

I stayed late that night. Gatsby asked me to wait until he was free and I lingered in the garden until the inevitable swimming party had run up, chilled and exalted, from the black beach, until the lights were extinguished in the guest rooms overhead. When he came down the steps at last the tanned skin was drawn unusually tight on his face, and his eyes were bright and tired.

‘She didn’t like it,’ he said immediately.

‘Of course she did.’

‘She didn’t like it,’ he insisted. ‘She didn’t have a good time.’

He was silent and I guessed at his unutterable depression.

‘I feel far away from her,’ he said. ‘It’s hard to make her understand.’

‘You mean about the dance?’

‘The dance?’ He dismissed all the dances he had given with a snap of his fingers.

‘Old sport, the dance is unimportant.’

He wanted nothing less of Daisy than that she should go to Tom and say: ‘I never loved you.’ After she had obliterated three years with that sentence they could decide upon the more practical measures to be taken. One of them was that, after she was free, they were to go back to Louisville and be married from her house—just as if it were five years ago.

‘And she doesn’t understand,’ he said. ‘She used to be able to understand. We’d sit for hours——’

He broke off and began to walk up and down a desolate path of fruit rinds and discarded favors and crushed flowers.

‘I wouldn’t ask too much of her,’ I ventured. ‘You can’t repeat the past.’

‘Can’t repeat the past?’ he cried incredulously. ‘Why of course you can!’

He looked around him wildly, as if the past were lurking here in the shadow of his house, just out of reach of his hand.

‘I’m going to fix everything just the way it was before,’ he said, nodding determinedly. ‘She’ll see.’

He talked a lot about the past and I gathered that he wanted to recover something, some idea of himself perhaps, that had gone into loving Daisy. His life had been confused and disordered since then, but if he could once return to a certain starting place and go over it all slowly, he could find out what that thing was....