

The I.O.U., F. Scott Fitzgerald

I

The above is not my real name—the fellow it belongs to gave me his permission to sign it to this story. My real name I shall not divulge. I am a publisher. I accept long novels about young love written by old maids in South Dakota, detective stories concerning wealthy clubmen and female apaches with "wide dark eyes," essays about the menace of this and that and the color of the moon in Tahiti by college professors and other unemployed. I accept no novels by authors under fifteen years old. All the columnists and communists (I can never get these two words straight) abuse me because they say I want money. I do—I want it terribly. My wife needs it. My children use it all the time. If someone offered me all the money in New York I should not refuse it. I would rather bring out a book that had an advance sale of five hundred thousand copies than have discovered Samuel Butler, Theodore Dreiser, and James Branch Cabell in one year. So would you if you were a publisher.

Six months ago I contracted for a book that was undoubtedly a sure thing. It was by Harden, the psychic-research man—Dr. Harden. His first book—I published it in 1913—had taken hold like a Long Island sand crab and at that time psychic research had nowhere near the vogue it has at present. We advertised his new one as being a fifty-heart-power document. His nephew had been killed in the war and Dr. Harden had written with distinction and reticence an account of his psychic communion through various mediums with this nephew, Cosgrove Harden.

Dr. Harden was no intellectual upstart. He was a distinguished psychologist, Ph.D. Vienna, LL.D. Oxford, and late visiting professor at the University of Ohio. His book was neither callous nor credulous. There was a fundamental seriousness underlying his attitude. For example, he had mentioned in his book that a young man named Wilkins had come to his door claiming that the deceased had owed him three dollars and eighty cents. He had asked Dr. Harden to find out what this deceased wanted done about it. This Dr. Harden had steadfastly refused to do. He considered that such a request was comparable to praying to the saints about a lost umbrella.

For ninety days we prepared for publication. The first page of the book was set up in three alternative kinds of type and two drawings each were ordered from five sky-priced artists before the jacket par excellence was selected. The final proof was read by no less than seven expert proofreaders, lest the slightest tremble in the tail of a comma or the faintest cast in a capital "I" offend the fastidious eyes of the Great American Public.

Four weeks before the day set for publication, huge crates went out to a thousand points of the literate compass. To Chicago alone went twenty-seven thousand copies. To Galveston, Texas, went seven thousand. One hundred copies apiece were hurled with sighs into Bisbee, Arizona, Red Wing, Minnesota, and Atlanta, Georgia. The larger cities having been accounted for, stray lots of twenty and thirty and forty were dropped here and there across the continent as a sand artist fills in his nearly completed picture by fine driftings from his hand.

The actual number of books in the first printing was three hundred thousand.

Meanwhile, the advertising department was busy from nine to five six days of the week, italicizing, underlining, capitalizing, double-capitalizing; preparing slogans, headlines, personal articles, and interviews; selecting photographs showing Dr. Harden thinking, musing, and contemplating; choosing snapshots of him with a tennis racquet, with a golf stick, with a sister-in-law, with an ocean. Literary notes were prepared by the gross. Gift copies were piled in stacks, addressed to the critics of a thousand newspapers and weeklies.

The date set was April 15th. On the fourteenth, a breathless hush pervaded the offices and below in the retail department the clerks were glancing nervously at the vacant spaces where the stacks were to rest and at the empty front windows, where three expert window dressers were to work all evening arranging the book in squares and mounds and heaps and circles and hearts and stars and parallelograms.

On the morning of April 15th at five minutes to nine, Miss Jordan, the head stenographer, fainted from excitement into the arms of my junior partner. On the stroke of nine, an old gentleman with Dundreary whiskers purchased the first copy of "The Aristocracy of the Spirit World."

The great book was out.

It was three weeks after this that I decided to run out to Joliet, Ohio, to see Dr. Harden. This was a case of Mohammed (or was it Moses?) and the mountain. He was of a shy and retiring disposition; it was necessary to encourage him, to congratulate him, to forestall the possible advances of rival publishers. I intended to make the necessary arrangements for securing his next book and with this in mind I took along several neatly worded contracts that would take all disagreeable business problems off his shoulders for the next five years.

We left New York at four o'clock. It is my custom when on a trip to put half a dozen copies of my principal book in my bag and lend them casually to the most intelligent-looking of my fellow-passengers in the hope that the book may thereby be brought to the attention of some new group of readers. Before we came to Trenton, a lady with a lorgnette in one of the staterooms was suspiciously turning the pages of hers, the young man who had the upper of my section was deeply engrossed in his, and a girl with reddish hair and peculiarly mellow eyes was playing tic-tac-toe in the back of a third.

For myself, I drowsed. The New Jersey scenery changed unostentatiously to Pennsylvania scenery. We passed many cows and a great number of woods and fields and every twenty minutes or so the same farmer would appear, sitting in his wagon beside the village station, chewing tobacco and gazing thoughtfully at the Pullman windows.

We must have passed this farmer ten or fifteen times when my nap was suddenly terminated by the realization that the young man who shared my section was moving his foot up and down like a bass drummer in an orchestra and uttering little cries and grunts. I was both startled and pleased for I could see that he was much moved, moved by the book he clutched tightly in his long white fingers—Dr. Harden's "Aristocracy of the Spirit World."

"Well," I remarked jovially, "you seem interested."

He looked up. In his thin face were the eyes that are seen in only two sorts of men: those who are up on spiritualism and those who are down on spiritualism.

As he seemed still rather dazed I repeated my inquiry.

"Interested!" he cried. "Interested! My God!"

I looked at him carefully. Yes, he was plainly either a medium or else one of the sarcastic young men who write humorous stories about spiritualists for the popular magazines.

"A remarkable piece of-work," he said. "The—hero, so to speak, has evidently spent most of his time since his death dictating it to his uncle."

I agreed that he must have.

"Its value, of course," he remarked with a sigh, "depends entirely on the young man being where he says he is."

"Of course." I was puzzled. "The young man must be in—in Paradise and not in—in Purgatory."

"Yes," he agreed thoughtfully, "it would be embarrassing if he were in Purgatory—and more so if he were in a third place."

This was rather too much.

"There was nothing in the young man's life which presupposed that he might be in—be in—"

"Of course not. The region you refer to was not in my thoughts. I merely said it would be embarrassing if he were in Purgatory but even more embarrassing were he somewhere else."

"Where, sir?"

"In Yonkers, for instance."

At this I started.

"What?"

"In fact, if he were in Purgatory it would only be a slight error of his own—but if he were in Yonkers—"

"My dear sir," I broke out impatiently, "what possible connection is there between Yonkers and 'The Aristocracy of the Spirit World'?"

"None. I merely mentioned that if he were in Yonkers—"

"But he's not in Yonkers."

"No, he's not." He paused and sighed again. "In fact, he has lately crossed from Ohio into Pennsylvania."

This time I jumped—from sheer nervousness. I had not yet realized at what he was driving yet I felt that his remarks hinted at some significance.

"You mean," I demanded quickly, "that you feel his astral presence?"

The young man drew himself up fiercely.

"There's been enough of that," he said, intensely. "It seems that for the last month I have been the sport of the credulous queens and Basil Kings of the entire United States. My name, sir, happens to be Cosgrove P. Harden. I am not dead; I have never been dead, and after reading that book I will never again feel it quite safe to die!"

II

The girl across the aisle was so startled at my cry of grief and astonishment that she put down a tic instead of a tac.

I had an immediate vision of a long line of people stretching from 40th Street, where my publishing house stands, down to the Bowery—five hundred thousand people, each one hugging a copy of “The Aristocracy of the Spirit World,” each one demanding the return of his or her two \$2.50. I considered quickly whether I could change all the names and shift it from my nonfiction to my fiction. But it was too late even for this. Three hundred thousand copies were in the hands of the American public.

When I was sufficiently recovered, the young man gave me a history of his experiences since he had been reported dead. Three months in a German prison—ten months in a hospital with brain fever—another month before he could remember his own name. Half an hour after his arrival in New York, he had met an old friend who had stared at him, choked, and then fainted dead away. When he revived, they went together to a drugstore to get a cocktail and in an hour Cosgrove Harden had heard the most astonishing story about himself that a man ever listened to.

He took a taxi to a bookstore. The book he sought was sold out. Immediately he had started on the train for Joliet, Ohio, and by a rare stroke of fortune the book had been put in his hands.

My first thought was that he was a blackmailer, but by comparing him with his photograph on page 226 of “The Aristocracy of the Spirit World” I saw that he was indubitably Cosgrove P. Harden. He was thinner and older than in the picture, the mustache was gone, but it was the same man.

I sighed—profoundly and tragically.

“Just when it’s selling better than a book of fiction.”

“Fiction!” he responded angrily. “It is fiction!”

“In a sense—” I admitted.

“In a sense? It is fiction! It fulfills all the requirements of fiction: it is one long sweet lie. Would you call it fact?”

“No,” I replied calmly. “I should call it nonfiction. Nonfiction is a form of literature that lies halfway between fiction and fact.”

He opened the book at random and uttered a short poignant cry of distress that made the red-haired girl pause in what must have been at least the semifinals of her tic-tac-toe tournament.

“Look!” he wailed miserably. “Look! It says ‘Monday.’ Consider my existence on this ‘further shore’ on ‘Monday.’ I ask you! Look! I smell flowers. I spend the day smelling flowers. You see, don’t you? On page 194, on the top of the page, I smell a rose—”

I lifted the book carefully to my nostrils.

“I don’t notice anything,” I said. “Possibly the ink—”

“Don’t smell!” he cried. “Read! I smell a rose and it gives me two paragraphs of rapture about the instinctive nobility of man. One little smell! Then I devote another hour to daisies. God! I’ll never be able to attend another college reunion.”

He turned a few pages and then groaned again.

"Here I am with the children—dancing with them. I spend all day with them and we dance. We don't even do a decent shimmy. We do some aesthetic business. I can't dance. I hate children. But no sooner do I die than I become a cross between a nurse girl and a chorus man."

"Here, now," I ventured reproachfully, "that has been considered a very beautiful passage. See, it describes your clothes. You are dressed in—let's see—well, a sort of filmy garment. It streams out behind you—"

"—a sort of floating undergarment," he said morosely, "and I've got leaves all over my head."

I had to admit it—leaves were implied.

"Still," I suggested, "think how much worse it could have been. He could have made you really ridiculous if he'd had you answering questions about the number on your grandfather's watch or the \$3.80 you owed as a poker debt."

There was a pause.

"Funny egg, my uncle," he said thoughtfully. "I think he's a little mad."

"Not at all," I assured him. "I have dealt with authors all my life and he's quite the sanest one with whom we've ever dealt. He never tried to borrow money from us; he never asked us to fire our advertising department; and he's never assured us that all his friends were unable to get copies of his book in Boston, Massachusetts."

"Nevertheless I'm going to take his astral body for an awful beating."

"Is that all you're going to do?" I demanded anxiously. "You're not going to appear under your true name and spoil the sale of his book, are you?"

"What!"

"Surely you wouldn't do that. Think of the disappointment you'd cause. You'd make 500,000 people miserable."

"All women," he said morosely. "They like to be miserable. Think of my girl—the girl I was engaged to. How do you think she felt about my flowery course since I left her? Do you think she's been approving my dancing around with a lot of children all over—all over page 221. Undraped!"

I was in despair. I must know the worst at once.

"What—what are you going to do?"

"Do?" he exclaimed wildly. "Why, I'm going to have my uncle sent to the penitentiary, along with his publisher and his press agent and the whole crew, down to the merest printer's devil who carried the blasted type."

III

When we reached Joliet, Ohio, at nine o'clock the next morning, I had calmed him into a semblance of reason. His uncle was an old man, I told him, a misled man. He had been fooled himself, there was little doubt of it. His heart might be weak and the sight of his nephew coming suddenly up the path might finish him off.

It was, of course, in the back of my mind that we could make some sort of a

compromise. If Cosgrove could be persuaded to keep out of the way for five years or so for a reasonable sum, all might still be well.

So when we left the little station we avoided the village and in a depressing silence traversed the half mile to Dr. Harden's house. When we were within a hundred yards, I stopped and turned to him.

"You wait here," I urged him. "I've got to prepare him for the shock. I'll be back in half an hour."

He demurred at first but finally sat down sullenly in the thick grass by the roadside. Drying my damp brow, I walked up the lane to the house.

The garden of Dr. Harden was full of sunshine and blossomed with Japanese magnolia trees dropping pink tears over the grass. I saw him immediately, sitting by an open window. The sun was pouring in, creeping in stealthily lengthening squares across his desk and the litter of papers that strewn it, then over the lap of Dr. Harden himself and up to his shaggy, white-topped face. Before him on his desk was an empty brown envelope and his lean fingers were moving busily over the sheaf of newspaper clippings he had just extracted.

I had come quite close, half hidden by the magnolias, and was about to address him when I saw a girl in a purple morning dress break, stooping, through the low-branched cluster of apple trees that made the north end of the garden and move across the grass toward the house. I drew back and watched her as she came directly up to the open window and spoke unabashed to the great Dr. Harden.

"I want to have a talk with you," she said abruptly.

Dr. Harden looked up and a section of the Philadelphia Press fluttered from his hand. I wondered if it was the clipping that called him "the new Saint John."

"About this stuff!" the girl continued.

She drew a book from under her arm. It was "The Aristocracy of the Spirit World." I recognized it by the red cover with the angels in the corners.

"About this stuff!" she repeated angrily, and then shied the book violently into a bush, where it skimmed down between two wild roses and perched disconsolately among the roots.

"Why, Miss Thalia!"

"Why, Miss Thalia!" she mimicked. "Why, you old fool, you ought to be crocked off for writing this book."

"Crocked off?" Dr. Harden's voice expressed a faint hope that this might be some new honor. He was not left long in doubt.

"Crocked off!" she blazed forth. "You heard me! My gosh, can't you understand English! Haven't you ever been to a prom?"

"I was unaware," replied Dr. Harden coolly, "that college proms were held in the Bowery and I know no precedent for using an abbreviation of the noun 'crockery' as a transitive verb. As for the book—"

"It's the world's worst disgrace."

"If you will read these clippings—"

She put her elbows on the windowsill, moved as though she intended to hoist herself through, and then suddenly dropped her chin in her hands and looking at him level-eyed began to talk.

"You had a nephew," she said. "That was his hard luck. He was the best man that ever lived and the only man I ever loved or will love."

Dr. Harden nodded and made as though to speak but Thalia knocked her little fist on the windowsill and continued.

"He was brave and square and quiet. He died of wounds in a foreign town and passed out of sight as Sergeant Harden, 105th Infantry. A quiet life and an honorable death. What have you done!" Her voice rose slightly until it shook and sent a sympathetic vibration over the window vines. "What have you done! You've made him a laughingstock! You've called him back to life as a fabulous creature who sends idiotic messages about flowers and birds and the number of fillings in George Washington's teeth. You've—"

Dr. Harden rose to his feet.

"Have you come here," he began shrilly, "to tell me what—"

"Shut up!" she cried. "I'm going to tell you what you've done, and you can't stop me with all the astral bodies this side of the Rocky Mountains."

Dr. Harden subsided into his chair.

"Go on," he said, with an effort at self-control. "Talk your shrewish head off."

She paused for a moment and turning her head looked into the garden. I could see that she was biting her lip and blinking to keep back the tears. Then she turned and fixed her dark eyes on him again.

"You've taken him," she continued, "and used him as a piece of dough for your crooked medium, to make pie out of—pie for all the hysterical women who think you're a great man. Call you great? Without any respect for the dignity and reticence of death? You're a toothless, yellow old man without even the excuse of real grief for playing on your own credulity and that of a lot of other fools. That's all—I'm through."

With that, she turned and as suddenly as she had come walked with her head erect down the path toward me. I waited until she had passed and gone some twenty yards out of sight of the window. Then I followed her along the soft grass and suddenly spoke to her.

"Miss Thalia."

She faced me, somewhat startled.

"Miss Thalia, I want to tell you that there's a surprise for you down the lane—somebody you haven't seen for many months."

Her face showed no understanding.

"I don't want to spoil anything," I continued, "but I don't want you to be frightened if in a few moments you get the surprise of your existence."

"What do you mean?" she asked quietly.

"Nothing," I said. "Just continue along the road and think of the nicest things in the world and all of a sudden something tremendous will happen."

With this, I bowed very low and stood smiling benevolently with my hat in my hand.

I saw her look at me wonderingly and then turn slowly and walk away. In a moment she was lost to view beyond the curve of the low stone wall under the magnolia trees.

IV

It was four days—four sweltering anxious days—before I could bring enough order out of the chaos to arrange any sort of business conference. The first meeting between Cosgrove Harden and his uncle was the most tremendous nervous strain of my life. I sat for an hour on the slippery edge of a rickety chair, preparing to spring forward every time I saw young Cosgrove's muscles tighten under his coat sleeve. I would make an instinctive start and each time slip helplessly from the chair and land in a sitting position on the floor.

Dr. Harden finally terminated the interview by rising and going upstairs. I managed to pack young Harden off to his room by dint of threats and promises and wrung out of him a vow of twenty-four hours' silence.

I used all my available cash in bribing the two old servants. They must say nothing, I assured them. Mr. Cosgrove Harden had just escaped from Sing Sing. I quaked as I said this but there were so many lies in the air that one more or less made little difference.

If it hadn't been for Miss Thalia I would have given up the first day and gone back to New York to await the crash. But she was in such a state of utter and beatific happiness that she was willing to agree to anything. I proposed to her that if she and Cosgrove were to marry and live in the West under an assumed name for ten years I would support them liberally. She jumped for joy. I seized the opportunity and with glowing colors painted a love bungalow in California, with mild weather all the year around and Cosgrove coming up the path to supper and romantic old missions nearby and Cosgrove coming up the path to supper and the Golden Gate in a June twilight and Cosgrove and so forth.

As I talked, she gave little cries of joy and was all for leaving immediately. It was she who persuaded Cosgrove on the fourth day to join us in conference in the living room. I left word with the maid that we were on no account to be disturbed and we sat down to thresh the whole thing out.

Our points of view were radically divergent.

Young Harden's was very similar to the Red Queen's in Alice in Wonderland. Someone had blundered and someone had to suffer for it right away. There had been enough fake dead men in this family and there was going to be a real one if someone didn't look out!

Dr. Harden's point of view was that it was all an awful mess and he didn't know what to do about it, God knew, and he wished he were dead.

Thalia's point of view was that she had looked up California in a guidebook and the climate was adorable and Cosgrove coming up the path to supper.

My point of view was that there was no knot so tight that there wasn't a way out of the labyrinth—and a lot more mixed metaphors that only got everybody more confused

than they were in the beginning.

Cosgrove Harden insisted that we get four copies of "The Aristocracy of the Spirit World" and talk it over. His uncle said that the sight of a book would make him sick to his stomach. Thalia's suggestion was that we should all go to California and settle the question out there.

I got four books and distributed them. Dr. Harden shut his eyes and groaned. Thalia opened hers to the last page and began drawing heavenly bungalows with a young wife standing in the doorway of each. Young Harden hunted furiously for page 226.

"Here we are!" he cried. "Just opposite the picture of 'Cosgrove Harden the day before he sailed, showing the small mole above his left eye' we see the following: 'This mole had always worried Cosgrove. He had a feeling that bodies should be perfect and that this was an imperfection that should in the natural order be washed away.' Hmm! I have no mole."

Dr. Harden agreed.

"Possibly it was an imperfection in the negative," he suggested.

"Great Scott! If the negative had failed to photograph my left leg you'd probably have me yearning all through the book for a left leg—and have it joined to me in Chapter Twenty-Nine."

"Look here!" I broke in. "Can't we reach some compromise? No one knows that you are in town. Can't we—"

Young Harden scowled at me fiercely.

"I haven't started yet. I haven't mentioned the alienation of Thalia's affections."

"Alienation!" Dr. Harden protested. "Why, I have paid her no attention. She detests me. She—"

Cosgrove laughed bitterly.

"You flatter yourself. Do you think I was jealous of your old gray whiskers? I'm talking about her affections being alienated by these descriptions of me."

Thalia bent forward earnestly.

"My affections never wavered, Cosgrove—never."

"Come, Thalia," Cosgrove said somewhat grumpily. "They must have been slightly alienated. How about page 223? Could you love a man who wore floating underwear? Who was—who was filmy?"

"I was grieved, Cosgrove. That is, I would have been grieved if I'd believed it, but I didn't."

"No alienation?" His tone expressed disappointment.

"None, Cosgrove."

"Well," Cosgrove said resentfully, "I'm ruined politically, anyway—I mean, if I decided to go into politics I can never be President. I'm not even a democratic ghost—I'm a spiritual snob."

Dr. Harden's face was sunk in his hands in an attitude of profound dejection.

I interrupted desperately, talking so loudly that Cosgrove was compelled to stop and listen.

"I will guarantee you ten thousand a year if you will go away for ten years!"

Thalia clapped her hands and Cosgrove seeing her out of the corner of his eye began for the first time to show a faint interest.

"How about after the ten years are up?"

"Oh," I said hopefully, "Dr. Harden may be—may be—"

"Speak up," the doctor said gloomily. "I may be dead. I sincerely trust so."

"—so you can come back under your own name," I continued callously. "Meanwhile we'll agree to publish no new edition of the book."

"Hmm. Suppose he's not dead in ten years?" Cosgrove demanded suspiciously.

"Oh, I'll die," the doctor reassured him quickly. "That needn't worry you."

"How do you know you'll die?"

"How does one know anyone will die? It's just human nature."

Cosgrove regarded him sourly.

"Humor is out of place in this discussion. If you'll make an honest agreement to die, with no mental reservations—"

The doctor nodded gloomily.

"I might as well. With the money I have left I'll starve to death in that time."

"That would be satisfactory. And when you do, for heaven's sake arrange to have yourself buried. Don't just lie around the house here dead and expect me to come back and do all the work."

At this the doctor seemed somewhat bitter, and then Thalia, who had been silent for some time, raised her head.

"Do you hear anything outside?" she asked curiously.

I had heard something—that is I had subconsciously perceived a murmur—a murmur growing and mingling with the sound of many footsteps.

"I do," I remarked. "Odd—"

There was a sudden interruption—the murmur outside swelled to the proportions of a chant, the door burst open, and a wild-eyed servant rushed in.

"Dr. Harden! Dr. Harden!" she cried in terror. "There's a mob, maybe a million people, comin' along the road and up toward the house. They'll be on the porch in a _"

An increase in the noise showed that they already were. I sprang to my feet.

"Hide your nephew!" I shouted to Dr. Harden.

His beard trembling, his watery eyes wide, Dr. Harden grasped Cosgrove feebly by the elbow.

"What is it?" He faltered.

"I don't know. Get him upstairs to the attic right away—put leaves over him, stick him behind an heirloom!"

With that, I was gone, leaving the three of them in puzzled panic. Through the hall I rushed and out the front door onto the screen porch. I was none too soon.

The screen porch was full of men, young men in checked suits and slouch hats, old men in derbies and frayed cuffs, crowding and jostling, each one beckoning and calling to me above the crowd. Their one distinguishing mark was a pencil in the right hand and a notebook in the left—a notebook open—waiting, virginally yet ominously portentous.

Behind them on the lawn was a larger crowd—butchers and bakers in their aprons, fat women with folded arms, thin women holding up dirty children so that they might better see, shouting boys, barking dogs, horrible little girls who jumped up and down shouting and clapping their hands. Behind these, in a sort of outer ring, stood the old men of the village, toothless, musty-eyed, their mouths open, their gray beards tickling the tops of their canes. Over behind them, the setting sun, blood-red and horrible, played on three hundred twisting shoulders.

After the burst of noise that succeeded my appearance, a silence fell—a deep hush, pregnant with significance—and out of this hush came a dozen voices from the men with notebooks in front of me.

"Jenkins of the Toledo Blade!"

"Harlan of the Cincinnati News!"

"M'Gruder of the Dayton Times!"

"Cory of the Zanesville Republican!"

"Jordan of the Cleveland Plain Dealer!"

"Carmichael of the Columbus News!"

"Martin of the Lima Herald!"

"Ryan of the Akron World!"

It was weird, uncanny—like some map of Ohio gone mad, with the miles refusing to square and the towns jumping about from county to county. My brain quivered.

Then again the hush fell. I noticed a commotion in the middle of the crowd, a sort of wave or eddy floating down the center like a thin line of wind blowing through a wheat field.

"What do you want!" I cried hollowly.

Like one voice came the response from half a thousand throats.

"Where is Cosgrove Harden?"

It was out! The reporters swarmed about me, pleading, threatening, demanding.

"—kept it pretty close, didn't you—almost didn't leak out—pays to pay bills—won't he give an interview—send us the old faker—"

Then that strange eddy in the field of people suddenly reached the front and died out. A tall young man with yellow hair and stilt-like legs emerged dynamically from the crowd and dozens of willing hands propelled him forward toward me. Up to the porch he came—up the steps—

"Who are you?" I shouted.

"Name's Elbert Wilkins," he gasped. "I'm the fella that told."

He paused and his chest swelled. It was his great moment. He was the immortal messenger of the gods.

"I recognized him the day he came! You see—you see—" We all swayed forward eagerly. "I got his I.O.U. for three dollars and eighty cents he lost to me at draw poker, and I want my money!"

I am a publisher. I publish any sort of book. I am looking for a book that will sell five hundred thousand copies. This is the season for novels with a psychic turn. If possible I would prefer something by a fervent materialist about a wealthy clubman and a dark apachess—or something about love. Love is a sure thing—it takes a living man to love.

Notes

Fitzgerald sent a manuscript with a letter to Ober (2 June 1920): this story was "a plot that Sell particularly wanted for Harps. Baz and which I promised him." There is no evidence that the story was actually offered to Harper's Bazaar, and that magazine published no Fitzgerald stories during his lifetime. Ober obviously offered it other places, because on 17 July 1920, Fitzgerald wrote concerning the story again: "If 'The I. O. U.' comes back from the Post I wish you'd return it to me as I think I can change it so there'll be no trouble selling it." No correspondence survives indicating whether Fitzgerald resubmitted the story in a new version or with a new title. There is not even a record of what magazines Ober offered it to. However, the manuscript and a typescript survive, and a note attached to the typescript shows that at some time (probably after Fitzgerald's death) Ober reworked or considered reworking the story in an attempt to make it salable.

Sotheby's 2012 sale:

—Autograph manuscript signed ("F. Scott Fitzgerald"), titled "The I. O. U.," n.p., c. 1920, 42 pages (11 x 8 1/2 in.; 279 x 215 mm) in pencil with numerous additions, deletions and emendations in the author's hand; first and last page with marginal chips and tears, marginal rust stains from paper clips, pin holes in upper left corners of all leaves, some marginal browning on a few leaves

—Typescript of the same story, n.p., c. 1920 (inscribed in pencil in an unidentified hand "written before 1928"), 25 pages (10 1/2 x 8 1/8 in.; 267 x 206 mm) with 3-hole punch in left margins; upper right corner of first leaf torn away (not affecting text), first and last leaf with small tears and chips to left margin; occasional soiling.

The typescript is accompanied by a typed note from Fitzgerald's agent, Harold Ober, giving a brief telegraphic synopsis of the story. This note, intended to accompany

the typescript when it was submitted to magazine editors, captures the tone of the story: "Cleverly written story. Almost a satire on publishing business. Told by a publisher. He brings out book by famous psychic research man, purporting to be in communication with his nephew killed in War (WWI). Publisher goes to Ohio to visit author. The nephew who has been in prison camp arrives at same time. Girl he was engaged to also there. Both are angry at author & publisher. Book is selling at great rate. Shows nephew dancing with angels in filmy garments. Publisher offers them money to keep quiet for a while - but native of town arrives. Recognizes nephew because he owes him \$3.85 lost at poker. Publisher decides to publish only love stories and mysteries. HO."

The manuscript and typescript has been sold to the Yale University.