

Chapter Six Summary and Analysis

The rumors about [Gatsby](#) continue to circulate in New York—a reporter even travels to Gatsby’s mansion hoping to interview him. Having learned the truth about Gatsby’s early life sometime before writing his account, [Nick](#) now interrupts the story to relate Gatsby’s personal history—not as it is rumored to have occurred, nor as Gatsby claimed it occurred, but as it really happened.

Gatsby was born James Gatz on a North Dakota farm, and though he attended college at St. Olaf in Minnesota, he dropped out after two weeks, loathing the humiliating janitorial work by means of which he paid his tuition. He worked on Lake Superior the next summer fishing for salmon and digging for clams. One day, he saw a yacht owned by Dan Cody, a wealthy copper mogul, and rowed out to warn him about an impending storm. The grateful Cody took young Gatz, who gave his name as Jay Gatsby, onboard his yacht as his personal assistant.

Traveling with Cody to the Barbary Coast and the West Indies, Gatsby fell in love with wealth and luxury. Cody was a heavy drinker, and one of Gatsby’s jobs was to look after him during his drunken binges. This gave Gatsby a healthy respect for the dangers of alcohol and convinced him not to become a drinker himself. When Cody died, he left Gatsby \$25,000, but Cody’s mistress prevented him from claiming his inheritance. Gatsby then dedicated himself to becoming a wealthy and successful man.

Nick sees neither Gatsby nor [Daisy](#) for several weeks after their reunion at Nick's house. Stopping by Gatsby's house one afternoon, he is alarmed to find [Tom Buchanan](#) there. Tom has stopped for a drink at Gatsby's house with Mr. and Mrs. Sloane, with whom he has been out riding. Gatsby seems nervous and agitated, and tells Tom awkwardly that he knows Daisy. Gatsby invites Tom and the Sloanes to stay for dinner, but they refuse. To be polite, they invite Gatsby to dine with them, and he accepts, not realizing the insincerity of the invitation. Tom is contemptuous of Gatsby's lack of social grace and highly critical of Daisy's habit of visiting Gatsby's house alone. He is suspicious, but he has not yet discovered Gatsby and Daisy's love. The following Saturday night, Tom and Daisy go to a party at Gatsby's house. Though Tom has no interest in the party, his dislike for Gatsby causes him to want to keep an eye on Daisy. Gatsby's party strikes Nick much more unfavorably this time around—he finds the revelry oppressive and notices that even Daisy has a bad time. Tom upsets her by telling her that Gatsby's fortune comes from bootlegging. She angrily replies that Gatsby's wealth comes from a chain of drugstores that he owns.

Gatsby seeks out Nick after Tom and Daisy leave the party; he is unhappy because Daisy has had such an unpleasant time. Gatsby wants things to be exactly the same as they were before he left Louisville: he wants Daisy to leave Tom so that he can be with her. Nick reminds Gatsby that he cannot re-create the past. Gatsby, distraught, protests that he can. He believes that his money can accomplish anything as far as Daisy is concerned. As he walks amid the debris from the party, Nick thinks about the first time Gatsby kissed Daisy, the moment when his dream of Daisy became the

dominant force in his life. Now that he has her, Nick reflects, his dream is effectively over.

The truth was that Jay Gatsby, of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his Platonic conception of himself.

Analysis:

Chapter 6 further explores the topic of social class as it relates to Gatsby. Nick's description of Gatsby's early life reveals the sensitivity to status that spurs Gatsby on. His humiliation at having to work as a janitor in college contrasts with the promise that he experiences when he meets Dan Cody, who represents the attainment of everything that Gatsby wants. Acutely aware of his poverty, the young Gatsby develops a powerful obsession with amassing wealth and status. Gatsby's act of rechristening himself symbolizes his desire to jettison his lower-class identity and recast himself as the wealthy man he envisions.

It is easy to see how a man who has gone to such great lengths to achieve wealth and luxury would find Daisy so alluring: for her, the aura of wealth and luxury comes effortlessly. She is able to take her position for granted, and she becomes, for Gatsby, the epitome of everything that he invented "Jay Gatsby" to achieve. As is true throughout the book, Gatsby's power to make his dreams real is what makes him "great." In this chapter, it becomes clear that his most powerfully realized dream is his own identity, his sense of self. It is important to realize, in addition, that Gatsby's conception of Daisy is itself a dream. He thinks of her as the sweet girl who loved

him in Louisville, blinding himself to the reality that she would never desert her own class and background to be with him.

Fitzgerald continues to explore the theme of social class by illustrating the contempt with which the aristocratic East Eggers, Tom and the Sloanes, regard Gatsby. Even though Gatsby seems to have as much money as they do, he lacks their sense of social nuance and easy, aristocratic grace. As a result, they mock and despise him for being “new money.” As the division between East Egg and West Egg shows, even among the very rich there are class distinctions.

It is worth noting that Fitzgerald never shows the reader a single scene from Gatsby’s affair with Daisy. The narrative is Nick’s story, and, aside from when they remake each other’s acquaintance, Nick never sees Gatsby and Daisy alone together. Perhaps Nick’s friendship with Gatsby allows him to empathize with his pain at not having Daisy, and that Nick refrains from depicting their affair out of a desire not to malign him. Whatever the reason, Fitzgerald leaves the details of their affair to the reader’s imagination, and instead exposes the menacing suspicion and mistrust on Tom’s part that will eventually lead to a confrontation.