

## Chapter 6 Summary:

- Nick tells us that an inquisitive newspaper reporter visited Gatsby one morning; rumours about him had spread to a point where ‘he fell just short of being news’ (p. 94).
- Nick then tells us what he knows of Gatsby’s real life-story. His original name was James Gatz and he grew up in North Dakota.
- At seventeen James Gatz changed his name to the more glamorous Jay Gatsby.
- He met Dan Cody, who had become wealthy prospecting for precious metals. Cody became Gatsby’s mentor, teaching him how to get rich.
- Nick tells us about an occasion when Tom Buchanan visits Gatsby’s mansion. Gatsby tells Tom that he knows Daisy.
- Tom and Daisy Buchanan attend a party at Gatsby’s mansion.
- Gatsby and Daisy spent half an hour together, sitting on the steps of Nick’s house.
- Tom suggests to Nick that Gatsby is a criminal bootlegger, like a lot newly rich Americans that time.
- Gatsby is upset that Daisy has not enjoyed the party. He wants her to leave her husband and marry him.

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## Analysis:

### Being and Becoming:

Nick tells us that Gatsby was the son of ‘shiftless and unsuccessful farm people’. His parents lived off the land, but to him their lives seemed aimless. At seventeen, Gatsby met Dan Cody, who lived on a yacht and was a millionaire. As farmers, his parents had a fixed place to live and work; Cody, on other hand, was mobile and energetic and that attracted Gatsby. He left his

parents behind —‘his imagination had never really accepted them as his parents at all’—and went off with Cody, who showed him another way of living a life. Nick tells us that, when he met him, there was a persistent rumour that Gatsby ‘didn’t live in a house at all, but in a boat that looked like a house and was moved secretly up and down the Long Island shore’. This rumour, through untrue, should remind us of Gatsby’s earlier life on Cody’s yacht, which had represented for him ‘all the beauty and glamour in the world’. It should also remind us of Gatsby’s determination not to be fixed in place and identity like his parents.

When Europeans started to arrive in America and decided to establish farming communities, they were often referred to as ‘settlers’. America’s past is a history of settlement. But it is also a history of restless movement.

## **Idealism and materialism:**

Nick tells us, ‘The truth was that Jay Gatsby of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his Platonic conception of himself’. Plato was an ancient Greek philosopher who argued that there is an ideal world beyond the material world in which we live. Our human senses are too crude to grasp this ideal world. The suggestion here is that seventeen-year-old Jay Gatsby, unhappy with his material circumstances, has created an ideal version of himself. His dreams and vivid imaginings have convinced him of ‘the unreality of reality’. His ideal has become more real to him than the physical world around him.

Gatsby was introduced to a wealthy lifestyle by the highly materialistic Dan Cody, and has developed his own image on the basis of material success achieved through illegal activity. Cody becomes a millionaire, but Nick tells us that under the surface he remained ‘the pioneer debauchee, who during one phase of American life brought back to the Eastern seaboard the savage violence of the frontier brothel and saloon’. A pioneer might seem heroic, but Fitzgerald reminds us that actual life at the frontier was often violent and dangerous.

\*\*\*Gatsby does not want his identity to be pinned down. The future he imagines for himself is actually focused in a moment that is forever lost in the past, the magical moment when he fell in love with Daisy. Remember that Gatsby has tried to delete much of his past; to erase all traces of his family and his upbringing in the Midwest. But the last words of the final chapter of *The Great Gatsby* confirm that we can never escape the flow of time: 'So we beat on, boats against the current borne back ceaselessly into the past'. That sentence is carved into Fitzgerald's gravestone.