

When I was younger, living in Louisiana with my aunt and uncle, I was given some wise advice. “Always follow your own moral compass” my aunt would remind me throughout my childhood, “be true to who you are and be a good person whether someone is watching or not”. My uncle likewise gave me a bit of good advice in the form of a quote from James Truslow Adams, “There is so much good in the worst of us, and so much bad in the best of us, that it ill behooves any of us to find fault with the rest of us” which I still remember to this day. These particular bits of advice were very prominent in my mind as I reflected on this chapter of my life, the chapter in which I befriended the best and worst person I have ever met, a man by the name of Jay Gatsby.

I moved to California, fresh from college at ULL, with my degree in journalism, and I figured California would be the place to go, the place where I could connect to the right people and get the best stories. I was fortunate to have saved up a decent sum of money and purchased a small condominium in a nicer area of Los Angeles. I started a job at the LA Tribune, working a decent paying, entry level position, Monday through Friday. It wasn't the glamorous job that I had initially hoped for but, for me, that 9 to 5 was the start of something greater. When I wasn't at work, I would spend time at home, working on my personal project, a fantasy novel I hoped to publish.

On Friday, after work, I would go to a bar called *The Green Light*, with a group of colleagues from work. They were friendly people who had taken a liking to “The New Guy” and decided to take me into the fold. I was grateful because being new to the area, I did not have very many friends. Amongst these colleagues was an attractive brunette named Jordan. She and I bonded quickly. Jordan was a reporter who had made a name for herself with her work. She and I often sat together long after our other colleagues had gone home, me sipping on a *Dos Equis* lager and her on a dirty martini with extra olives. We would talk about any range of topics and often would laugh when one of us checked our phones and saw it was approaching 2 am. It was simple, I would have sat out on the patio of that bar forever.

This was the tradition for several months. One day I worked up the strength to call Jordan and invite her to my place to hang out and watch something, and when she said yes I texted her my address and got to work cleaning up the place and making sure that it looked organized. I didn't have to do too much, just some bits of laundry in the hamper and some sweeping. We agreed that we would hang out after work on Friday at *The Green Light* with our colleagues for a bit, but then head to my place early enough. That whole week, when we passed each other in the hallway, we would smile and exchange pleasant, but brief looks. Friday finally rolled around and we spent some time bantering with our work-buddies at the bar before slipping off to her car. She drove us to my place in her silver BMW convertible with an automatic roof that would raise and lower with the push of a button. I was nervous she would judge my humble abode, which probably cost less than her car, but when we pulled into my (empty driveway) she smiled and made me blush saying “Nick, this is very nice, I used to live somewhere very similar to this!”

“I bet you made quite an upgrade from it” I said, trying to switch the subject to being about her, and she smiled again “I did, but I often miss the charm of my old house,” we went inside and sat on my couch, we chatted about our lives and I mentioned my cousin, Daisy, who lived 30 minutes away. We continued to chat, about an hour later she perked up.

“Nick!” she exclaimed, taking my hand, “It's late and all, but I just remembered I was invited to attend a party at the home of Jay Gatsby tonight! I think you should come, be my plus one!” she squeezed my hand, and the polite decline I was about to offer melted away when I saw the light in her eyes. I nodded and we grabbed our coats and took off.

We rode with her car-top down. I was surprised at how fast we got to the party, and even more shocked when I saw where the party was happening, it was a huge mansion. It looked like one of those massive celebrity homes you would see in catalogs. As we pulled through the gate, Jordan flashed her invitation to the security guard who nodded and gestured the way ahead. When we parked next to a bunch of other cars, I realized just how rich the crowd would be. I saw Rolls Royce's, Jaguars, and several other cars so expensive that I might go bankrupt if I touched one. As we walked across the massive property, to the house, we heard the sounds of music blasting, laughter, and breaking glass.

"Nick, Come on!" Jordan tugged me in the direction of a man in a suit that could've been made out of clouds. That's when I was bumped by someone and her hand slipped from mine. I lost her in the crowd. I bumped into several other people. I shuffled into a less packed area and began walking around, hoping to spot Jordan in the crowd, all the noise and people were confusing. I pulled out my phone to call her, but then I was bumped again, this time I recognized the person, it was Snoop Dogg. "Sorry G, I didn't see you" he pulled out a stack of cash and handed it to me "For your troubles homie, hey, you tryna hit the blunt, this shit is *dank*."

I took the cash but refused the blunt politely, he patted my shoulder and walked off. I picked up my phone, but it was no good, the screen had fallen off. I walked around shouting over the music, "Jordan! Jordan!" but I still had no luck. I gave in and decided that I may as well enjoy the party. I found the mini-bar and got a rum and coke. As I sat there sipping, I looked around, hoping that perhaps Jordan would make her way here. The bartender seemed to notice my concern.

"Hey, you looking for someone?" he asked, leaning on the bar so he was near enough to avoid shouting.

"Yes, I came here with her, Baker." He laughed when he heard this, revealing a set of perfect, white teeth.

"That's the reporter? I'm surprised she came, she has gotten invites before, don't worry, you tried calling her?" I sighed before replying.

"Yes, and you won't believe this but, when I took out my phone, Snoop Dogg accidentally broke it, he slid me a stack for my troubles so you'll get a really good tip for the rum and coke!" he laughed again.

"I appreciate it man, but drinks are free, trust me money is not an issue!" The music got louder and louder, so he had to raise his voice for his next question. "SO WHAT'S YOUR NAME?!"

"Nick, Nick CARRAWAY, YOU?" taking my hand in a handshake, his response threw me.

"JAY, JAY GATSBY!" I was shocked, the music died down to some lo-fi type beat and we returned to our normal voices.

"You are Jay Gatsby? The owner of Gat-tech?" I struggled to comprehend the idea of a multi-billionaire bartending at his own house, at his own party.

"Yep, I like to blend into the background a bit, most of the people here have no idea what I even look like, I keep a low profile, but you are the first one to ask!" On cue, Jordan walked up, saw me, and breathed a sigh of relief. "There you are Nick, sorry about that, I lost you in the crowd! I tried to call but your phone must be dead!" Gatsby and I looked at each other and laughed.

"Actually, Snoop Dogg bumped into me and caused me to drop it, but he slid me some cash!" Jordan chuckled as she sat next to me, she turned to the bartender and her eyes widened.

“Wait, aren’t you Jay Gatsby?” I was surprised she knew but then remembered, she is a reporter, she is in the business of knowing things. He handed her a martini and we chatted for a bit. I was not used to the bustling of party life so I asked her if we could head out. She agreed, but before we could leave, Jay said “Hey, Let me take our friend home, I want an excuse to get out the house and drive, if it’s ok, don’t worry, I’m too famous to be a danger to him.” I shrugged and she nodded.

As we walked, Jay put a hand on my shoulder and said “thanks for getting me out of there” . We entered his garage, a massive one with all kinds of vehicles, old and new, and what looked to be a tank. Seeing the look on my face, Gatsby chuckled and said “hear it is, the *American Dream*” we walked over to a lamborghini, solid black. “Wanna drive?” he asked, offering me a key fob he unhooked from a wall. I was in no shape to drive, I was struggling to process everything that had happened today and while the offer was very tempting, I declined.

“Suit yourself Nick, just give me your address”. After putting the address into his GPS from the passenger seat, we drove off. He was a careful driver. I was in awe of how luxury the inside of the car was. He and I talked, and I joked with him about doing Uber as a side job. When we got to my place, I offered him to come in, which he politely declined. “I appreciate it but I know you probably need some time to yourself, I have to go and see the people off at my place. Have a good night!” he pulled out of the driveway after I exited his car and I watched as he drove off.

The next morning I woke up to the sound of my doorbell. Groaning, I sat up and memories of the previous night flooded my mind. I looked at my damaged phone and sighed, before being snapped out of it by the doorbell ringing again. I answered the door, and was surprised to see a delivery man, wearing a hat with the letter G monikered on it.

“Nick Carraway?” he asked, holding a package in one hand and a clipboard in the other. I nodded. “Ok, Sign here for your package. Confused, I did and received the unmarked box. Before I could even question, the delivery man walked away. I took the package into my kitchen and started the coffee pot. While the coffee brewed, I set the package on the counter and opened it. Inside was a smaller box with the image of a fancy cellphone on it and the letter G just like the delivery mans hat. I realized then that Gatsby had sent me a new phone. I took the box out and slid it open. When I did, I was shocked. The sleek touchscreen device felt almost delicate. I looked in the package container and noticed a phone case and a note. I picked up the note, which read “Nick, It was nice to meet you, Snoop sends his apologies, but I am sure this can make up for the inconvenience. I went ahead and found your contacts and everything from you old G-phone and put it in this one, Perks of being the CEO, also, I added my own contact info. Enjoy!”

I took the phone out and upon holding the device, the screen lit up with a welcome text “Welcome to your new mobile experience, this device comes with the deluxe premium package. Enjoy:)” Shaking my head, I ignored the coffee pot beeping to tell me it was done and put the phone in its case. I sent a text to Gatsby saying “Hey, thanks for the new phone, you didn’t have to though!” and then I texted Jordan saying “Hey, Jay sent me a new phone, It’s Nick.” I explored the device, and saw the note was right, all of the contacts and messages and apps had been transferred to my new phone, as I scrolled through, the phone went off, I was getting a call. Jay Gatsby, read the ID. I answered.

“Hey Nick, Saw your text, how do you like it?” I laughed at how casual the man sounded.

“It’s great Mr. Gatsby, I don’t know how to thank you!”

“You can start by calling me Jay, Mr. Gatsby is way too formal, by the way, do you have plans for the day?”

“Not really, I am going visit my Cousin Daisy and her husband Tom for dinner today”

“Good, well If you're not busy now, how about we hit the town? I can show you the high life!”

“Mr, sorry, Jay, you don't have to do all that, I apprec-” He interrupted me,

“Nick, relax, it'll be fun, see you in a bit!” I sighed, knowing that he wouldn't take no for an answer. After hanging up, the smell of burning coffee hit my nostrils and I hurried to the coffee pot and saw sparks flying from the top of the machine. I unplugged it, thankful that it didn't break when Jay was around, I did not want to bother him more than I felt like I had already. I got dressed and as I sat down, sipping what I could salvage from the burnt coffee, which still tasted awful despite the cream and sugar I added, I got a ding from the new phone. It was a text from Gatsby, saying “be there in 5”. Sure enough, I soon heard the sound of a car pulling into my driveway and then my doorbell ringing. I answered the door and there was Jay, and next to him stood Jordan. this time he had arrived in a gold Tesla. “Hey Nick, ready? We're gonna grab a quick brunch. I asked Jordan to join us, figured three would be ideal for a nice day out”. Jordan grinned at me, she looked as confused as I felt about this. We got into his car, and he peeled out of the driveway, moving faster than he had last night, but still with care. As we rode into town, We chatted and he asked us about our work. When he hear we worked for the LA Tribune, he laughed. After a minute of silence Jay shared the humor in it.

“You see, I had a problem a few years back with reporters and Journalists hounding me for an interview, and one of the most aggressive paparazzi was working for the LA Tribune, so, I figured I would save myself some trouble, and I bought the company, so technically, I'm also your boss!” I couldn't help but laugh, not just at the revelation, but at how bizarre everything had been since I agreed to attend the party last night. Jordan was laughing along with me.

We had finally calmed down to a normal conversation as Jay pulled into a spot outside of a fancy looking restaurant. When we walked in, the host looked up and, with a nod, brought Jay and us to a table in an out of the way area. Jay ordered bottomless mimosas for the table. As we chatted and drank, the waiter brought out several courses, each dish with a small amount of food so we did not get too full. At one point, Jay got a phone call, when he checked, his casual smile dropped and his brow furrowed. “I gotta take this, excuse me” he stepped away. I couldn't help but watch as he stepped outside. Through the window I could see he was animated and frustrated, as he paced back and forth, waving his arms and frowning. After a few minutes, he hung up and walked inside.

“Everything ok Jay?” Jordan asked, trying to make small talk. He nodded and then looked at me. “Hey Nick, you mentioned your cousin, Daisy, what's her last name?” Confused at the question, I replied “Buchanan, she is married ” I watched and something seemed to click, but then he resumed chatting with us casually. When we were finished, Jay called for the waiter, who brought the check. As we Exited, the restaurant, Jay placed a hand on my shoulder and turned to Jordan. “Hey, I need to talk to Nick one on one real quick, if you don't mind, cars unlocked!” She nodded and walked over to the vehicle.

“Nick, it seems there was something important about you being at my party the other night. I would like for you to mention me at dinner tonight with your cousin, see what happens, I'll explain later, ok?” I nodded, glad to do a favor for him for a change.

We drove around a bit, and then, Jay dropped Jordan off first at her house, then on the way to mine, he finally opened up. “Before I was the CEO of Gat-tech, I was a bartender at *The Green Light* which Jordan tells me you know by now?” I nodded wondering where this was going. “As a bartender, I had many customers and some were even regulars, but none of them

were as important to me as Daisy, she and I took to one another like wild-fire. That was until I had to leave town for personal reasons. I was gone for 10 years before I returned and had my business running. I looked her up when I returned and found out she had married. I know I should move on but I have longed for her since I first met her. I know this is a lot, but I want you to mention me and see how she reacts, as I said earlier.”

“I had no idea she knew you Jay, I’ll send her your regards” I said, hoping that would appease him, he seemed very on edge and I did not know him too well, but I was surprised to see something have him so worked up. He smiled and sighed as we pulled into my driveway. “Thank you Nick, I mean it. See you around.” I walked into my house and sat with a sigh on the couch. Despite all the information I took in, my full stomach and the mimosa’s caught up to me and I felt myself dozing off, so I set an alarm on my new phone so that I wouldn’t miss dinner that night with Daisy and James.

My alarm went off, shaking me from my light doze. I sat up and checked the time. After noting that I still had a couple hours to get ready, I washed my face, brushed my teeth and hair, and went to the kitchen to make some coffee before remembering that my coffee machine was broken. Settling for a can of coke zero, I sat back on the couch, plugging my phone into my computer to charge. Using the device while plugged in, I saw a text from Jordan, “Hey Nick, it was lovely having brunch with you and Jay, it’s nice that you two have taken to each other so well. I hope you enjoy dinner with your cousin!” I chuckled, Jay hadn’t given me much of a choice in the matter. I replied “Thank you, It’s been a strange two days but not boring!” to which she reacted with an animated laughing emoji.

My phone dinged, and I saw it was a notification from the man himself. “Hey bro, thank you for getting out with me today, had a good time, let me know how dinner goes!” After replying with “It was a great man, Will do!” to which he gave a thumbs up, I scrolled to my aunt in the contacts

Me: Hey, Just wanted to reach out, things are going well here in California, You won’t believe who I befriended, Jay Gatsby! Aunt Debbie reacted with ☐

AD: Glad things are going well, wait, Jay Gatsby?! Be careful with those rich types, money can corrupt, follow your moral compass! Still, impressive! How’s work?

Me: I am keeping my guard up, and work is great, Jordan, Jay, and I went to have a nice brunch today, I’m going to have dinner with Daisy and Tom in a bit!

AD: I heard! Sounds nice. Be safe and be *smart*! Love you!

Me: Love you too!

AD: Uncle Walter says not to give money to the homeless people, if you *have* to be nice, give them food instead!

Me: I Know, talk to you later!

AD: Have a good night!

I chuckled and idly scrolled through IFunny for a while, enjoying the goofy edits with the dog saying “Let me do it for you” and other memes. The sound of a car pulling into the driveway let me know Daisy had arrived. I collected my phone and checked my face quickly in the entry-hall mirror before opening the door and stepping into the cool night.

“NICK! How’ve you been?” My cousin smiled at me excitedly as she stepped out of her white Benz (likely payed for by her well off husband, who worked as the CFO of some company that manufactured vehicle parts). We embraced and she pulled back, leaving her hands on my shoulders. “It’s so good to see you!” she exclaimed.

“Hey Daisy! Good seeing you too!” I was telling the truth, I just hadn’t expected such an excited welcome, to be honest, I was a bit mentally exhausted from the excitement since yesterday, to the point where I was looking forward to being stuck in my office for a while.

“Well, let’s go, I hope you’re hungry, Tom is an *excellent* cook!” she beamed as we got into her car. “Sorry it’s a little bit messy in here” she said. I looked around, it wasn’t messy, in fact, it looked pristine, but I didn’t correct her.

“It’s fine” As she drove, I heard snoop dogg rapping from the radio, and couldn’t help but laugh. She briefly glanced at me before re-focusing on the road.

“What’s up?” She asked, concern in her voice.

“Well, Fun story, I went to a party yesterday, and my phone got destroyed.”

“Oooookay?” she said, concern growing slightly.

“Well, of all the ways it could happen, Snoop Dogg accidentally bumped into me, knocking it out of my hand!” Daisy burst out laughing with me at this!

“WOW! What was that like?!”

“Honestly, weird, He saw my phone, handed me a stack of cash for my troubles, and offered me a hit off of his blunt!” She snorted, a look of wonder on her face.

“Did you hit the blunt?”

“Nope, I did take the money though!” She sighed as she made a left turn.

“Well, I guess you can use it to get a new phone or something”

“Actually, I was given one, we can talk all about it over dinner.” We turned into the driveway of her nice, two story house.

“Here we are! Tom is going to be happy to see you!” We got out of the car and I followed her into the house, the walls were a shade of light yellow that paired with the hardwood floors. As we walked into the kitchen, Tom, a tall brunette with an impressive mustache and an athletic frame said “Alright, there here, we will talk later!” and hung up the phone. “Well, Well, Well, if it isn’t Nick Carraway! How’ve you been? Living it up big?” He walked around the counter, and reached out his hand. I went to shake it but he took my own and pulled me into an embrace, slapping my back and tousling my hair.

“Good to see you Tom! What’re you cooking? Smells great!” He grinned,

“You got here just in time, this is my attempt at making a Gumbo!” I laughed, Tom and I had gone to college together and he was not from Louisiana, so I had shown him a good spot that made the dish and remembered he had gone wild for it.

“Smells authentic” I lied, knowing that he wanted to do something special. He grinned before asking Daisy to dish it up when it was ready. “Nick, my man, let’s head to the living room while Daisy takes over, wanna watch the game?”

“Whatever you want!” I was not a fan of sports but I didn’t care what was on TV. I was waiting for the right time to mention Gatsby to Daisy. He rambled on about his work and his life, and I nodded at the right times as my mind wandered. At one point, he got off the couch and sat down on the floor in front of the coffee table and set to rolling two small joints. “You learned how to roll yet, Nick?” I shook my head as he ground up a nugget of the odorous herb and rolled the paper neatly. “Come on man, it’s legal here, you should learn!” I laughed.

“I have been a bit busy with work since I got here, that and my own writing.” Tom looked at me baffled.

“Nick, you were always a bit straight edge, Come one man, rolling is part of the journey, I’ll teach you!” I sighed, knowing that he would not take “no” for an answer, and sat down next to him. After he figured I had it down decently, he tucked a joint into my shirt pocket and said,

“Save that for later, I have a couple pre-rolled for after dinner, it’s good stuff too, won’t get you too stoned, but well have you feeling good!” I nodded my thanks when I heard Daisy calling from the kitchen. “Hey Nick, would you go help her, I’ll clean this up!”

“Sure” I stood up and went to the kitchen. I helped daisy set the table and dish up the gumbo, she had done something to it that made it smell more like the real deal while her husband was distracted. She saw I had noticed and winked playfully. “What were you too losers up too?”

“Tom talked up his work, and then taught me how to roll a joint.”

“Yeah, he does this with all the guests” I laughed, imagining if my Aunt and Uncle had come to visit. Tom came in and helped us finish setting the table. We ate in silence for a bit before Daisy piped up. “Nick went to a party yesterday, Tom, he has a wild story to tell! Go on Nick!” I sighed and took my phone from my pocket. I told the story I had shared with Daisy, Tom laughed and nearly choked on a mouthful of gumbo. When I finished the story, all three of us were laughing.

“Well Nick, welcome to California!” Tom chuckled. After the laughter subsided, Daisy had another question. “Nick, who hosted this party, this host that brought you home?” I sighed, knowing the time had come.

“His name is Jay, Jay Gatsby.” Daisy’s smile faltered. Tom’s spoon clinked loudly against his bowl. I looked back and forth between the two for a while, the silence crushing the atmosphere around us until finally Tom started laughing. “That’s the fellow who has been sending party invites to us? Well, how about that!” I was glad the silence was broken. Daisy chuckled too and I smiled. We continued idol conversation and then after dinner I asked to help clear the table and do the dishes. Daisy nodded and Tom told me to meet him out in the back yard after we finished.

As we brought the dishes to the sink, Daisy looked at me and in a hushed voice asked “Did, did Jay mention me?” The look in her eyes was a mixture of excitement, fear, and sadness, but I couldn’t tell which emotion would win out after I answered.

“He did”

Daisy sighed shakily as she scrubbed the dishes. “Thank you for the help Nick, Tom probably wants to chat some more. I nodded, understanding she needed time with her thoughts. I stepped into the back yard and the man waved me over to a picnic table with an ashtray on it.

“Let’s light up man!” he said affably, handing me a pre-rolled joint. I sat across from him, taking the doobie. He struck a match, lighting his own then reaching over with it. I lit mine off the offered flame. I took a drag, held it in, then exhaled before coughing my lungs out. Tom laughed and patted my back. “Been a while, has it?” I nodded, laughing between coughs. He handed me a bottle of water, which i gratefully gulped from to settle my throat. The pleasant tingling sensation spread pretty quickly, *he was right, this is good shit*. I took another small puff and Tom and I chatted for a bit. He asked after Daisy’s parents, my aunt and uncle. I asked how he’d been aside from work, and then he fell silent for a minute.

“Nick, Are you busy tomorrow? I want to meet up and show you around, we can do something together.” I had to think through the haze of the kush for a moment.

“Sure man, I don’t have a vehicle yet, but I can call an Uber”

“No need, I’ll come pick you up around two p.m. we can get a late lunch.” I nodded. I decided to put out the joint.

“Tom, I’m good on this.” He nodded and told me to keep it. I sighed, not used to not having to worry about the law on this. His phone started ringing and he answered. After a

minute, I got up and waved bye, he pulled away and said “If you’re headed out, have a good night Nick” before returning to his talk.

I walked into the house and Daisy was sitting at the kitchen table with her face in her hands. I tapped her shoulder and she jumped, making me jump.

“Oh! Nick!” she sighed, wiping what seemed to be tears from her eyes, “I was just about to ask if you were ready for me to bring you home! Ready?”

“Sure, you alright?” She looked at me silently and nodded. “Let’s go, it’s getting late.” The ride home felt longer than the ride there partly due to the cannabis and partly to the silence which remained unbroken until we pulled into my driveway. After putting the car in park, Daisy turned to me. “Nick, it was nice seeing you, what do you have planned for next weekend?”

“Not much, Tom is coming to pick me up tomorrow but I should be free next weekend, if you want to come over and have a cup of coffee. I’d offer one now but I need to get a new one”

“Ok, also, if Jay wants to stop by, it’d be great to see him, I think...I hope” I nodded and rested a hand on her shoulder. “I’m sure he would love to see you.” She smiled and brightened up a bit.

“Well, alright, have a good night!”

“You too Daze, drive safe!” The use of her old nickname seemed to boost her mood even more. After she pulled out of my driveway and had turned out of sight, I walked into my house, flicked on the light. Everything seemed to be as I left it. As I sat on my sofa, my body still tingling warmly from the bud, I flicked on the TV. I flipped through the channels, not particularly searching through anything, I left the tube on as I pulled out my phone. *Guess I should let Jay know how it went.* I pulled up his contact and tapped the phone icon under his name. It rang once before he answered.

“Nick, how did it go my man?” he still sounded so casual, it was unnerving.

“Hey Jay, it was interesting, she is coming over next weekend to visit and after mentioning you, she said she’d like it if you were there.” I left out some details because I figured they were not as important to him. I was right.

“Nick, my boy, you are an absolute GOAT!” I laughed at the comment, as he continued excitedly “I have to make plans, this has to be perfect, Nick, perfect, how about we start out at your place next Saturday, then, from there, after a bit, I suggest she comes to see my own house, naturally you are going to be there too...” some part of my fogged brain presented an uneasy feeling but I dismissed it.

“Sure Jay, that’s a good idea!” I said, convincing him and myself.

“Good man! Nick, are you busy tomorrow?”

“I am Jay, Tom and I are going to do something.” It was silent on the other end now, as if saying his name had been a judge slamming his mallet, so I broke the quiet “How come?”

“I would like to send some people over to spruce the place up, no offense, just cleaning, painting, making sure the place looks good!” I had no idea how that made me feel, and he must have picked up on it. “Nick, I trusted you, I want you to trust me, I have a good feeling about our friendship.” I gave in and agreed to have a key under the doormat for the cleanup crew to come in during the week. We chatted a bit about nothing in particular and then said our goodnights.

After hanging up, I sighed, resting my face in my hands, wondering what exactly was I getting myself into. After a minute I decided to have a shower and get ready for bed. As I was folding my clothes, I saw the two joints in my shirt pocket and shook my head with a smile. *I am not a stoner, yet here I am,* Then I thought about my encounter with Snoop Dogg and I bursted



out laughing, saying aloud to myself “this shit is *dank*.” After I was through amusing myself, I lay down in bed, sinking into my mattress. As I set my alarm to wake up, I sent Jordan a text.

Me: Hey, dinner went well, told them what happened to my old phone, it’s still funny.

JB: Glad to hear it. You busy tomorrow evening? I was thinking we could go to *The Green Light* together.

Me: Yeah, I’m going to be hanging out with Tom, my cousin’s husband, but after that, I’ll be free!

JB: Sounds like you’re having a full weekend. Well, I’m off to bed, don’t let anything else interesting happen or I may end up having to interview *you*.

Me: LOL, have a good night!

JB: You too ;)

I drifted into sleep immediately. As I slept, I dreamt that Jay and I were sitting across from one another at a large table near a cliff. He held up a glass of champagne and said something but the wind swept his words away. I tried to call out but my words followed his. I stood up and tried to walk over to him, but as I walked up to where he was seated, near the ledge, he kept getting further away, then a loud thunder crashed and he was standing on the precipice, facing me, still smiling with a raised glass. “JAY!” I called out, finally getting close to him, to which he responded with “Nick, my man” and then falling backwards into oblivion as thunder crashed again.

I jolted upright, screaming out “JAY” before I slowly came back to reality. *What a strange dream*. I was damp with sweat and my mouth felt really dry, checking the time, I saw it was three in the morning. I went to the restroom, splashed water on my face and drank some straight from the faucet. Feeling better, but wide awake, I sighed and figured I could work on my novel. As I walked into the living room, I passed the kitchen, and saw my still-broken coffee maker. Still having the money Snoop had given me, when I sat on the sofa, I opened up my Amazon account and ordered a fancy Keurig to replace the broken one.

Writing did not happen, I stared at the google document on my computer screen and could not bring any inspiration. My mind wandered to the dream I had earlier and I contemplated it for a while.

Finally, I gave up and closed my computer, feeling tired enough to try going back to sleep. My head hit the pillow and next thing I knew, my alarm was going off. After going to the restroom and getting dressed, I made myself some toast and had a glass of orange juice. I longed for coffee but figured I would be alright for the couple days it would take for my new coffee maker to be delivered. I bid my time aimlessly. As I scrolled through Instagram. Daisy’s profile popped up. Her social media popularity seemed to grow by the minute, I wasn’t on social media very much except for connecting to people I know, and while I had known that my cousin was famous on instagram as a clothing model, I didn’t fully understand what “social media influencer” meant.

After a while, my doorbell rang and I opened it to find Tom standing there. He seemed on edge. “Hey, I’m early, wanna grab a bite somewhere?” he was talking quickly and looking around alot, as if to be sure he wasn’t being followed.

“Sure” I said, stepping outside and locking my door “everything alright?”

“Huh? Oh, yeah, let’s go.” We got into his vehicle, a blue Cadillac, with a white interior. “Before we go to lunch, I have a couple errands to run, I hope you don’t mind.” He seemed settled once we were in his car.

“No problem, I’ve got time.” He nodded, and took off. I figured he’d be stopping at his office or going to the pharmacy, what I did not expect was him to stop at an animal shelter.

“I won’t be long, wait here.” I felt like a kid being told to stay in the car, but I nodded, figuring my confusion would be cleared up later. I was wrong. I watched as Tom walked back to the car with a blue-pitbull puppy in his arms. When he got in, he asked if I could hold the dog in my lap as he drove. I took the squirmy animal and it immediately began to see what my face tasted like. As I set the pup in my lap, I looked at Tom as he pulled out of the parking lot.

“Hey, what’s going on? You seem to be in a bit of a rush and I have no idea what the puppy is about”. Glancing at me from the corner of his eye, his response shocked me.

“You’re inquisitive today” which was as useful to me as my coffee maker back at home.

“Where are we going?” I tried again, grasping for any form of understanding at this point.

“To deliver a puppy and visit someone, you don’t know them.” I gave up and stroked the animated pitt in my lap while it tried to eat my hand, shirt, the seatbelt, and anything it could reach. I lifted the animal up, it was a female. The pup didn’t know why it was being held like so, but she took the opportunity to bite at my nose and hair. Setting her back down, she seemed to accept that no food was present. With a sigh, she lay on my lap and closed her eyes.

After a few minutes, Tom slowed the vehicle into a turn down a dirt road. I looked out and saw a few houses (some with large tin sheds nearby) and lots of grass. Tom turned up the drive leading to one of the sheds, and as we slowed to a stop, A greasy man in a gray boiler suit walked up. The man had a glass eye, a rough complexion, and no hair on his scalp. Tom and I stepped out of the car, me carrying the puppy, who had alerted me to the new surroundings and was panting excitedly.

“Hey Mr. Buchanan, what can I do you for today?” Asked the greasy mechanic with his oily hand extended.

“Afternoon George, here for my oil-change, is Myrtle in?” George grunted and lowered the unshaken hand, pointing to his house.

“She must’ve known you were coming, made a pot of mushroom tea ‘few minutes ago, who’s your friend?” I took the time to speak up.

“Nick, Nick Carraway.” I shook his hand as best I could, with the puppy trying to wiggle out of my arms. After meeting the mechanic, Tom and I made our way to the house. It was not a bad place, nowhere near the living style of the Buchanans or Jay, but there was a charm to it. Tom rang the doorbell before turning to me with a smile.

“You’re in for a treat, she is a very nice person.” The door was opened by a petite woman with curly blond hair and a wide smile.

“HI TOMMY, you brought a friend and a...” her words trailed off as her gaze fell to the puppy wiggling and yipping in my arms “OMG who is this fella?!” Tom, now grinning, answered “This is a gift for you” he gestured for me to hand her the pup, which I did. The little dog immediately took to licking her face, setting off a string of high-pitched (and kinda obnoxious) laughter from her.

“Where are my manners?!” Myrtle proclaimed after a minute of getting acquainted with her new puppy, “come on in! I just made a pot of tea!”. As we stepped into the house, the earthy smell of boiled mushrooms hit me in tandem with a very floral air freshener. She led us through her home, which had a nice rural aesthetic, into a small living room. “Have a seat, I’ll go get the tea!”. She set the puppy down and waltzed to the kitchen as Tom and I sat on a leather couch. The little dog followed her, pausing to sniff the floor every other step.

Myrtle returned with three cups of tea and a plate of pastries. After we all had our tea in hand, she sat down in a nearby recliner. I took a sip and fought a grimace as I smiled politely to our hostess. "The tea is nice" I lied.

"OH, I'm glad you like it, there's more if you want it! What's your name, by the way?" Tom answered for me "This is Nick Carraway, an old acquaintance from college!" She seemed to be overly excited to hear that, as she beamed at us.

"That's lovely, by the way Tom, thank you for the puppy, she is so cute, I decided to name her Reishi!" I fought the urge to laugh at the idea of the dog being named after a mushroom.

Reishi was sitting at her feet as she ate one of the pastries, wagging her tail as she looked up at her. Myrtle broke off a small piece and gave it to her. As the puppy wolfed down the morsel, I forced another sip of the tea. It had not gotten any better as it cooled down. Setting the cup down on a flower-shaped coaster on the table, Myrtle, who had been talking to Reishi in a baby voice, sat up and looked at me.

"Hey, Rick, what do you do for a living?" Not knowing who she meant at first, then realizing she got my name wrong, I replied "I work at the LA tribune, entry-level right now."

"OH, how lovely, I personally prefer the California Chronicle but that's just me." She smiled at me as if she had said something profound. "Do you like working there, Rick?"

"It's Nick, and I enjoy it well enough I guess."