

ELLERSLIE by William Francis

EXCERPT

“I don’t know,” Scott said, lifting his glass of gin, his bowl of stew untouched. “I’m just so sick and tired of hearing about Charles Lindbergh. They report everything he says and does.”

Zelda spooned her stew and turned serious. “I’m sorry, Fitz. I know you’re upset about the latest sales figures for Gatsby. I should’ve been more receptive to your feelings when you told me.”

Scott took another sip. “I blame the title. I told you I hated the title.” He mimicked sarcasm. “The Great Gatsby. Rather pretentious, don’t you think? And what’s so great about him? He’s a sick symbol of today’s greed and self-absorption. Who needs to read a story about a man who epitomizes what we see in everyday society?”

“You know,” Zelda said, “I think those journalists who are coverin’ Lindbergh would better serve the public if they examined the disgusting tastes of American readers. They need to explain to me why dime novelists like Zane Grey are making a fortune while respectable writers like you, Fitz, are not.”

April appreciated seeing Zelda act kindly to her husband, but she wondered how long it would last.

“My friend Mencken is soooo right,” Scott said after tasting some stew. “Quote: ‘No one has ever lost money by underestimating the intelligence of the great masses of plain people, nor has anyone ever lost public office thereby.’”

“Fitz, maybe you should write one of those dime novels.”

“I’d rather die.”

“Do not fret, monsieur. I believe you could write a good one.”

“Well,” Scott said to April, “what do you think? You’ve been silent so far.”

April put her spoon down and took a moment to formulate her response. “I’ve been reading The Great Gatsby and I really like it. I’m intrigued by the mysterious Jay Gatsby and how Nick perceives him. And then there’s the relationship between Jay and Daisy and Tom Buchanan. I look forward to finishing the book, hopefully tonight.”

“Thank you for saying so, but that wasn’t the question. Should I write a dime novel?”

“No, sir,” April said staring directly at Scott’s bloodshot eyes. “There’s nothing wrong with writing at an elite level. It’s a known fact that the masses prefer tabloid stories and yellow journalism, and that Mr. Hearts has capitalized on this. But I think you’d be doing yourself and the literary world a great disservice if you lowered your talents to that type of writing.”

Scott’s eyes watered. He looked shocked.

“Wow, Fitz,” Zelda said, humbled. “I think that’s the nicest thing anyone’s ever said to you about your writing.”