws

 too, but Wolfsheim scared him into shutting his mouth.

*(Now Gatsby has again that unfamiliar yet recognizable look in his face.*)

Tom: That drug-store business was just small change but you’ve got something on now that

 Walter’s afraid to tell me about.

**If it is a movie version, the camera zooms out and captures the following scene only as silhouette from a distance. In a stage performance, the following scene can be portrayed as if a pantomime while the stage is inundated with cacophonous white noise.**

*(Nick glances at Daisy, who is staring terrified between Gatsby and her husband, and at Jordan, who has begun to balance an invisible but absorbing object on the tip of her chin. Then Nick turns back to Gatsby — and is startled at his expression. Gatsby looks as if he had “killed a man.” For a moment the set of his face can be described in just that fantastic way.*

*It passes, and he begins to talk excitedly to Daisy, denying everything, defending his name against accusations that were not made. But with every word she is drawing further and further into herself, so he gives that up, and only the dead dream fights on as the afternoon slips away, trying to touch what is no longer tangible, struggling unhappily, undespairingly, toward that lost voice across the room.)*

Daisy *(with eyes that have lost all courage and defiance*): Please, Tom! I can’t stand this

 anymore.

Tom *(with magnanimous scorn*): You two start on home, Daisy in Mr. Gatsby’s car. Go on. He

 won’t annoy you. I think he realizes that his presumptuous little flirtation is over.

(Daisy and Gatsby leave, like ghosts, without a word.)

Tom (*after a moment, getting up and wrapping the unopened bottle of whiskey in the towel*):

 Want any of this stuff? Jordan? . . . Nick?

*(Nick does not answer.)*

Tom: Nick?

Nick: What?

Tom: Want any?

Nick: No . . . I just remembered that today’s my birthday. I am thirty now.