

An American Dream

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The key slid into the lock, and the early morning chill trailed behind her into the library. She found the light switch, juggling a wobbly stack of books and moved to the front desk, book bag and purse slapping against opposite hips.

She rolled her chair to the computer and began to scan in the books from the drop boxes she'd emptied on her way in. She flipped through the pages of a book, found no damage, and slid it under the red like of the light. Beep.

"Good morning," a voice sang from the doorway. The other librarians came in and busied themselves in preparation for the opening doors while she absently scanned four more books. Beep, flip, flip, flip, beep, clomp. She piled the books up again.

She looked at the books, yet to be scanned, flickering over the titles. One caught her eye. Her favorite, or one of her many favorites, that is, sat squeezed in between *New Moon* and *Moby Dick: The Great Gatsby*. Pushing the other books from it, she felt somehow invisibly drawn toward it. Pushing the other books from it, she felt somehow invisibly drawn toward it. She pulled it before her and opened the cover. The book felt odd – like a fork in the road.

She had flipped nearly all the way through when she spied a tiny, folded paper. It seemed to have her name written all over it.

"Jan?" a voice called from behind in the office. She turned; a coworker pulling a cart of misplaced books was eyeing her.

"Just one minute," Jan replied and turned the book over hunting for the library's barcode. She opened the covers, inspected the back, the front, the binding; no code was there to be found.

Janice stood up and walked over to the other woman, taking the cart from her. In a long string of rapid-fire words, she asked Janice to replace them on their corresponding shelves. The librarians went back to work and Janice moved toward the back of the building, pausing first to dash back and grab the book.

She turned down a narrow aisle. She reached into the pocket of her denim skirt and leaning against the shelf, pulled out the note, feeling rather foolish. She wanted to laugh while unfolding it, thinking it for her – a silly notion. The laughs were caught in her throat when the note revealed a letter, and her name followed the tender greeting.

It seemed sincere, very sincere. Could it really be written to her? Thoughts pounded her head, and her heart melted, simultaneously. She pressed the letter against her chest and sank back hard into the shelf, bumping her own cart of books. *The Great Gatsby* flopped to the ground and she watched it for a long moment before opening the letter again searching for a signature. There at the end of the paper laid the name of her secret admirer: Gatsby.

Her heart sank. How could she have let herself get so excited over some joke? She wanted to crumple the letter, but holding onto the hope of an exciting romance, she simply folded it again, replacing it in her denim pocket.

Feeling a little dejected, Jan plucked *The Great Gatsby* from the carpet and dropped it on the cart. She began putting the books back in their places, every few moments gazing bleakly at Gatsby's book lying on the cart, just along for the ride.

She returned to her desk, slumped into the seat, silently berating herself for her melancholy behavior. Janice sat typing on her computer pretending to be busy while she traced the tender phrases in her mind.

The day ended quickly; few patrons needed assistance, few things needed organizing. It was one of those days, a good day with little to do. The library closed, and Jan watched each of her fellow librarians saunter out for the night as she promised to lock the doors and shut off the lights. When she was alone again, she withdrew the paper and put it on the desk before her, reading it as her fingers absently caressed the book's binding.

Lifting the book, tempted to read a few pages, Jan opened to a good part in the center. The book felt new, different even, and as she thought about its enchanting touch, she saw something peculiar: her name.

For an instant, she was stunned. Then she was convinced she had just been working too many hours – a gross understatement. The book snapped shut and she held it tightly there as if holding its mouth quiet. Janice stood and walked toward the door, book bag over her shoulder and *The Great Gatsby* nestled under her arm.

Her little car backed out of its space and rolled down the road toward her apartment. Every few seconds she glanced at the passenger seat where *The Great Gatsby* stared at her, unblinking, and lifeless.

"Janice, you're losing it," she thought, "Someone must be messing with your head." Somewhere in her heart, she knew that it wasn't a hallucination, and it wasn't a sick joke.

She unlocked the apartment door and made herself a strong cup of coffee as soon as she was in. As she sat, drinking, she touched the book, and a small voice whispered, "Read," in the back of her mind. Opening the book to a random page, she began to read. Before she could protest, she was falling asleep, caffeine or no.

Things were hazy, and Janice was hanging somewhere semi-consciously in the dark of an unformed dream, only vaguely aware of shapes forming around her. She felt her feet graze on the ground, and silky fabric flapped at her legs. She was sure that she hadn't been wearing that before. She landed fully on the ground, and instantly there was light and color and music mingling with the voices, the shuffling of feet, and clinking of glasses. Janice looked down. A short, beaded, white gown lay against her legs; tiny white shoes adorned her feet.

As Jan stood, looking sophisticated, yet wildly out of place, she heard a voice near her, and turned inconspicuously. A young man who looked just as out of place as she did was sharing a tete-a-tete with a cool woman with short hair and an air of indifferent confidence. Jan played the part of excited partygoer and inched closer to the pair feigning casual and calm.

Instead of keying her in on where she was, the pair of themselves. But, Jan caught a name: Jordan. She blinked.

"This isn't happening," she whispered feeling her voice sink away. A woman wrapped with beads bumped into her back, obviously tipsy, and wobbled away. Jan turned back to the pair being rapidly approached by another man. She performed a perfect volte-face. The light, music, and the rough scent of alcohol and perfume: it was too much. She began to march toward the bay, away from the party.

"I'm not here," she said clutching her arms against the cold, and looked up. With the breeze slapping at her gown she spied, by chance, a green light. Janice watched the light and the thoughts of the man and woman were whisked away by the cold and confusion. "This isn't happening," she whispered again.

Funny – she'd fantasized about going to one of Gatsby's marvelous and debaucherous parties, but now, it felt like too much for a shy girl who spent her days among books. She was staring at the green light on the shore of East Egg, when she felt eyes on her back.

She sucked in the biting night air and turned an inch at a time. A man, a man she knew well but had never seen, stood with wordless phrases trapped in his teeth. His hand was outstretched as if wanting to touch her shoulder before she had moved.

“You came,” he said at last and his hand dropped by his side. “Leaving so...soon?” She had no answer. “You’ve been watching...your house.”

She turned back to the distant green glow, and suddenly remembered. It *was* her house. She was filled with memories: a husband, a daughter – a beautiful baby girl. She knew the story well, however. Daisy was never supposed to come to one of his many parties. They would meet “accidentally” at her cousin’s house. It would be love at first sight, but, it could never last. The outcome was decided, but she had a will, hadn’t she? “Janice,” that was her name, not “Daisy,” no matter what part she played in this dream.

There were no words between them, and that profound silence swept away the waves of noise from the house and yard. Her eyes softened; she had made up her mind. Gatsby looked as if he could cry and laugh – as if he wanted to. In that moment, they had a tremendous understanding.

Some say that a person gradually falls in love and some that there can be an instant moment of excitement and emotion that is love at first sight. She knew that he had loved her for years, built his life around her, or Daisy. But Daisy was gone, and she could be his Daisy now. She *was* Daisy now.

The real Daisy wouldn’t have, could not have known him like Janice did. She had read his life over and over, loving him more each time. If she stayed, there would be no Daisy to come and break his heart. There would be no drive back from the coast - upset, hysterical. There would be no murder. Tom, the lecherous coward, could slink away with his under-appreciated lover. Jan could take her little girl and come to live with Gatsby, a man who loved her, and whom she loved. She knew she could be the Daisy Gatsby had waited for, not the Daisy who would choose security over love.

“No, I’m not leaving,” Janice said with wet eyes, and touched his hand.

Gatsby’s eyes were still on hers, and his grin widened. He knew she’d come back to him; she was his Daisy. They turned together toward the celebration, turning their backs on the glowing green orb forever.

They passed the pair still standing on the lawn, talking closely and observing the liquor-induced actions of the partiers in the house. The man, Nick, caught them in his gaze and Jan smiled, happily rewriting history. Gatsby’s grin shone to friends and everyone at the party. He vigorously shook Nick’s hand, tacking an “old sport” onto the end of his greeting.

They parted, and Jan walked into the house with Gatsby. The night continued, the party died down, and they began their new lives together. Soon, they were all living together happily in Gatsby’s mansion: Jan, the baby, and her new husband.

Tom left the house across the bay, running not from a broken heart, but wounded pride. He wouldn’t be back.

So, in short, Jan never went to work again, but the next week a librarian found a very peculiar note detailing the adventure in one of her favorite books. The letter told of Gatsby, and Jan’s exciting new life, ending with a tender sentiment.

“I wish I could have come back to say goodbye, but I can’t take the chance. I’m finally home. I’ve really got an American dream. Love always, Janice.”