Chapter 3 summary:

- Nick describes Gatsby's lifestyle, his servants, lavish parties, motorboats and cars.
- At one of Gatsby's parties, Nick talks with Jordan Baker and two girls she met at an earlier party. They discuss rumours that Gatsby has killed a man, and that he was a German spy in the First World War.
- In Gatsby's library, Nick and Jordan meet a man wearing glasses that make his eyes look owl-like. The owl-eyed man has been 'drunk for about a week' (p. 47).
- Nick meets Gatsby for the first time. Gatsby claims to have seen Nick during their army service in the First World War. They share memories of 'wet, grey little villages in France' (p. 48).
- Gatsby speaks privately with Jordan Baker. She then tells Nick that Gatsby has disclosed 'the most amazing thing' (p. 53).
- Leaving the party, Nick witnesses 'a bizarre and tumultuous scene' surrounding a car that has crashed into a ditch (p. 54).
- Nick's comments on what he has written so far. He remembers a news report which claimed that Jordan Baker had cheated in a golf tournament. He concludes, 'She was incurably dishonest' (p. 58). Nonetheless he admits to feeling 'a sort of tender curiosity' towards her (p. 58).

Analysis:

The Great Gatsby is a book about a man—Nick Carraway—writing a book about another man—Jay Gatsby—who has remained obsessively in love with a woman—Daisy Fay—whom he met when they were teenagers. Daisy is now married to Tom Buchanan, so a lot of this story is about Gatsby's hope that one day he and Daisy will be together again as lovers. In itself that does not amount to a dramatic, action-packed storyline. Look carefully at the way Fitzgerald

creates and connects scenes that hold our attention, rather like a film director who cleverly keeps us watching.

The party in this chapter is part of Gatsby's attempt to impress Daisy. There is plenty of action on the surface: people coming and going, chance meetings, high spirits and drunken behaviour. In itself much of this action is going nowhere, in terms of the development of the story, but as we watch it unfold we are drawn deeper into the heart of Gatsby's obsession.

Nick is part of the story:

After describing one of Gatsby's parties at some length, Nick Carraway steps back to examine his telling of the story so far. In doing so, he reminds us of fact that he is a writer as well as our narrator. Events which seem so immediate when we are caught up in the dialogue and description have actually been filtered through his remembering and reconstruction of them. Nick is part of the story in a fundamental way. We are learning about Nick as he tells us about Gatsby.

Nick in love:

Nick seems to give us a valuable insight into his emotional life when he refers to 'romantic women' (p. 57), whom he chases after, but only in his imagination. Love affairs seem to attract Nick as an idea, but in reality he seems to find it difficult to become fully involved with a woman. He seems to worry that people might find out about his love affairs and disapprove of them. Yet towards the end of the next chapter, Nick puts his arm around Jordan Baker's 'golden shoulder' (p. 77), draws her close to him and invites her to dinner. There seems to be inconsistency here.

As well as his involvement with Jordan, Nick is still in touch with a girl in the Midwest. He tells us: 'I'd been writing letters once a week and signing them: "Love Nick", and he adds,

'there was a vague understanding that had to be tactfully off before I was free' (p. 59). Is Nick being entirely honest with when he writes of his involvement with women? If not, can we trust his version of event in general?

*The 'violent confusion' (p. 59) of the comic scene in which a car has crashed into a ditch after leaving the drive of Gatsby's mansion can be seen to foreshadow the accident that results in Myrtle Wilson's tragic death. Owl Eyes is here accused of being 'a bad driver' (p. 55), be he reveals that another man was actually driving. Later, Gatsby takes responsibility for Myrtle's death, even though Daisy was driving. Details in this narrative are intricately patterned and intertwined.