Chapter 2 summary:

- Nick describes a 'valley of ashes' (p. 26), a bleak area between New York City and the suburban village of West Egg. It is watched over by the huge bespectacled eyes of an optician's advertising hoarding.
- Nick is introduced to Tom Buchanan's mistress, Myrtle, the wife of George Wilson, a garage mechanic.
- Tom, Nick and Myrtle catch a train into New York. Myrtle does some shopping and buys a puppy. All three then go to apartment which Tom and Myrtle use for their extramarital affair. They are joined by Myrtle's sister Catherine, a photographer named Mckee and his wife.
- Tom breaks Myrtle's nose, provoked by her repetition of Daisy's name. Nick leaves with Mckee, who insists on showing him some of the photographs he has taken.
- At Pennsylvania Station, Nick waits to catch the 4 a.m. train home.

Commentary:

The Gatsby Brand

We learn that Myrtle was dismayed when she found out that her husband George had borrowed the suit he ore at their wedding (see p. 37). When she first met Tom Buchanan, on a train, she was immediately impressed by his suit, shirt and shoes. Unable to keep her eyes off Tom, she pretended to be looking at an advertisement over his head.

Advertising and brand names were prominent feature of American life in the 1920s. the huge advertising hoarding, featuring Doctor Eckleburg's bespectacled eyes, is a realistic detail from America's early consumer culture. A visual advertisement of this kind couldn't be missed, and it could be understood by newly arrived immigrants with little or no grasp

of English language. The optician's hoarding becomes really significant at the end of the novel, when George Wilson—in his bewilderment—mistakes those huge eyes for the eyes of God. Consumerism and materialism have taken the place of spiritual values in the America that Fitzgerald depicts in this novel.

Gatsby's efforts to attract Daisy can be seen as a kind of self-advertisement. He has created an image in order to persuade Daisy that he is the person she needs. In effect he is promoting his own brand. His clothes are imported from Europe, and are intended to impress Daisy just as Tom's clothes impress Myrtle. Note that, in Chapter 8, Daisy actually tells Gatsby that he reminds her of an advertisement (see p. 114).

Class

The Wilsons live over the garage where George works. This shows they have lower social standing than Nick Carraway, who works in the city but lives in a suburb, at a distance from work. The very rich in this novel seem not to work at all, and can live where they choose. Fitzgerald is indicating that America, despite claims to democratic equality, is a society divided into a number of social classes based on wealth and property. He was attracted to the lavish lifestyle of the wealthy, yet he also had a keen sense of social injustice in 20th-century America.