

## The Trail of the Duke, F. Scott Fitzgerald

It was a hot July night. Inside, through screen, window and door fled the bugs and gathered around the lights like so many humans at a carnival, buzzing, thugging, whirring. From out the night into the houses came the sweltering late summer heat, over-powering and enervating, bursting against the walls and enveloping all mankind like a huge smothering blanket. In the drug stores, the clerks, tired and grumbling handed out ice cream to hundreds of thirsty but misled civilians, while in the corners buzzed the electric fans in a whirring mockery of coolness. In the flats that line upper New York, pianos (sweating ebony perspiration) ground out rag-time tunes of last winter and here and there a wan woman sang the air in a hot soprano. In the tenements, shirt-sleeves gleamed like beacon lights in steady rows along the streets in tiers of from four to eight according to the number of stories of the house. In a word, it was a typical, hot New York summer night.

In his house on upper Fifth Avenue, young Dodson Garland lay on a divan in the billiard room and consumed oceans of mint juleps, as he grumbled at the polo that had kept him in town, the cigarettes, the butler, and occasionally breaking the Second Commandment. The butler ran back and forth with large consignments of juleps and soda and finally, on one of his dramatic entrances, Garland turned towards him and for the first time that evening perceived that the butler was a human being, not a living bottle-tray.

"Hello, Allen," he said, rather surprised that he had made such a discovery. "Are you hot?"

Allen made an expressive gesture with his handkerchief, tried to smile but only succeeded in a feeble, smothery grin.

"Allen," said Garland struck by an inspiration, "what shall I do tonight?" Allen again essayed the grin but, failing once more, sank into a hot, undignified silence.

"Get out of here," exclaimed Garland petulantly, "and bring me another julep and a plate of ice."

"Now," thought the young man, "what shall I do? I can go to the theatre and melt. I can go to a roof-garden and be sung to by a would-be prima donna, or—or go calling." "Go calling," in Garland's vocabulary meant but one thing: to see Mirabel. Mirabel Walmsley was his fiancée since some three months, and was in the city to receive some nobleman or other who was to visit her father. The lucky youth yawned, rolled over, yawned again and rose to a sitting position where he yawned a third time and then got to his feet.

"I'll walk up and see Mirabel. I need a little exercise." And with this final decision he went to his room where he dressed, sweated and dressed, for half an hour. At the end of that time, he emerged from his residence, immaculate, and strolled up Fifth Avenue to Broadway. The city was all outside. As he walked along the white way, he passed groups and groups clad in linen and lingerie, laughing, talking, smoking, smiling, all hot, all uncomfortable.

He reached Mirabel's house and then suddenly stopped on the door step.

"Heavens," he thought, "I forgot all about it. The Duke of Dunsinlane or Artrellane or some lane or other was to arrive today to see Mirabel's papa. Isn't that awful? And I haven't seen Mirabel for three days." He sighed, faltered, and finally walked up the steps and rang the bell. Hardly had he stepped inside the door, when the vision of his dreams came running into the hall in a state of great excitement and perturbation.

"Oh, Daddy!" she burst out, "I'm in an awful situation. The Duke went out of the house an hour ago. None of the maids saw him go. He just wandered out. You

must find him. He's probably lost—lost and nobody knows him." Mirabel wrung her hands in entrancing despair. "Oh, I shall die if he's lost—and it so hot. He'll have a sunstroke surely or a—moonstroke. Go and find him. We've telephoned the police, but it won't do any good. Hurry up! Do! oh, Doddy, I'm so nervous."

"Doddy" put his hands in his pockets, sighed, put his hat on his head and sighed again. Then he turned towards the door. Mirabel, her face anxious, followed him.

"Bring him right up here if you find him. Oh Doddy you're a life-saver." The life-saver sighed again and walked quickly through the portal. On the door-step he paused.

"Well, of all outrageous things! To hunt for a French Duke in New York. This is outrageous. Where shall I go? What will I do." He paused at the door-step and then, following the crowd, strode toward Broadway. "Now let me see. I must have a plan of action. I can't go up and ask everybody I meet if he's the Duke of—, well of, well—I can't remember his name. I don't know what he looks like. He probably can't talk English. Oh, curses on the nobility."

He strode aimlessly, hot and muddled. He wished he had asked Mirabel the Duke's name and personal appearance, but it was now too late. He would not convict himself of such a blunder. Reaching Broadway he suddenly bethought himself of a plan of action.

"I'll try the restaurants." He started down towards Sherry's and had gone but half a block when he had an inspiration. The Duke's picture was in some evening paper, and his name, too.

He bought a paper and sought for the picture with no result. He tried again and again. On his seventh paper he found it: "The Duke of Matterlane Visits American Millionaire."

The Duke, a man with side whiskers and eye-glasses stared menacingly at him from the paper. Garland heaved a sigh of relief, took a long look at the likeness and stuck the paper into his pocket.

"Now to business," he muttered, wiping his drenched brow, "Duke or die."

Five minutes later he entered Sherry's, where he sat down and ordered ginger ale. There was the usual summer night crowd, listless, flushed, and sunburned. There was the usual champagne and ice that seemed hotter than the room; but there was no Duke. He sighed, rose, and visited Delmonico's, Martin's, at each place consuming a glass of ginger ale.

"I'll have to cut out the drinking," he thought, "or I'll be inebriated by the time I find his royal nuisance."

On his weary trail, he visited more restaurants and more hotels, ever searching; sometimes thinking he saw an oasis and finding it only a mirage. He had consumed so much ginger ale that he felt a swaying sea-sickness as he walked; yet he plodded on, hotter and hotter, uncomfortable, and, as Alice in Wonderland would have said, uncomfortabler. His mind was grimly and tenaciously set on the Duke's face. As he walked along, from hotel to cafe, from cafe to restaurant, the Duke's whiskers remained glued firmly to the insides of his brains. It was half past eight by the City Hall clock when he started on his quest. It was now quarter past ten, hotter, sultrier and stuffier than ever. He had visited every important place of refreshment. He tried the drug stores. He went to four theatres and had the Duke paged, at a large bribe. His money was getting low, his spirits were lower still; but his temperature soared majestically and triumphantly aloft.

Finally, passing through an alley which had been recommended to him as a short cut, he saw before him a man lighting a cigarette. By the flickering match he noticed the whiskers. He stopped dead in his tracks, afraid that it might not be

the Duke. The man lit another cigarette. Sure enough, the sideburns, eyeglasses and the whole face proved the question without a doubt.

Garland walked towards the man. The man looked back at him and started to walk in the opposite direction. Garland started to run; the man looked over his shoulder and started to run also. Garland slowed down. The man slowed down. They emerged upon Broadway in the same relative position and the man started north. Forty feet behind, in stolid determination, walked Garland without his hat. He had left it in the alley.

For eight blocks they continued, the man behind being the pacemaker. Then the Duke spoke quietly to a policeman and when Garland, lost in an obsession of pursuit, was grabbed by the arm by a blue-coated Gorgas, he saw ahead of him the Duke start to run. In a frenzy he struck at the policeman and stunned him. He ran on and in three blocks he had made up what he had lost. For five more blocks the Duke continued, glancing now and then over his shoulder. On the sixth block he stopped. Garland approached him with steady step. He of the side whiskers was standing under a lamp post. Garland came up and put his hand on his shoulder.

"Your Grace."

"What's dat?" said the Duke, with an unmistakable east-side accent. Garland was staggered.

"I'll grace you," continued the side burns aggressively. "I saw you was a swell and I'd a dropped you bad only I'm just out of jail myself. Now listen here. I'll give you two seconds to get scarce. Go on, beat it."

Garland beat it. Crestfallen and broken-hearted he walked away and set off for Mirabel's. He would at least make a decent ending to a miserable quest. A half an hour later he rang the bell, his clothes hanging on him like a wet bathing suit.

Mirabel came to the door cool and fascinating.

"Oh Doddy," she exclaimed. "Thank you so much. Dukey," and she held up a small white poodle which she had in her arms, "came back ten minutes after you left. He had just followed the mail man."

Garland sat down on the step.

"But the Duke of Matterlane?"

"Oh," said Mirabel, "he comes tomorrow. You must come right over and meet him."

"Im afraid I can't," said Garland, rising feebly, "previous engagement." He paused, smiled faintly and set off across the sultry moon-lit pavement.

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