

Pat Hobby's College Days, F. Scott Fitzgerald

I

The afternoon was dark. The walls of Topanga Canyon rose sheer on either side. Get rid of it she must. The clank clank in the back seat frightened her. Evylyn did not like the business at all. It was not what she came out here to do. Then she thought of Mr Hobby. He believed in her, trusted her—and she was doing this for him.

But the mission was arduous. Evylyn Lascalles left the canyon and cruised along the inhospitable shores of Beverly Hills. Several times she turned up alleys, several times she parked beside vacant lots—but always some pedestrian or loiterer threw her into a mood of nervous anxiety. Once her heart almost stopped as she was eyed with appreciation—or was it suspicion—by a man who looked like a detective.

—He had no right to ask me this, she said to herself. Never again. I'll tell him so. Never again.

Night was fast descending. Evylyn Lascalles had never seen it come down so fast. Back to the canyon then, to the wild, free life. She drove up a paint-box corridor which gave its last pastel shades to the day. And reached a certain security at a bend overlooking plateau land far below.

Here there could be no complication. As she threw each article over the cliff it would be as far removed from her as if she were in a different state of the Union.

Miss Lascalles was from Brooklyn. She had wanted very much to come to Hollywood and be a secretary in pictures—now she wished that she had never left her home.

On with the job though—she must part with her cargo—as soon as this next car passed the bend..

II

...Meanwhile her employer, Pat Hobby, stood in front of the barber shop talking to Louie, the studio bookie. Pat's four weeks at two-fifty would be up tomorrow and he had begun to have that harassed and aghast feeling of those who live always on the edge of solvency.

"Four lousy weeks on a bad script," he said. "That's all I've had in six months."

"How do you live?" asked Louie—without too much show of interest.

"I don't live. The days go by, the weeks go by. But who cares? Who cares—after twenty years."

"You had a good time in your day," Louie reminded him.

Pat looked after a dress extra in a shimmering lamé gown.

"Sure," he admitted, "I had three wives. All anybody could want."

"You mean THAT was one of your wives?" asked Louie.

Pat peered after the disappearing figure.

"No-o. I didn't say THAT was one. But I've had plenty of them feeding out of my pocket. Not now though—a man of forty-nine is not considered human."

"You've got a cute little secretary," said Louie. "Look Pat, I'll give you a tip—"

"Can't use it," said Pat, "I got fifty cents."

"I don't mean that kind of tip. Listen—Jack Berners wants to make a picture about U.W.C. because he's got a kid there that plays basketball. He can't get a story. Why don't you go over and see the Athaletic Superintendent named Doolan at U.W.C.? That superintendent owes me three grand on the nags, and he could maybe give you an idea for a college picture. And then you bring it back and sell it to Berners. You're on salary, ain't you?"

"Till tomorrow," said Pat gloomily.

"Go and see Jim Kresge that hangs out in the Campus Sport Shop. He'll introduce you to the Athaletic Superintendent. Look, Pat, I got to make a collection now. Just remember, Pat, that Doolan owes me three grand."

III

It didn't seem hopeful to Pat but it was better than nothing. Returning for his coat to his room in the Writers' Building he was in time to pick up a plaining telephone.

"This is Evylyn," said a fluttering voice. "I can't get rid of it this afternoon. There's cars on every road—"

"I can't talk about it here," said Pat quickly, "I got to go over to U.W.C. on a notion."

"I've tried," she wailed, "—and TRIED! And every time, some car comes along—"

"Aw, please!" He hung up—he had enough on his mind.

For years Pat had followed the deeds of "the Trojums" of U.S.C. and the almost as fabulous doings of "the Roller Coasters", who represented the Univ. of the Western Coast. His interest was not so much physiological, tactical or intellectual as it was mathematical—but the Rollers had cost him plenty in their day—and thus it was with a sense of vague proprietorship that he stepped upon the half De Mille, half Aztec campus.

He located Kresge who conducted him to Superintendent Kit Doolan. Mr Doolan, a famous ex-tackle, was in excellent humour. With five coloured giants in this year's line, none of them quite old enough for pensions, but all men of experience, his team was in a fair way to conquer his section.

"Glad to be of help to your studio," he said. "Glad to help Mr Berners—or Louie. What can I do for you? You want to make a picture?... Well, we can always use publicity. Mr Hobby, I got a meeting of the Faculty Committee in just five minutes and perhaps you'd like to tell them your notion."

"I don't know," said Pat doubtfully. "What I thought was maybe I could have a spiel with you. We could go somewhere and hoist one."

"Afraid not," said Doolan jovially. "If those smarties smelt liquor on me—Boy! Come on over to the meeting—somebody's been getting away with watches and jewellery on the campus and we're sure it's a student."

Mr Kresge, having played his role, got up to leave.

"Like something good for the fifth tomorrow?"

"Not me," said Mr Doolan.

"You, Mr Hobby?"

"Not me," said Pat.

IV

Ending their alliance with the underworld, Pat Hobby and Superintendent Doolan walked down the corridor of the Administration Building. Outside the Dean's office Doolan said: "As soon as I can, I'll bring you in and introduce you." As an accredited representative neither of Jack Berners' nor of the studio, Pat waited with a certain malaise. He did not look forward to confronting a group of highbrows but he remembered that he bore an humble but warming piece of merchandise in his threadbare overcoat. The Dean's assistant had left her desk to take notes at the conference so he repleted his calories with a long, gagging draught.

In a moment, there was a responsive glow and he settled down in his chair, his eye fixed on the door marked:

SAMUEL K. WISKETH
DEAN OF THE STUDENT BODY

It might be a somewhat formidable encounter.

...but why? There were stuffed shirts—everybody knew that. They had college degrees but they could be bought. If they'd play ball with the studio they'd get a lot of good publicity for U.W.C. And that meant bigger salaries for them, didn't it, and more jack?

The door to the conference room opened and closed tentatively. No one came out but Pat sat up and readied himself. Representing the fourth biggest industry in America, or ALMOST representing it, he must not let a bunch of highbrows stare him down. He was not without an inside view of higher education—in his early youth he had once been the "Buttons" in the DKE House at the University of Pennsylvania. And with encouraging chauvinism he assured himself that Pennsylvania had it over this pioneer enterprise like a tent.

The door opened—a flustered young man with beads of sweat on his forehead came tearing out, tore through—and disappeared. Mr Doolan stood calmly in the doorway.

"All right, Mr Hobby," he said.

Nothing to be scared of. Memories of old college days continued to flood over Pat as he walked in. And instantaneously, as the juice of confidence flowed through his system, he had his idea...

"...it's more of a realistic idea," he was saying five minutes later.
"Understand?"

Dean Wiskith, a tall, pale man with an earphone, seemed to understand—if not exactly to approve. Pat hammered in his point again.

"It's up-to-the-minute," he said patiently, "what we call 'a topical'. You admit that young squirt who went out of here was stealing watches, don't you?"

The faculty committee, all except Doolan, exchanged glances, but no one interrupted.

"There you are," went on Pat triumphantly. "You turn him in to the newspapers. But here's the twist. In the Picture we make it turn out he steals the watches to support his young brother—and his young brother is the mainstay of the football team! He's the climax runner. We probably try to borrow Tyrone Power but we use one of YOUR players as a double."

Pat paused, trying to think of everything.

"—of course, we've got to release it in the southern states, so it's got to be one of your players that's white."

There was an unquiet pause. Mr Doolan came to his rescue.

"Not a bad idea," he suggested.

"It's an appalling idea," broke out Dean Wiskith. "It's—"

Doolan's face tightened slowly.

"Wait a minute," he said. "Who's telling WHO around here? You listen to him!"

The Dean's assistant, who had recently vanished from the room at the call of a buzzer, had reappeared and was whispering in the Dean's ear. The latter started.

"Just a minute, Mr Doolan," he said. He turned to the other members of the committee.

"The proctor has a disciplinary case outside and he can't legally hold the offender. Can we settle it first? And then get back to this—" He glared at Mr Doolan, "—to this preposterous idea?"

At his nod the assistant opened the door.

This proctor, thought Pat, ranging back to his days on the vineclad, leafy campus, looked like all proctors, an intimidated cop, a scarcely civilized beast of prey.

"Gentlemen," the proctor said, with delicately modulated respect, "I've got something that can't be explained away." He shook his head, puzzled, and then continued: "I know it's all wrong—but I can't seem to get to the point of it. I'd like to turn it over to YOU—I'll just show you the evidence and the offender... Come in, you."

As Evelyln Lascalles entered, followed shortly by a big clinking pillow cover which the proctor deposited beside her, Pat thought once more of the elm-covered campus of the University of Pennsylvania. He wished passionately that he were there. He wished it more than anything in the world. Next to that he wished that Doolan's back, behind which he tried to hide by a shifting of his chair, were broader still.

"There you are!" she cried gratefully. "Oh, Mr Hobby—Thank God! I couldn't get rid of them—and I couldn't take them home—my mother would kill me. So I came here to find you—and this man peeked into the back seat of my car."

"What's in that sack?" demanded Dean Wiskith. "Bombs? What?"

Seconds before the proctor had picked up the sack and bounced it on the floor, so that it gave out a clear unmistakable sound, Pat could have told them. There were dead soldiers—pints, half-pints, quarts—the evidence of four strained weeks at two-fifty-empty bottles collected from his office drawers. Since his contract was up tomorrow he had thought it best not to leave such witnesses behind.

Seeking for escape his mind reached back for the last time to those careless days of fetch and carry at the University of Pennsylvania.

"I'll take it," he said rising.

Slinging the sack over his shoulder, he faced the faculty committee and said surprisingly:

"Think it over."

V

"We did," Mr Doolan told his wife that night. "But we never made head nor tail of it."

"It's kind of spooky," said Mrs Doolan. "I hope I don't dream tonight. The poor man with that sack! I keep thinking he'll be down in purgatory—and they'll make him carve a ship in EVERY ONE of those bottles—before he can go to heaven."

"Don't!" said Doolan quickly. "You'll have ME dreaming. There were plenty bottles."