

## Excerpt from: F. Scott Fitzgerald, “My Lost City” (1932)

### *Introduction:*

*F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940) named and epitomized the Jazz Age, yet lived to see the end of that era and the decline of his own reputation. The essay below was not published in Fitzgerald's lifetime.*

There was first the ferry boat moving softly from the Jersey shore at dawn — the moment crystallized into my first symbol of New York. Five years later when I was fifteen I went into the city from school to see Ina Claire in *The Quaker Girl* and Gertrude Bryan in *Little Boy Blue*. Confused by my hopeless and melancholy love for them both, I was unable to choose between them — so they blurred into one lovely entity, the girl. She was my second symbol of New York. The ferry boat stood for triumph, the girl for romance. In time I was to achieve some of both, but there was a third symbol that I have lost somewhere, and lost for ever.

I found it on a dark April afternoon after five more years.

'Oh, Bunny,' I yelled. '*Bunny!*'

He did not hear me — my taxi lost him, picked him up again half a block down the street. There were black spots of rain on the sidewalk and I saw him walking briskly through the crowd wearing a tan raincoat over his inevitable brown get-up; I noted with a shock that he was carrying a light cane.

'Bunny!' I called again, and stopped. I was still an undergraduate at Princeton while he had become a New Yorker. This was his afternoon walk, this hurry along with his stick through the gathering rain, and as I was not to meet him for an hour it seemed an intrusion to happen upon him engrossed in his private life. But the taxi kept pace with him and as I continued to watch I was impressed: he was no longer the shy little scholar of Holder Court - he walked with confidence, wrapped in his thoughts and looking straight ahead, and it was obvious that his new background was entirely sufficient to him. I knew that he had an apartment where he lived with three other men, released now from all undergraduate taboos, but there was something else that was nourishing him and I got my first impression of that new thing - the Metropolitan spirit.

Up to this time I had seen only the New York that offered itself for inspection - I was Dick Whittington up from the country gazing at the trained bears, or a youth of the Midi dazzled by the

boulevards of Paris. I had come only to stare at the show, though the designers of the Woolworth Building and the Chariot Race Sign, the producers of musical comedies and problem plays, could ask for no more appreciative spectator, for I took the style and glitter of New York even above its own valuation. But I had never accepted any of the practically anonymous invitations to debutante balls that turned up in an undergraduate's mail, perhaps because I felt that no actuality could live up to my conception of New York's splendour. Moreover, she to whom I fatuously referred as 'my girl' was a Middle Westerner, a fact which kept the warm centre of the world out there, so I thought of New York as essentially cynical and heartless — save for one night when she made luminous the Ritz Roof on a brief passage through.

Lately, however, I had definitely lost her and I wanted a man's world, and this sight of Bunny made me see New York as just that. A week before, Monsignor Fay had taken me to the Lafayette where there was spread before us a brilliant flag of food, called an *hors d'oeuvre*, and with it we drank claret that was as brave as Bunny's confident cane -but after all it was a restaurant, and afterwards we would drive back over a bridge into the hinterland. The New York of undergraduate dissipation, of Bustanoby's, Shanley's, Jack's, had become a horror, and though I returned to it, alas, through many an alcoholic mist, I felt each time a betrayal of a persistent idealism. My participance was prurient rather than licentious and scarcely one pleasant memory of it remains from those days; as Ernest Hemingway once remarked, the sole purpose of the cabaret is for unattached men to find complaisant women. All the rest is a wasting of time in bad air.

But that night, in Bunny's apartment, life was mellow and safe, a finer distillation of all that I had come to love at Princeton. The gentle playing of an oboe mingled with city noises from the street outside, which penetrated into the room with difficulty through great barricades of books; only the crisp tearing open of invitations by one man was a discordant note. I had found a third symbol of New York and I began wondering about the rent of such apartments and casting about for the appropriate friends to share one with me.

[...]

It was three years before we saw New York again. [*ie. in 1926, ed.*] As the ship glided up the river, the city burst thunderously upon us in the early dusk — the white glacier of lower New York swooping down like a strand of a bridge to rise into uptown New York, a miracle of foamy light suspended by the stars. A band started to play on deck, but the majesty of the city made the march trivial and tinkling. From that moment I knew that New York, however often I might leave it, was home.

The tempo of the city had changed sharply. The uncertainties of 1920 were drowned in a steady golden roar and many of our friends had grown wealthy. But the restlessness of New York in 1927 approached hysteria. The parties were bigger - those of Conde Nast, for example, rivalled in their way the fabled balls of the nineties; the pace was faster - the catering to dissipation set an example to Paris; the shows were broader, the buildings were higher, the morals were looser and the liquor was cheaper; but all these benefits did not really minister to much delight. Young people wore out early - they were hard and languid at twenty-one, and save for Peter Arno none of them contributed anything new; perhaps Peter Arno and his collaborators said everything there was to say about the boom days in New York that couldn't be said by a jazz band. Many people who were not alcoholics were lit up four days out of seven, and frayed nerves were strewn everywhere; groups were held together by a generic nervousness and the hangover became a part of the day as well allowed-for as the Spanish siesta. Most of my friends drank too much — the more they were in tune to the times the more they drank. And so effort *per se* had no dignity against the mere bounty of those days in New York, a depreciatory word was found for it: a successful programme became a racket — I was in the literary racket.

We settled a few hours from New York and I found that every time I came to the city I was caught into a complication of events that deposited me a few days later in a somewhat exhausted state on the train for Delaware. Whole sections of the city had grown rather poisonous, but invariably I found a moment of utter peace in riding south through Central Park at dark towards where the facade of 59th Street thrusts its lights through the trees. There again was my lost city, wrapped cool in its mystery and promise. But that detachment never lasted long - as the toiler must live in the city's belly, so I was compelled to live in its disordered mind.

Instead there were the speakeasies — the moving from luxurious bars, which advertised in the campus publications of Yale and Princeton, to the beer gardens where the snarling face of the underworld peered through the German good nature of the entertainment, then on to strange and even more sinister localities where one was eyed by granite-faced boys and there was nothing left of joviality but only a brutishness that corrupted the new day into which one presently went out. Back in 1920 I shocked a rising young business man by suggesting a cocktail before lunch. In 1929 there was liquor in half the downtown offices, and a speakeasy in half the large buildings.

One was increasingly conscious of the speakeasy and of Park Avenue. In the past decade Greenwich Village, Washington Square, Murray Hill, the chateaux of Fifth Avenue had somehow disappeared, or become unexpressive of anything. The city was bloated, gutted, stupid with cake and circuses, and a new expression 'Oh yeah?' summed up all the enthusiasm evoked by the announcement of the

last super-skyscrapers. My barber retired on a half million bet in the market and I was conscious that the head waiters who bowed me, or failed to bow me, to my table were far, far wealthier than I. This was no fun — once again I had enough of New York and it was good to be safe on shipboard where the ceaseless revelry remained in the bar in transport to the fleecing rooms of France.

'What news from New York?'

'Stocks go up. A baby murdered a gangster.'

'Nothing more?'

'Nothing. Radios blare in the street.'

I once thought that there were no second acts in American lives, but there was certainly to be a second act to New York's boom days. We were somewhere in North Africa when we heard a dull distant crash which echoed to the farthest wastes of the desert.

'What was that?'

'Did you hear it?'

'It was nothing.'

'Do you think we ought to go home and see?'

'No - it was nothing.'

In the dark autumn of two years later we saw New York again. We passed through curiously polite customs agents, and then with bowed head and hat in hand I walked reverently through the echoing tomb. Among the ruins a few childish wraiths still played to keep up the pretence that they were alive, betraying by their feverish voices and hectic cheeks the thinness of the masquerade. Cocktail parties, a last hollow survival from the days of carnival, echoed to the plaints of the wounded: 'Shoot me, for the love of God, someone shoot me!', and the groans and wails of the dying: 'Did you see that United States Steel is down three more points?' My barber was back at work in his shop; again the head waiters bowed people to their tables, if there were people to be bowed. From the ruins, lonely and inexplicable as the sphinx, rose the Empire State Building and, just as it had been a tradition of mine to climb to the Plaza Roof to take leave of the beautiful city, extending as far as eyes could reach, so now I went to the roof of the last and most magnificent of towers. Then I understood — everything was explained: I had discovered the crowning error of the city, its Pandora's box. Full of vaunting pride the New Yorker had climbed here and seen with dismay what he had never suspected, that the city was not the endless succession of canyons that he had

supposed but that *it had limits* - from the tallest structure he saw for the first time that it faded out into the country on all sides, into an expanse of green and blue that alone was limitless. And with the awful realization that New York was a city after all and not a universe, the whole shining edifice that he had reared in his imagination came crashing to the ground. That was the rash gift of Alfred E. Smith to the citizens of New York.

Thus I take leave of my lost city. Seen from the ferry boat in the early morning, it no longer whispers of fantastic success and eternal youth. The whoopee mamas who prance before its empty parquets do not suggest to me the ineffable beauty of my dream girls of 1914. And Bunny, swinging along confidently with his cane towards his cloister in a carnival, has gone over to Communism and frets about the wrongs of southern mill workers and western farmers whose voices, fifteen years ago, would not have penetrated his study walls.

All is lost save memory, yet sometimes I imagine myself reading, with curious interest, a *Daily News* of the issue of 1945:

MAN OF FIFTY RUNS AMUCK IN NEW YORK

Fitzgerald Feathered Many Love Nests Cutie Avers

Bumped Off By Outraged Gunman

So perhaps I am destined to return some day and find in the city new experiences that so far I have only read about. For the moment I can only cry out that I have lost my splendid mirage. Come back, come back, O glittering and white!

<b>epitomize</b>	være indbegrebet af	<b>sole</b>	eneste	<b>retire</b>	trække sig tilbage
<b>decline</b>	forfald	<b>complaisant</b>	eftergivende	<b>market</b>	børsmarkedet
<b>Ina Claire</b>	Am. skuespillerinde	<b>mellow</b>	blød	<b>ceaseless</b>	uendelig
(1893-1985)		<b>distillation</b>	sammendrag	<b>revelry</b>	drukorgie
<b>The Quaker Girl</b>	Eng. musical	<b>penetrate</b>	trænge ind	<b>remain</b>	forblive
<b>Gertrude Bryan</b>	Am. skuespillerinde	<b>crisp</b>	sprød	<b>fleeing</b>	lodden
(1893-ukendt)		<b>discordant</b>	falsk	<b>stock</b>	aktie
<b>Little Boy Blue</b>	romantisk operette	<b>note</b>	tone	<b>blare</b>	gjalde
<b>melancholy</b>	melankolsk	<b>cast about for</b>	søge efter	<b>dull</b>	dump
<b>blur</b>	smelte sammen	<b>appropriate</b>	passende	<b>distant</b>	fjern
<b>entity</b>	væsen	<b>burst</b>	eksplodere	<b>crash</b>	krak
<b>briskly</b>	rask	<b>dusk</b>	tusmørke	<b>curiously</b>	bemærkelsesværdigt
<b>tan</b>	gyldenbrun	<b>glacier</b>	gletsjer	<b>customs</b>	told
<b>inevitable</b>	uundgåelig	<b>swoop down</b>	kaste sig over	<b>reverently</b>	ærbødig
<b>get-up</b>	påklædning	<b>strand</b>	kabel	<b>tomb</b>	grav
<b>cane</b>	stok	<b>foamy</b>	skummende	<b>wraith</b>	genfærd
<b>undergraduate</b>	studerende	<b>suspend</b>	hænge op	<b>pretence</b>	foregivende
<b>Princeton</b>	anerkendt universitet i	<b>tinkling</b>	klimprende	<b>betray</b>	afsløre
New Jersey		<b>roar</b>	brøl	<b>feverish</b>	feberagtig
<b>intrusion</b>	trængen sig på	<b>wealthy</b>	velhavende	<b>hollow</b>	hul; overfladisk
<b>happen upon</b>	rende ind i	<b>restlessness</b>	rastløshed	<b>plaint</b>	klage
<b>engross</b>	fordybe	<b>approach</b>	nærme sig	<b>groan</b>	stønnen
<b>kept pace</b>	holde trit	<b>Conde Nast</b>	bladudgiver, der blandt	<b>wail</b>	jammer
<b>confidence</b>	selvtillid	andet stod bag <i>Vanity Fair, Vogue</i> og <i>The</i>		<b>United States Steel</b>	(en aktie)
<b>entirely</b>	helt og aldeles	<i>New Yorker</i>		<b>point</b>	børspoint
<b>sufficient</b>	passende	<b>fabled</b>	sagnomspundne	<b>inexplicable</b>	gådefuld
<b>nourish</b>	nære	<b>pace</b>	tempo	<b>sphinx</b>	sfinx (ægyptisk fabeldyr)
<b>Metropolitan</b>	storby-	<b>catering</b>	forsøg på at imødekomme	<b>Empire State Building</b>	(stod færdig
<b>spirit</b>	ånd	<b>liquor</b>	sprut	1931)	
<b>Dick Whittington</b>	fiktiv karakter, der tager	<b>benefit</b>	gode	<b>take leave</b>	tage afsked
fra landet til London for at blive sin egen		<b>minister to</b>	bidrage til	<b>extend</b>	strække sig
lykkes smed		<b>delight</b>	glæde	<b>magnificent</b>	storslået
<b>gape at</b>	måbe over	<b>wear out</b>	blive slidt op	<b>error</b>	fejl
<b>Midi</b>	Midi-Pyrénées – region i Frankrig	<b>languid</b>	mat; apatisk	<b>Pandora's box</b>	Pandoras æske, som
<b>dazzled</b>	ør	<b>Peter Arno</b>	tegner (tegneserier)	ifølge græsk mytologi blev givet til den	
<b>Woolworth Building</b>	skyskraber i	<b>collaborator</b>	samarbejdspartner	første kvinde (Pandora), fordi den første	
New York		<b>lit up</b>	pløret	mand (Prometheus) havde stjålet ilden fra	
<b>Chariot Race Sign</b>	berømt lysreklame, som	<b>frayed</b>	flosset	guderne. Æsken var en straf, der indeholdt	
bestod af mere end 20.000 pærer i		<b>strewn</b>	spredt	alverdens onder blandt andet død og	
forskellige farver		<b>generic</b>	generisk	sygdom.	
<b>appreciative</b>	taknemmelig	<b>hangover</b>	tømmermænd	<b>vaunting</b>	forfængelig
<b>spectator</b>	tilskuer	<b>allowed-for</b>	accepteret	<b>dismay</b>	forfærdelse
<b>above</b>	over	<b>in tune to</b>	i trit med	<b>succession</b>	rækkefølge
<b>valuation</b>	vurdering	<b>per se</b>	i sig selv	<b>canyon</b>	dal
<b>debutante ball</b>	et bal, hvor velhavende	<b>dignity</b>	ære	<b>expanse</b>	udstrakt flade
familiers døtre og sønner officielt		<b>bounty</b>	rigdom	<b>edifice</b>	bygningværk
introduceres til selskabslivet		<b>depreciatory</b>	nedsættende	<b>rear</b>	rejse
<b>actuality</b>	virkelig hændelse	<b>racket</b>	fidus	<b>rash</b>	overilet
<b>conception</b>	opfattelse; ide om	<b>settle</b>	slå sig ned	<b>Alfred E. Smith</b>	politiker og direktør for
<b>splendour</b>	pragt	<b>exhausted</b>	udmattet	Empire State Building Corporation	
<b>fatuously</b>	fjoget	<b>poisonous</b>	giftig	<b>thus</b>	således
<b>cynical</b>	kynisk	<b>invariably</b>	uden undtagelse	<b>eternal</b>	evig
<b>save for</b>	undtagen	<b>utter</b>	ren og skær	<b>youth</b>	ungdom
<b>make luminous</b>	oplyse	<b>thrust</b>	kaste	<b>whoopee</b>	prostitueret
<b>Ritz</b>	berømt hotel i New York	<b>detachment</b>	adskillelse	<b>prance</b>	spankulere
<b>Lafayette</b>	restaurant	<b>toiler</b>	slider	<b>parquet</b>	parket (her: siddepladserne på
<b>claret</b>	rødvin	<b>belly</b>	mave	gulvet forrest i en teatersal)	
<b>hinterland</b>	opland	<b>compel to</b>	tvinge til	<b>ineffable</b>	usigelig
<b>dissipation</b>	udskejelser	<b>speakeasy</b>	smugkro	<b>cloister</b>	kloster
<b>Bustanoby's</b>	populært dansested i	<b>snarling</b>	snerrende	<b>fret</b>	bekymre sig
New York		<b>peer through</b>	skinne igennem	<b>penetrate</b>	trænge igennem
<b>Shan-ley's</b>	spisested i New York	<b>sinister</b>	skummel	<b>feather love nests</b>	(ordspil) "bygge
<b>Jack's</b>	(som ovenstående?)	<b>joyiality</b>	munterhed	elskovsreder til sig selv"	
<b>alas</b>	ak	<b>brutishness</b>	råhed	<b>cutie</b>	skønhed; "dulle"
<b>mist</b>	tåge	<b>presently</b>	det øjeblik	<b>aver</b>	forsikre; bekræfte
<b>persistent</b>	vedholdende	<b>increasingly</b>	i stigende grad	<b>bump off</b>	rydde af vejen
<b>participance</b>	deltagelse	<b>chateaux</b>	slotte	<b>outraged</b>	rasende
<b>prurient</b>	lysten	<b>bloated</b>	oppustet	<b>destined to</b>	bestemt til
<b>licentious</b>	tøjlesløs	<b>guttled</b>	udtømt	<b>splendid</b>	storslået
<b>scarcely</b>	knap	<b>evoke</b>	fremkalde	<b>mirage</b>	fata morgana