

Too Cute for Words, F. Scott Fitzgerald

I

Bryan didn't know exactly why Mrs. Hannaman was there. He thought it was something about his being a widower who should be looked after in some way. He had come home early from his office to catch up on certain aspects of his daughter.

"She has such beautiful manners," Mrs. Hannaman was saying. "Old-fashioned manners."

"Thank you," he said. "We brought up Gwen in the Continental style, and when we came back here, we tried to keep up the general idea."

"You taught her languages, and all that?"

"Lord, no! I never learned anything but waiter's French, but I'm strict with Gwen. I don't let her go to the movies, for instance—"

Had Mrs. Hannaman's memory betrayed her, or had she heard her little niece Clara say that she and Gwen sat through three straight performances of Top Hat, and would see it again if they could find it at one of the smaller theaters.

"We have a phonograph," Bryan Bowers continued, "so Gwen can play music of her own choice, but I won't give her a radio. Children ought to make their own music."

He heard himself saying this, only half believing it, wishing Gwen would come home.

"She plays the piano?"

"Well, she did. She took piano lessons for years, but this year there was so much work at school that we just let it go. I mean we postponed it. She's just thirteen, and she's got plenty of time."

"Of course," agreed Mrs. Hannaman dryly.

When Mrs. Hannaman left, Bryan went back to work on the apartment. They were really settled at last. At least he was settled; it seemed rather likely that Gwen never would be settled. Glancing into his daughter's room now, he uttered a short exclamation of despair. Everything was just as it had been for the past three weeks. He had told the maid that nothing must be touched except the bed, because Gwen should do her own straightening up. She had been to camp this past summer; if this was the system she had learned, that was time wasted. A pair of crushed jodhpur breeches lay in the corner where they had been stepped out of, a section of them rising resentfully above the rest, as if trying to straighten up of its own accord; a stack of letters from boys—a stack that had once worn a neat elastic band—was spread along the top of the bureau like a pack of cards ready for the draw; three knitted sweaters in various preliminary stages of creation and the beginnings of many tidying-ups lay like abandoned foundations about the room. The business was always to be completed on the following Sunday, but Sunday was always the day when the unforeseen came up: Gwen was invited to do something very healthy, or she had so much homework, or he had to take her out with him because he didn't want to leave her alone. For a while it had been a fine idea to let her live in this mess until she was impelled to act from within, but as October crept into November the confusion increased. She was late for everything because nothing could be found. The maid complained it had become absolutely impossible to sweep the room, save with the cautious steps of Eliza on the ice.

He heard his daughter come in, and, with the problem in his mind, went to meet her

in the living room.

They faced each other in a moment of happiness. They looked alike. He had been handsome once, but middle age had added flesh in the unappealing places. When he spoke of the past, Gwen was never able to imagine him in romantic situations. She was an arresting little beauty, black-eyed, with soft bay hair and with an extraordinarily infectious laugh—a rare laugh that had a peal in it, and yet managed not to get on people's nerves.

She had thrown herself full length on a couch, scattering her books on the floor. When Bryan came in, she moved her feet so that they just projected over the side of the couch. He noted the gesture, and suggested:

"Pull down your skirt or else take it off altogether."

"Daddy! Don't be so vulgar!"

"That's the only way I can get through to you sometimes."

"Daddy, I got credit plus in geometry. Cute?"

"What's credit plus?"

"Ninety-two."

"Why don't they just say ninety-two?"

"Daddy, did you get the tickets for the Harvard game?"

"I told you I'd take you."

She nodded, and remarked as if absently:

"Dizzy's father's taking her to the Harvard game and the Navy game. And her uncle's taking her to the Dartmouth game. Isn't that cute?"

"What's cute about it? Do you know what you said to Doctor Parker the other day, when he asked you if you liked Caesar? You said you thought Caesar was cute." He walked around the room in helpless laughter. "A man conquers the whole known world, and a little schoolgirl comes along a thousand years afterwards and says he's cute!"

"Two thousand years," remarked Gwen, unruffled.. "Daddy, Mr. Campbell's driving them up to the Harvard game in their new car. Isn't that cu—isn't that fine?"

She was always like this in the first half hour home from school or a party—outer worlds where she lived with such intensity that she carried it into the slower tempo of life at home like weather on her shoes. This is what made her say:

"It'd take forever the way you drive, daddy."

"I drive fast enough."

"Once I drove ninety miles an hour—"

Startled, he stared at her, and Gwen should have been acute enough to minimize the statement immediately. But still in her worldly daze, she continued "—on the way to Turtle Lake this summer."

"Who with?"

"With a girl."

"A girl your age driving a car!"

"No. The girl was nineteen—she's a sister of a girl I was visiting. But I won't tell you who. Probably you'd never let me go there again, daddy."

She was very sorry that she had ever spoken.

"You might as well tell me. I know who you've visited this summer and I can find out who's got a sister nineteen years old. I'm not going to have you mangled up against a telegraph post because some young—"

Momentarily Gwen was saved by the maid calling her father to the phone. As a sort of propitiation, she hung her overcoat in the closet, picked up her books and went on into her own room.

She examined it, as usual, with a vast surprise. She knew it was rather terrible, but she had some system of her own as to what to do about it—a system that never seemed to work out in actuality. She bounced with a cry upon the wastebasket—it was her record of "Cheek to Cheek," broken, but preserved to remind her to get another. She cradled it to her arms, and as if this, in turn, reminded her of something else, she decided to telephone Dizzy Campbell. This required a certain diplomacy. Bryan had become adamant on the matter of long phone conversations.

"This is about Latin," she assured him.

"All right, but make it short, daughter."

He read the paper in the living room, waiting for supper; for some time he had been aware of a prolonged murmur which confused itself in his mind with distant guns in Ethiopia and China. Only when he turned to the financial page and read the day's quotation on American Tel. and Tel. did he spring to his feet.

"She's on the phone again!" he exclaimed to himself; but even as the paper billowed to rest in front of him, Gwen appeared, all radiant and on the run.

"Oh, daddy, the best thing! You won't have to take me to the game, after all! I mean you will to the game, but not up to the game. Dizzy's aunt, Mrs. Charles Wrotten Ray, or something like that—somebody that's all right, that they know about, that they can trust, and all that sort of thing—"

While she panted, he inquired politely:

"What about her? Has she made the Princeton team?"

"No. She lives up there and she has some nephews or uncles or something—it was all kind of complicated on the phone—that go to some kind of prep school that are about our age—about fifteen or sixteen—"

"I thought you were thirteen."

"The boy is always older," she assured him. "Anyhow, she—"

"Don't ever say 'she.'"

"Well, excuse me, daddy. Well, anyhow, this sort of person—you know, not 'she,' but

this sort of Mrs. Wrotten Ray, or whatever her name is—she wants Dizzy—”

“Now, calm yourself, calm yourself.”

“I can’t, daddy; she’s waiting on the phone.”

“Who? Mrs. Wrotten Ray?”

“Oh, that isn’t her name, but it’s something like that. Anyhow, Mrs. Wrotten Ray wants Dizzy to bring Clara Hannaman and one other girl up to a little dance the night before the game. And Dizzy wants me to be the other girl, and can I go?”

“This is all a little sudden. I don’t like such things during a school term, and you know that.” He hated to refuse her, though, for, excepting an occasional indiscretion of speech, she was a trustworthy child; she made good grades in school and conscientiously wrestled with her ebullient temperament.

“Well, can I, daddy? Dizzy’s waiting; she has to know.”

“I suppose you can.”

“Oh, thanks. Mrs. Campbell’s going to call you up, but Dizzy couldn’t wait to tell me. Cute?”

She vanished, and in a moment the low murmur behind the door began again.

Something told Bryan that she’d be leading a simpler life at boarding school, but didn’t Helen Hannaman say something today about her old-fashioned manners? He couldn’t afford it this year anyhow, and, besides, she was such a bright little thing to have around the house.

But if he’d known that the movies were going to produce this Top Hat— She had broken the record of “Cheek to Cheek,” but there was still the one about sitting on his top hat and climbing up his shirt front—

Curiously, he opened the door to the dining room and discovered the phonograph going and his daughter in a crouching posture, arms outspread, head projecting from its proper neck, eyes half closed. When she saw him, she straightened up.

“I thought that this ‘Cheek by Jowl’ was broken,” he said.

“It is, but you can still play the inside a little. See, it’s over already. You certainly can’t object to that much of a record.”

“Let’s put it on again,” he suggested facetiously, “and we’ll dance.”

She looked at him with infinite compassion.

“Who do you imagine you are, daddy? Fred Astaire? What I want to know is if I can go to Princeton.”

“I said yes, didn’t I?”

“But you didn’t say it like when you mean it.”

“Yes, then—yes. Get enough rope and hang yourself.”

“Then I can go?”

"Yes, of course. Why not? Where do you think you're going? To the prom or something? Of course, you can go."

## II

Having lunch on the train, the three girls were a little bit mad with excitement. Clara Hannaman and Dizzy Campbell were fourteen, a year older than Gwen, and Clara was already somewhat taller, but they were all dressed alike in suits that might have been worn by their mothers. Their jewelry consisted of thin rings and chains, legacies from grandmothers, supplemented by flamboyant Koh-i-noors from the five-and-ten; and it was true that their coats might once have responded to wheedling calls of "Pussy," "Bunny," or "Nanny." But it was their attacks of hysteria that stamped them as of a certain age.

Clara had asked: "What kind of a joint is this we're going to?" She was temporarily under the spell of Una Merkel and the hard-boiled school, and this question was enough to start a rat-tat-tat of laughter, to the extent that eating was suspended, napkins called into play. One word was usually enough to send them off; frequently it was a boy's name that had some private meaning to them, and for a whole afternoon or evening this single word would serve as detonator. At other times a curious soberness fell upon all of them, a sort of quietude. They faced both ways—toward a world they were fast leaving and a world they had never met—and the contradiction was externalized in the uncanny mirth.

There was a sober moment now when they all looked at the girl across the way, who was the debutante of the year and bound for the fall prom. They looked with respect, even a certain awe, impressed with her ease and tranquility in the face of her ordeal. It made them feel very young and awkward, and they were both glad and sorry that they were too young for the prom. Last year that girl had been only the captain of the basketball team at school; now she was in the Great Game, and they had noted the men who came to see her off at the station with flowers and adjurations not to "fall for any babies up there... Be five years before they get a job."

After luncheon, the three girls planned to study—they had conscientiously brought books along—but the excitement of the train was such that they never got any farther than the phrase "jeweled stomacher" from an English-history lesson—which thereafter became their phrase for the day. They reached Princeton in an uncanny, explosive quiet, because Dizzy claimed to have forgotten her jeweled stomacher on the train, but their wild chuckles changed to a well-bred reserve as they were greeted on the platform by Miss Ray, young and lovely and twenty.

Where were the boys? They peered for them through the early dusk, not expecting to be greeted like prom girls, but there might have been someone of their own age, the one for whom they had dressed and dreamed and waved their locks sidewise in these last twenty-four hours. When they reached the house, Miss Ray exploded the bomb; while they took off their coats, she said:

"You're due for a disappointment. I tried to reach you by telegraphing and telephone, too, but you'd already left."

Their eyes turned toward her, apprehensive, already stricken.

"Seems that grandmother's not well, and mother felt she had to go up to Albany. So, before I was even awake, she called off the little dance, and she'd phoned everybody. I tried to fix it up, but it was too late."

Now their faces were utterly expressionless.

"Mother was excited, that's all," continued Miss Ray. "Grandmother'll live to be a hundred. I've been on the phone all afternoon trying to find some company for you girls for this evening, but the town's a madhouse and nobody's available—the boys for the little dance were coming from New York. Lord, if I'd only waked up before eleven o'clock!"

"We don't mind," Dizzy lied gently. "Really we don't, Esther. We can amuse ourselves."

"Oh, darling, I know how you feel!"

"Yes," they said together, and Dizzy asked, "Where's Shorty? Did he have to go to Albany too?"

"No, he's here. But he's only sixteen and— I hardly know how to explain it, but he's the youngest man in his class in college, and very small, and this year he's just impossibly shy. When the party was called off, he just refused to appear as the only boy; said he'd stay in his room and study chemistry, and there he is. And he won't come out."

Gwen formed a mental picture of him. Better that he remained in his hermitage; they could have more fun without him.

"Anyhow, you'll have the game tomorrow."

"Yes," they said together.

That was that. Upstairs they took out their evening gowns, which, according to modern acceptance, were as long and as chic as any adult evening gowns, and laid them on their beds. They brought out their silk hosiery, their gold or silver sandal dancing shoes, and surveyed the glittering exhibit. At that age, their mothers would have worn ruffles, flounces and cotton stockings to brand them as adolescent. But this historical fact, dinned into them for many years, was small consolation now.

After they had dressed, things seemed better, even though they were only dressing for one another; when they went down to dinner, they gave such an impression of amiability and gaiety that they convinced even Esther Ray. It was difficult, though, when Miss Ray's escort called to take her to the Harvard-Princeton concert, and she must have seen it in their eyes.

"I've got an idea," she said. "I think we can get you into the concert, but you may have to stand up in back."

That was something indeed. They brightened. They ran for coats; and Gwen caught sight of a very hurried young man in the upper hall with a plate in one hand and a cup in the other, but he disappeared into his room before she could see him plainly.

In any event, the concert turned out as precariously as most improvisations—it was jammed, and they were obliged to stand behind rows of taller people and to listen to tantalizing bursts of laughter and fragments of song—while from Clara's superior three inches they gathered such information as they could as to what it looked like.

When it was over, they were washed out with the happy, excited crowd, driven back to the Rays', and dumped almost brusquely on the doorstep.

"Good night. Thanks."

"Thanks a lot."

"It was fine!"

"Thanks. Good night."

Upstairs they moved around in silence, casting stray glances at themselves in the mirror and rearranging, to no purpose now, some bit of awry finery. Dizzy had even taken off her necklace of seed pearls, when Gwen said suddenly:

"I want to go to the prom."

"Who doesn't?" Clara said. Suddenly she looked at Gwen sharply and asked: "What do you mean, Gwen?"

Gwen was drawing her lips in the mirror with Dizzy's lipstick. She would have had one along herself, save it had melted going through Alabama on the way to the ranch last summer, and she had never since been able to get the top off it. Clara watched her until Gwen said:

"How would you make up if you were going to the prom?"

"Like this," Clara suggested.

In a minute they were all at it.

"Not like that; that looks very ordinary." And: "Remember, that's Esther's eye pencil. That's too much, Dizzy."

"Not with powder, it isn't."

Within half an hour they had somehow managed to age themselves by several years, and crying: "Bring on my jeweled stomacher," they minced, paraded and danced around the room.

"I'll tell you what," Gwen said. "I just sort of want to go to the outside of the prom. I mean I don't want to do anything bad, you know, but I want to see how they work it."

"Esther might see us."

"She won't," said Gwen sagely. "She's probably having herself a time, and that girl on the train too—that Marion Lamb—you know, we used to know her in school. You take a lot of these debutantes," she continued, "and when they get by themselves—pretty cute is what I would say, if you asked me."

Dizzy looked like white-pine shavings; even her eyes were so light and virginal that what she said now came as a sort of shock to the other two:

"We'll do it—we'll go to the prom. We've got more what it takes than most of those girls."

"Of course this isn't like a city," Clara suggested uncertainly. "It's perfectly all right; it's just the same as going out in your yard."

This remark was calming to their consciences, but they were really less concerned with kidnapers or molesters of womanhood than with what Gwen's plan was. Gwen had no plan. She had literally nothing on her mind except a certain disparity between

the picture of herself wandering around a college campus at night with rouged lips, and a little scene that had taken place a week before, when she had argued with her father that she wanted to set up her doll's house in her room instead of having it sent to storage.

The deciding factor was that they had been cheated by their elders. Though Bryan had never met Mrs. Ray, he somehow seemed to share in her disastrous excitability of the morning. This was the sort of thing that parents did as a class. The sort of thing for which they had joint responsibility. Before Gwen and Dizzy had agreed to the excursion in words, they bumped shoulders around the mirror, modifying their faces until the theatrical quality yielded to the more seemly pigmentation of an embassy ball. In the last burst of conservatism, for they might run inadvertently into Esther Ray, they cleansed the area around their eyes, leaving only the faintest patina of evening on lips and noses. The ten-cent crown jewels disappeared from ear and wrist and throat so quickly that when they went downstairs all taint of the side show had disappeared. Taste had triumphed.

Issuing into a clear brilliant November night, they walked along a high exuberant street beneath the dark trees of Liberty Place—though that meant nothing to them. A dog panicked them momentarily from behind a hedge, but they met no further obstacle until it was necessary to pass beneath a bright arc on Mercer Street.

"Where are we going?" Clara asked.

"Up to where we can hear it."

She stopped. Figures had loomed up ahead, and they linked arms protectively, but it was only two colored women carrying a basket of laundry between them.

"Come on," Gwen said.

"Come on to where?"

"To where we're going."

They reached a cathedral-like structure which Clara recognized as a corner of the campus, and by a sort of instinct they turned into an archway, threaded a deserted cloister and came out into a wider vista of terraces and Gothic buildings, and suddenly there was music in the air. After a few hundred yards, Dizzy pulled them up short.

"I see it," she whispered. "It's that big building down there with all the lights. That's the gymnasium."

"Let's go closer," said Gwen. "There isn't anybody around. Let's go till we see somebody, anyhow."

Arms linked, they marched on in the shadow of the long halls. They were getting dangerously close to the zone of activity, could distinguish figures against the blur of the gymnasium entrance, and hear the applause in the intervals. Once more they stopped, afraid either to go on or to hold their ground, for there were voices and footsteps approaching out of the darkness.

"Over at the other side," Clara suggested. "It's dark there and we can get really close."

They left the path and ran across the turf; stopped, breathless, in the haven of a group of parked cars. Here they huddled silently, feeling like spies behind the enemy lines. Within the great bulky walls, fifty feet away, a sonorous orchestra



proclaimed a feeling that someone was fooling, announced that someone was its lucky star, and demanded if it wasn't a lovely day to be caught in the rain. Inside those walls existed ineffable romance—an orchid-colored dream in which floated prototypes of their future selves, surrounded, engulfed, buoyed up by unnumbered boys. No one spoke; there was no more to say than the orchestra was saying to their young hearts, and when the music stopped, they did not speak; then suddenly they realized that they were not alone.

"We can eat later," a man's voice said.

"I don't care about it at all, when I'm with you."

The three young girls caught their breath in a gasp, clutched at one another's arms. The voices came from a car not five feet from where they stood; it was turned away from the gymnasium, so that under cover of the music, their approach had gone unobserved.

"What's one supper," the girl continued, "when I think of all the suppers we'll have together all through life?"

"Beginning next June, darling."

"Beginning next June, darling, darling, darling."

And once again a clutching went on among the listeners. For the girl's voice was that of Marion Lamb, the debutante who had been on the train.

At this point, because it was a rather cool night and her evening cloak was thin, Dizzy sneezed—sneezed loudly and sneezed again.

III

"But how do we know you kids won't tell?" the man was demanding. He turned to Marion: "Can't you explain to them how important it is not to tell? Explain that it'll absolutely wreck your debut at home."

"But I don't care, Harry. I'd be proud—"

"I care. It simply can't get around now."

"We won't tell," the young girls chorused ardently. And Gwen added: "We think it's cute."

"Do you realize you're the only ones that know?" he asked sternly. "The only ones! And if it slipped out, I'd know who told, and—"

There were such sinister threats in his voice that instinctively the trio recoiled a step.

"That isn't the way to talk to them," said Marion. "I went to school with these girls and I know they won't tell. Anyhow, they know it's not serious—that I get engaged every few weeks or so."

"Marion," cried the young man, "I can't stand hearing you talk like that!"

"Oh, Harry, I didn't mean to hurt you!" she gasped, equally upset. "You know there's never been anyone but you."

He groaned.

"Well, how are we going to silence this gallery?" Distraught, he fumbled in his pocket for money.

"No, Harry. They'll keep quiet." But looking at those six eyes, she felt a vast misgiving. "Listen, what would you three like more than anything in the world?"

They laughed and looked at one another.

"To go to the prom, I guess," said Gwen frankly. "But of course, we wouldn't be allowed to. Our parents wouldn't let us, even if we were invited—I mean—"

"I've got the idea," said Harry. "I'll tell you what I'll do. I know a side entrance that leads up to the indoor track. How would you like to sit up there in the dark and look on awhile without anybody seeing you?"

"Whew!" said Dizzy.

"If I take you up there, will you give me your sacred words of honor that you'll never breathe a word of what you heard tonight?"

"Will we!" they exclaimed together.

#### IV

Leaving them on the running track, the focusing eye must move down momentarily to the thick of the dance below. Or rather to its outskirts, where a person had just appeared who has hitherto played a small and sorry part in this history, and there he stood uncertainly, his view obscured by a throbbing Harvard-Princeton stag line. If, half an hour before, anyone had told Shorty Ray that eleven o'clock would find him in his present situation, he would not even have said, "Huh!" Some boys of inconsiderable height are compensated by an almost passionate temerity. Not Shorty; since adolescence, he never had been able to face girls with a minimum of dignity. The dance at home was part of a campaign to break him of his shyness, and it had seemed a stroke of luck to him that if his grandmother's health were going to fail anyhow, it should have chosen this particular day.

As if in retribution for this irreverence, a telegram from Albany addressed to his sister had come to the house at the very moment when he had started to turn out his lights.

An older man would have torn open the telegram and read it, but anything sealed was sacred to him, and such telegrams spelled emergencies. There was nothing for it save to get it to Esther in the gymnasium as quickly as possible.

One thing he knew—he would not go upon the dance floor in search of her. After he had argued his way past the doorkeeper, he was simply standing there feeling helpless, when Dizzy spied him from above.

"There's Tommy!" she exclaimed.

"Where?"

"The short boy by the door. Well, that's pathetic, if you ask me! He wouldn't even come out and look at us, and then he goes to the prom."

"He doesn't seem to be having much of a time," said Clara.

"Let's go down and cheer him up," Gwen suggested.

"Not me," said Dizzy. "For one thing, I wouldn't want the Rays to know we were here."

"I forgot about that."

"Anyhow, he's gone now."

He was gone, but not, as they supposed, into the delirious carnival. Irresolute, he had finally conceived the idea of mounting to the running track and trying to locate Esther among the dancers. Even as Dizzy spoke, he was there at her elbow, to their mutual surprise.

"I thought you were in bed!" he exclaimed, as he recognized his cousin.

"I thought you were studying."

"I was studying when a telegram came, and now I've got to find Esther."

He was introduced with great formality; Gwen and Clara immediately adopting the convention that they had not known of his existence in the same town.

"Esther was in one of the boxes a while ago," said Gwen. "No. 18."

Grasping at this, Tommy turned to Dizzy.

"Then I wonder if you'd mind going over and giving her this telegram?"

"I would so mind," said Dizzy. "Why don't you give it to her yourself? We're not supposed to be here."

"Neither am I; they let me in. But I can't just walk across there all by myself, and you can," he said earnestly.

Gwen had been looking at him in a curiously intent way for some moments. He was not at all the person she had pictured—in fact, she decided that he was one of the handsomest boys she had ever seen in her life.

"I'll take it to her," she said suddenly.

"Will you?" For the first time he seemed to see Gwen—a girl who looked like the pictures in the magazines, and yet was smaller than himself. He thrust the telegram at her. "Thanks! Gosh, I certainly am—"

"I'm not going downstairs alone," she interrupted. "You've got to take me part way."

As they descended, he looked at her again out of the corner of his eye; at the big arch he paused.

"Now you take it the rest of the way," he said.

"The best way would be to do it together."

"Oh, no!" he exclaimed. "You didn't say that. I'm not going to walk across the floor."

"I didn't mean walk. If we walked, everybody'd kind of look at us, but if we danced across to the box, nobody would notice it."

"You said you'd take it!" he said indignantly.

"I will, but you've got to take me." And she added innocently, "That makes it easy for us both."

"I won't do it," he declared.

"Then you can take it yourself."

"I never—"

Suddenly, before he realized it, she was in the circle of his arm, his hand was on what was apparently a forgotten seam in her dress just between shoulder blades, and they were moving across the floor.

Through the line of stags and out into the kaleidoscope. Gwen was at home; all hesitancy at the daring of her idea vanishing like the tension of a football player after the kick-off. By some inexorable right, this was her world. This was, perhaps, not the time set for entering it, but, maybe because her generation had ceased to move in the old Euclidian world, her age ceased to matter after a moment. She felt as old as any girl on the floor.

And now, miracle of miracles, the lights dimmed, and at the signal, the divine spark passed from one orchestra to another, and Gwen was dancing onward in a breathless trance to the melody of "Cheek to Cheek."

In the Laurel Club box, the ladies were growing weary. Chaperonage, they decided, was too lightly undertaken, too poorly compensated for. They were tired of the parade of animation, of lovely, confident faces, and one of them said as much to the middle-aged man who sat at her side. He, too, wore the look of speculating upon the texture of cool pillowcases and the beatitude of absolute quiet.

"I had to come," she said, "but I still don't understand why you came."

"Perhaps because I saw in the morning paper that you'd be here, after all these years."

"This is no place to say that to a woman of my age; the competition makes me feel very old. Look at that odd-looking couple—like a pair of midgets. I haven't seen them before."

He looked, but they seemed like just the sort of eccentrics to wander into any doze, so, after vaguely replying, "Aren't they cute?" he glazed his eyes for a while, until she commented: "There they are again. Such little people. That girl—why, she can't be more than fourteen, and she's like a blase, world-weary woman of twenty. Can you imagine what her parents could have been thinking of, to let her come here tonight?"

He looked again; then, after a long pause, he said, rather wearily:

"Yes, I can imagine."

"You think it's all right then?" she demanded. "Why, it seems to me—"

"No, Helen, I just meant I can imagine what they would be thinking if they knew about it. Because the girl seems to be my daughter."

V

It was not in Bryan's nature to rush out and snatch Gwen from the floor. Should she pass near him again, he intended to bow to her very formally indeed and let the next step be hers. He was not angry with her—he supposed her hostess was behind the matter—but he was angry at a system which permitted a baby disguised as a young woman, a marriageable young woman, to dance at a semipublic ball.

At his undergraduate club the next day, he wended his way from group to group, stopping to chat momentarily here and there, but with his eye always out for Gwen, who was to meet him there. When the crowd was drifting out and down to the stadium, he called the Rays' house, and found her still there.

"You better meet me at the game," he said, glad he had given her the ticket. "I want to go down now and see the teams practice."

"Daddy, I hate to say it but I've lost it." Her voice was hushed and solemn. "I searched and searched, and then I remembered I stuck it in the mirror at home with some invitations, to see how it would look, and forgot to—"

The connection was broken, and a male voice demanded if there were rooms at the club tonight and if the steward had delivered a brown lunch basket to Thomas Pickering, '96. For ten minutes more he jangled the receiver; he wanted to tell her to buy a bad seat in the end stand and work her way around to him, but the phone service in Princeton shared the hysteria of the crowd.

People began going by the booth, looking at their watches and hurrying to get to the kick-off; in another five minutes there was no one going by the booth, and there was sweat upon Bryan's brow. He had played freshman football in college; it meant to him what war or chess might have meant to his grandfather. Resentment possessed him suddenly.

"After all, she had her fun last night, and now I have a right to mine. Let her miss it. She doesn't care, really."

But on the way to the stadium he was torn between the human roar that went up at momentary intervals behind that massive wall and the picture of Gwen making a last desperate search for that precious counter that gleamed uselessly in a mirror at home.

He hardened himself.

"It's that disorderliness. This will be a better lesson than any lecture."

Nevertheless, at the very gate Bryan paused once more; he and Gwen were very close, and he could still go after her, but a huge swelling cry from the arena decided him; he went in with the last dribble of the crowd.

It was as he reached his seat that he saw that there was a hand signaling him, heard a voice hailing him.

"Oh, daddy, here we are! We thought maybe you'd—"

"Sit down," he whispered, breathlessly slipping into his place. "People want to see. Did you find your ticket?"

"No, daddy. I had a terrible time—but this is Tommy Ray, daddy. He hasn't got a seat here; he was just keeping your seat till you came. He can sit anywhere because he—"

"Be quiet, Baby! You can tell me later. What's happened on the field? What's on that Scoreboard?"

"What Scoreboard?"

From the aisle steps whither he had moved, Tommy supplied the information that it was nothing to nothing; Bryan bent his whole attention upon the game.

At the quarter, he relaxed and demanded:

"How did you manage to get in?"

"Well, you see, Tommy Ray"—she lowered her voice—"this boy beside me—he's one of the ticket takers. And I knew he'd be somewhere, because he told me last night that was why he had to go home—"

She stopped herself.

"I understand," Bryan said dryly. "I wondered what you found to talk about in that remarkable dancing position."

"You were there?" she cried in dismay. "You—"

"Listen to that Harvard band," he interrupted, "jazzing old marching songs—seems sort of irreverent. Of course, you'd probably like them to play 'Cheek by Jowl.'"

"Daddy!"

But for a moment her eyes were far off on the gray horizon, listening, not to the band, but to that sweeter and somehow older tune.

"What did you think?" she asked, after a moment. "I mean when you saw me there?"

"What did I think? I thought you were just too cute for words."

"You didn't! I don't care how you punish me, but please don't ever say that horrible word again!"

"Too Cute for Words" was written at the Skyline Hotel, Hendersonville, North Carolina, in December 1935. It was planned as the first in a series of Gwen stories for the Post, on the model of the successful Basil (1928-1929) and Josephine (1930-1931) stories about adolescents. It is usually easier for a writer to continue a series of connected stories than to write independent stories, and Fitzgerald was trying desperately to increase his productivity. By this time Harold Ober was acting as both editor and agent—providing lists of suggestions for improving stories, which Fitzgerald tried to act on. On 29 December Ober was able to report that the Post had bought the first Gwen story, "Too Cute for Words," for \$3000 and was interested in the series. The second story, "Make Yourself at Home," was declined. "Inside the House" was written in Baltimore in February-March 1936, and the Post paid \$3000 for it. The fourth story, "The Pearl and the Fur," was declined. After the characters' names were changed, "Make Yourself at Home" and "The Pearl and the Fur" were sold to Pictorial Review, which did not publish them. "Make Yourself at Home" appears to have been finally published in 1939 as "Strange Sanctuary" in Liberty.

Gwen was based on Fitzgerald's daughter Scottie who was fourteen when the stories were written. She had seen Top Hat, with Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, seven times, and "drove Daddy crazy" playing the record of its hit song, "Cheek to Cheek." "Inside the House" also draws on the occasion when Clark Gable came to

lunch at the Baltimore apartment.

Fitzgerald tried to compensate for Zelda's absence, but he was under great personal and professional strain; moreover, his somewhat arbitrary strictness generated father-daughter conflict. In 1939, when he was working on *The Last Tycoon*, he explained to Scottie: "And I think when you read this book, which will encompass the time when you knew me as an adult, you will understand how intensively I knew your world—not extensively because I was so ill and unable to get about."