

## Nick Carraway

### Quote 1

I am still a little afraid of missing something if I forget that, as my father snobbishly suggested, and I snobbishly repeat, a sense of the fundamental decencies is parceled out unequally at birth. (1.3)

Here, Nick says that money isn't the only thing that some people are born to. Some people are naturally just nicer and more honest: they have more "sense of the fundamental decencies." But does Nick believe that poor people can be born with these fundamental decencies, too, or do you have to be rich to have natural class?

## Nick Carraway

### Quote 2

When I came back from the East last autumn I felt that I wanted the world to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever; I wanted no more riotous excursions with privileged glimpses into the human heart. Only Gatsby, the man who gives his name to this book, was exempt from my reaction—Gatsby, who represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn. (1.4)

Gatsby may be low-class, but Nick still manages to see something good in him, anyway. Maybe he has the "natural decencies" that other members of high society don't. Except, we think this might be a little like the, "but I have a lot of \_\_\_\_\_ friends" excuse to make someone not sound racist or xenophobic.)

## Nick Carraway

### Quote 3

I lived at West Egg, the – well, the least fashionable of the two, though this is a most superficial tag to express the bizarre and not a little sinister contrast between them. My house was at the very tip of the egg, only fifty yards from the Sound, and squeezed between two huge places that rented for twelve or fifteen thousand a season. The one on my right was a colossal affair by any standard ... My own house was an eyesore, but it was a small eyesore, and it had been overlooked, so I had a view of the water, a partial view of my neighbor's lawn, and the consoling proximity of millionaires—all for eighty dollars a month. (1.14)

It may be a small house, but at least Nick gets to live near millionaires. He's joking, but this is the same logic that makes people buy designer sunglasses: you may not be able to afford the actual clothes, but you still get to have a little reflected glamour. Hey, no judgment here.

## Nick Carraway

### Quote 4

I decided to call to him. Miss Baker had mentioned him at dinner, and that would do for an introduction. But I didn't call to him, for he gave a sudden intimation that he was content to be alone—he stretched out his arms toward the dark water in a curious way, and, far as I was from him, I could have sworn he was trembling. Involuntarily I glanced seaward—and distinguished nothing except a single green light, minute and far away, that might have been the end of a dock. When I looked once more for Gatsby he had vanished, and I was alone again in the unquiet darkness. (1.152)

Love the one you're with, or love the one you *were* with? Gatsby reaches forward, but he's really reaching back into the past to a Daisy who doesn't exist anymore. Yeah, this relationship is doomed.

## Nick Carraway

### Quote 5

The Carraways are something of a clan, and we have a tradition that we're descended from the Dukes of Buccleuch, but the actual founder of my line was my grandfather's brother, who came here in fifty-one, sent a substitute to the Civil War, and started the wholesale hardware business that my father carries on to-day. (1.5)

Nick self-deprecatingly punctures the illusion that his family comes from nobility—but instead, he makes himself into another kind of nobility: a family that actually *has* achieved the American Dream of wealth and respectability through hard work.

## Nick Carraway

### Quote 6

I lived at West Egg, the—well, the less fashionable of the two, though this is a most superficial tag to express the bizarre and not a little sinister contrast between them. [...] Across the courtesy bay the white palaces of fashionable East Egg glittered along the water, and the history of the summer really begins on the evening I drove over there to have dinner with the Tom Buchanans. Daisy was my second cousin once removed, and I'd known Tom in college. And just after the war I spent two days with them in Chicago. (1.14-15)

Nick sees two kinds of America: the hard-working Chicago, part of a "Middle-West" culture; and the "white," fashionable East Egg. Nick may be able to make it in the Middle-West, but he's not cut out for East Coast life.

## Nick Carraway

### Quote 7

I decided to call to him. Miss Baker had mentioned him at dinner, and that would do for an introduction. But I didn't call to him, for he gave a sudden intimation that he was content to be alone—he stretched out his arms toward the dark water in a curious way, and, far as I was from him, I could have sworn he was trembling. Involuntarily I glanced seaward—and distinguished nothing except a single green light, minute and far away, that might have been the end of a dock. When I looked once more for Gatsby he had vanished, and I was alone again in the unquiet darkness. (1.152)

We never see Gatsby's version of America directly; we just get glimpses of it through Nick's narrative and through ephemera like his childhood notebook. But, judging from the way he's staring across the water, Gatsby has a pretty spectacular vision.

## Nick Carraway

### Quote 9

In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since.

"Whenever you feel like criticizing any one," he told me, "just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had." (1.1-3)

It's a lot easier to be morally upright when you're not pinching and scraping to make a living... which makes the immorality of the wealthy even more unforgivable. Every advantage in the world, and they can't even be nice people? Nick may forgive them, but we're not sure we do.

Nick Carraway

Quote 10

Why they came East I don't know. They had spent a year in France for no particular reason, and then drifted here and there unrestfully wherever people played polo and were rich together. (1. 17)

Okay, hilarious. Isn't playing polo basically the definition of "being rich together"?

Nick Carraway

Quote 11

His speaking voice, a gruff husky tenor, added to the impression of fractiousness he conveyed. There was a touch of paternal contempt in it, even toward people he liked—and there were men at New Haven who had hated his guts. (1.20)

Wealth makes Tom "paternal," as though it gives him the right to tell the entire world how to behave. But remember—he didn't earn the wealth. He's literally done *nothing* to deserve it. So why does he get to be mean-dad to everyone?

Nick Carraway

Quote 12

"Whenever you feel like criticizing any one," he told me, "just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had." He didn't say any more, but we've always been unusually communicative in a reserved way, and I understood that he meant a great deal more than that. In consequence, I'm inclined to reserve all judgments [...]. (1.2)

Really, Nick? Because this entire book seems like one big judgment. But maybe that's okay, because he's only judging them after the fact. Either way, it sets us up to be particularly attentive to Nick's trustworthiness.

Nick Carraway

Quote 13

Across the courtesy bay the white palaces of fashionable East Egg glittered along the water, and the history of the summer really begins on the evening I drove over there to have dinner with the Tom Buchanans. Daisy was my second cousin once removed, and I'd known Tom in college. And just after the war I spent two days with them in Chicago. (1.15)

Oh, fun. Notice how Nick doesn't even say "the Buchanans," just the "Tom Buchanans"? This is evidence that the girl Gatsby was in love with—Daisy—no longer exists.

Nick Carraway

Quote 14

The only completely stationary object in the room was an enormous couch on which two young women were buoyed up as though upon an anchored balloon. They were both in white, and their dresses were rippling and fluttering as if they had just been blown back in after a short flight around the house. I must have stood for a few moments listening to the whip and snap of the curtains and the groan of a picture on

the wall. Then there was a boom as Tom Buchanan shut the rear windows and the caught wind died out about the room, and the curtains and the rugs and the two young women ballooned slowly to the floor. (1.27)

Ah, the sweet smell of foreshadowing. Here, Tom literally—or is it metaphorically?—deflates the women, just like (SPOILER) he's going to do later on.

### Nick Carraway

#### Quote 15

At any rate, Miss Baker's lips fluttered, she nodded at me almost imperceptibly, and then quickly tipped her head back again—the object she was balancing had obviously tottered a little and given her something of a fright. Again a sort of apology arose to my lips. Almost any exhibition of complete self-sufficiency draws a stunned tribute from me. (1.32)

Complete self-sufficiency—or complete self-sufficiency from a woman? We get the feeling that Nick is half in love with and half repulsed by Jordan because he can't deal with the fact that, unlike Daisy, she doesn't need a man. After all, she's got a phallic symbol of her own: that golf club.

### Nick Carraway

#### Quote 16

I looked back at my cousin, who began to ask me questions in her low, thrilling voice. It was the kind of voice that the ear follows up and down, as if each speech is an arrangement of notes that will never be played again. Her face was sad and lovely with bright things in it, bright eyes and a bright passionate mouth, but there was an excitement in her voice that men who had cared for her found difficult to forget: a singing compulsion, a whispered "Listen," a promise that she had done gay, exciting things just a while since and that there were gay, exciting things hovering in the next hour. (1.33)

We're not saying that Daisy Buchanan was the first [Manic Pixie Dream Girl](#), but we're also not saying that she wasn't.

### Daisy Buchanan

#### Quote 17

"It'll show you how I've gotten to feel about – things. Well, she was less than an hour old and Tom was God knows where. I woke up out of the ether with an utterly abandoned feeling, and asked the nurse right away if it was a boy or a girl. She told me it was a girl, and so I turned my head away and wept. 'All right,' I said, 'I'm glad it's a girl. And I hope she'll be a fool—that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool.'" (1.116-118)

Daisy thinks that the best a girl can do is to be dumb enough not to realize how awful her life is. Awesome. No wonder she cries.

### Daisy Buchanan > Tom Buchanan

#### Quote 18

Before I could answer her eyes fastened with an awed expression on her little finger.

"Look!" she complained. "I hurt it."

We all looked – the knuckle was black and blue.

"You did it, Tom," she said accusingly. "I know you didn't mean to, but you did do it. That's what I get for marrying a brute of a man, a great, big, hulking physical specimen of a—"

"I hate that word hulking," objected Tom crossly, "even in kidding."

"Hulking," insisted Daisy. (1.67-72)

That poor bruised little finger is like a symbol of Tom and Daisy's marriage: he hurts it unintentionally, and Daisy just cannot stop talking about it. You get the feeling that Fitzgerald kind of wants her to stop whining already.

### Nick Carraway

#### Quote 19

Instead of being the warm center of the world, the Middle West now seemed like the ragged edge of the universe—so I decided to go East and learn the bond business. (1.6)

You'd think that returning from war would make Nick satisfied to live a quiet life with his family—but it doesn't. It just makes him restless and, yep, dissatisfied.

### Nick Carraway

#### Quote 20

Why they came East I don't know. They had spent a year in France for no particular reason, and then drifted here and there unrestfully wherever people played polo and were rich together. This was a permanent move, said Daisy over the telephone, but I didn't believe it – I had no sight into Daisy's heart, but I felt that Tom would drift on forever seeking, a little wistfully, for the dramatic turbulence of some irrecoverable football game. (1.17)

Tom's problem is that he peaked too early, playing football at Yale. It's hard to be satisfied with a normal life of playing polo and yachting when you've been a gridiron star.

### Daisy Buchanan

#### Quote 21

"It'll show you how I've gotten to feel about – things. Well, she was less than an hour old and Tom was God knows where. I woke up out of the ether with an utterly abandoned feeling, and asked the nurse right away if it was a boy or a girl. She told me it was a girl, and so I turned my head away and wept. 'All right,' I said, 'I'm glad it's a girl. And I hope she'll be a fool – that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool.'" (1.118)

Daisy pretends that she's happy she's had a girl, but she's not. Girls of any class seem to be the losers in this world (thanks, 1920s!), and Daisy, as you could imagine, isn't psyched about that.

### Tom Buchanan > Daisy Buchanan

#### Quote 22

"Did you give Nick a little heart-to-heart talk on the veranda?" demanded Tom suddenly.

"Did I?" She looked at me. "I can't seem to remember, but I think we talked about the Nordic race. Yes, I'm sure we did. It sort of crept up on us and first thing you know—"

"Don't believe everything you hear, Nick," he advised me. (1.137-143)

The **first rule** of marriage is: Don't talk about marriage. Tom is worried that Daisy's been airing their dirty laundry—which is its own form of betrayal.

### Nick Carraway

#### Quote 23

Why they came East I don't know. They had spent a year in France for no particular reason, and then drifted here and there unrestfully wherever people played polo and were rich together. (1.16-17)

Daisy and Tom's crowd may be "rich together," but this sounds an awful lot like loneliness to us.

### Daisy Buchanan

#### Quote 24

"It'll show you how I've gotten to feel about – things. Well, she was less than an hour old and Tom was God knows where. I woke up out of the ether with an utterly abandoned feeling, and asked the nurse right away if it was a boy or a girl. She told me it was a girl, and so I turned my head away and wept. 'All right,' I said, 'I'm glad it's a girl. And I hope she'll be a fool – that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool.'" (1.116-118)

Daisy gives birth to her child alone—the nurse is there, but her husband is nowhere to be found. Apparently, he's not even pacing the hall with a cigar, the way dads were supposed to back in the 1920s. And that poor little girl, born alone into a lonely world. It's enough to make us reach for the tissues.