

# Crazy Sunday Study Guide

## Crazy Sunday by F. Scott Fitzgerald

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# Introduction

F. Scott Fitzgerald's short story "Crazy Sunday" is the story of a young screenwriter and his personal and professional difficulties in the complex Hollywood film industry. Intent on impressing the elite in his industry, Joel instead finds himself ensnared in the personal problems of a high-profile couple. The story was originally published in a magazine called *American Mercury* in October 1932. Fitzgerald included it in his final collection of short stories, 1935's *Taps at Reveille*.

Joel Coles, the main character, is based on Fitzgerald himself, and Joel's embarrassment at Miles Calman's party is autobiographical. At a party hosted by Hollywood producer Irving Thalberg and his wife, actress Norma Shearer, Fitzgerald had too much to drink and was booed after performing a song he meant to be humorous but which was actually juvenile and in bad taste. Rather than hide this humiliating moment in the recesses of his memory, Fitzgerald turned it over to his imagination, and it became "Crazy Sunday." The story was turned down for publication from a number of magazines for various reasons, including its ending, length, characters, and sexual content, but Fitzgerald refused to revise the story just to please magazine editors. Ultimately, *American Mercury* bought it intact for two hundred dollars.

## Author Biography

F. Scott Fitzgerald (Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald) was born on September 24, 1896, in St. Paul, Minnesota, to a businessman and an heiress. His desire to become a writer crystallized early and remained a driving force throughout his life. Regarded as the preeminent writer of the Jazz Age, Fitzgerald created characters and stories of youth, love, excess, eccentricity, and style. During his lifetime, his success was based on his standing as a niche writer. It was not until after his death that his writing was appreciated and placed among the American greats.

By the time Fitzgerald entered Princeton University in 1913, he had already begun to develop his writing skills. His work for school newspapers and theater groups had exposed him to various types of writing. At Princeton he wrote for a literary magazine, a humor magazine, and a performance club. He put in so much effort on such activities, however, that he could not keep up with his schoolwork, and he left Princeton in 1916. His return a year later was interrupted by enlistment in the U.S. Army during World War I.

Upon leaving the military in 1919, Fitzgerald worked briefly as an advertising copywriter while he revised his first novel, *This Side of Paradise* (1920). Things moved fast as he enjoyed acclaim for his novel and promptly married Zelda Sayre. Later that year, his first collection of short stories, *Flappers and Philosophers*, was published. Over the course of his career, more novels followed, most notably *The Great Gatsby*, in 1925. Fitzgerald also continued to produce volumes of short stories at almost the same pace as he was completing novels. "Crazy Sunday" appeared in his last collection, *Taps at Reveille*.

The Fitzgeralds lived the fast-paced life of the Roaring Twenties to the hilt. Much of Fitzgerald's material was drawn from his own life. Because his income was inconsistent, he accrued a great amount of debt by borrowing money from his publisher and from his agent. The 1920s were the greatest and most trying years for the Fitzgeralds. While they enjoyed a high standard of living and an exciting lifestyle, Zelda became increasingly mentally ill, Fitzgerald struggled with alcoholism, and he ultimately fell out of favor when his contemporary subject matter became passé.

The pace at which Fitzgerald wrote had slowed so that by the time *Tender Is the Night* (1934) and *Taps at Reveille* (1935) were published, American readers were enduring the Great Depression, a far cry from the carefree heydays of the 1920s. With Zelda in a mental hospital, mounting debts, and little income from his writing, Fitzgerald drank heavily, and his health suffered. He rallied in 1937, however, and returned to Hollywood (where he had worked briefly in 1927) to work on such screenplays as *Gone with the Wind*. A life of fast living with extreme highs and lows ended on December 21, 1940, when forty-four-year-old Fitzgerald died of a heart attack in Hollywood.



# Plot Summary

## Part I

Joel Coles is a twenty-eight-year-old screenwriter who arrived in Hollywood six months ago. Already, he has enjoyed some success and has impressed many of the right people. He is enthusiastic and optimistic, not yet jaded by the competitive industry he has chosen.

It is Sunday, and having been invited to a party at the home of a major director, Miles Calman, Joel imagines how he will impress him. He promises himself he will not drink and that he will prove his worthiness to be in the kind of company Miles keeps. Once he arrives, he is reunited with Stella Walker (now Stella Calman, Miles's wife), whom he knew as a struggling actress in New York. They are comfortable with each other, and soon Joel has finished a few cocktails. He meets up with another writer, Nat Keogh, and they join the other guests to watch a hired singer perform.

## Part II

After the singer's performance, Joel asks Stella if he can entertain the guests with a short act he wrote. She agrees and even stands in as the second actor. As he performs, he realizes that the audience is not enjoying it, and he even hears someone "boo" him. Humiliated, he sends a note to Miles the next morning apologizing for the display. Later, he receives an invitation from Stella to her sister's house for supper the next Sunday. Delighted, he accepts.

## Part III

At the supper, Joel and the other guests witness tension between Miles and Stella. Apparently, they have been fighting about Miles's lengthy affair with an actress named Eva Goebel. Stella talks with Joel about the situation, and when the discussion goes on long enough, Miles suggests that the three of them go back to their house. There, Stella, Joel, and Miles talk about the infidelity until the conversation turns to work.

The next morning, Stella invites Joel to accompany her to dinner and a theater party Saturday night while Miles is out of town. He agrees but plans to tell Miles about the invitation. Miles changes his plans because he does not want Stella going out with Joel or anyone else. Even though Joel realizes he is in love with Stella, he assures Miles that he would never make a pass at her. Miles invites Joel to join them at the party, and Joel accepts.



## Part IV

Joel arrives at the theater to meet them, discovering that Miles went on his trip after all. He thinks Stella looks breathtaking, and when she suggests skipping the party and going to her house, he agrees. A telegram from Miles is there, but she is suspicious. She is not convinced that he has really gone away on business. He may be seeing his mistress, she surmises.

Joel tells Stella he is afraid that she is using him to get back at Miles. She admits that she is attracted to him but adds that she loves Miles and is uncomfortable about the evening she just shared with Joel. He prepares to leave, a little vexed but also a little relieved, when the phone rings at midnight.

## Part V

Shortly after midnight, Joel has hurriedly made love to Stella. He pours himself a drink, and as Stella leans toward the telephone, Joel picks it up to hear the wired message that is replaying. It says that Miles has been killed in an airplane accident. Stella is vaguely aware of the message, but Joel insists on having her doctor or a friend present before she hears the news. As she realizes that Miles is dead and Joel is stalling, she becomes frantic and insists that he stay with her. He continually presses her for the name of a girlfriend to come to be with her.

A messenger delivers a telegram confirming the phone message, and Stella has trouble absorbing the news. Joel manages to get in touch with some of her friends to come to be with her, but she begs him not to leave. Feeling that she is only clinging to him in an effort to keep Miles's memory alive, Joel leaves once other people begin to arrive. As he leaves, Joel is overwhelmed by the enormous presence of Miles, even in death.



# Part 1

## Part 1 Summary

Joel Coles is a young screenwriter trying to make it big in Hollywood. Since arriving six months ago, he has tirelessly worked to impress the studio executives with his work. He's so committed that he typically works on Sundays, which he describes as simply a gap between Saturday and Monday, rather than spend the day relaxing or going out. Joel is working on the screenplay for a Eugene O'Neill play that is rumored to star a famous Hollywood leading lady. The director, Miles Calman, has been pleased with his work so far, and Joel is confident that his career is about to take off.

On this particular Sunday, however, Joel is preparing to attend a tea he has been invited to attend at Miles Calman's home. Joel is flattered to have been invited and is sure that it is a sign that things are moving in the right direction for him. Further, he is sure that some of Hollywood's biggest players, including Greta Garbo and Marla Dietrich, will be there.

As he prepares to leave, Joel makes a promise to himself that he will not drink. He recently overheard Calman voice his displeasure at those who do. Joel thinks that abstaining will be a good way to make a good impression.

When he arrives at Calman's home, Joel is pleased to see that there are only two other writers in attendance. One is described only as an "ennobled limey" and the other is Nat Keogh, the writer whose drinking habits drew Calman's criticism.

Joel keeps his promise until Calman's wife Stella puts a drink in his hand. Joel notes that Stella is lingering near him, rather than circulating amongst all of her guests. Looking for something to say, Joel remarks how everyone in Hollywood seems to put so much energy into making sure they are seen with the right people and hoping that their competitors make mistakes, a sentiment that Stella agrees with. As they continue to converse, Stella periodically introduces Joel to several people, in a manner that makes Joel feel quite important.

Noting that Stella has recently had a baby, Joel remarks that new mothers are particularly vulnerable and need unqualified devotion to reassure them that they are still charming and desirable. Stella replies that she does not receive anyone's unqualified devotion, a fact that Joel attributes to everyone being afraid of her husband. At this moment, their conversation is interrupted and Stella leaves to talk to her other guests.

Joel watches Stella to see if she spends as much time with others as she did with him. He wishes that he could just sit and talk with her as a person, rather than as an important director's wife. Buoyed by a newfound confidence, Joel decides not to spend the afternoon with the safe people he knows, but instead to spend it mingling and speaking with people he doesn't know very well. As he crosses the room, he takes



another drink before sitting down next to Miles' mother. When Joel remarks to Mrs. Calman that her son has become quite a Hollywood legend, he is mildly surprised to learn that Miles' mother had always believed her son was destined for greatness.

Soon after, Joel finds himself at the bar with Nat Keogh. Nat tells Joel that, although he makes a lot of money, he has hired a manager to deal with his finances. Nat explains that he has a gambling problem, which the manager helps to keep under control. Nat finds a certain irony in the fact that he is responsible enough to make enough money to need a manager, yet he is irresponsible enough to have the manager. When their conversation is interrupted by the strains of music, the two men go to listen to the performance.

## Part 1 Analysis

This story takes place on a Sunday afternoon, the first of three successive Sundays during which significant events in the life of Joel Coles will take place. Hence, the title of the story is "Crazy Sunday." As the story unfolds, it becomes clear that the events of each particular Sunday are no more important than those taking place on the other Sundays. Rather, these events help build the story toward its final crescendo.

The author uses foreshadowing fairly early in the story to indicate that drinking will play a significant role in the events that occur. This happens when Joel makes a promise to himself not to drink at the Calman's party. He knows that Miles Calman has no patience for those who drink excessively, and as an up-and-coming writer, Joel does not want to do anything to jeopardize his status as a rising star. We know that alcohol will contribute to his downfall when he drinks the cocktail that Stella puts in his hand. This is the first of many instances throughout the story in which Joel will succumb to alcohol, as well as to Stella's beauty and charm. It also serves to underscore Joel's immaturity. He is only twenty-eight years old. In fact, Stella tells him he looks sixteen. Joel has been in Hollywood for only six months. He often acts impetuously, as evidenced by his decision to renege on his promise not to drink.

Another example of Joel's immaturity comes when Nat tries to explain the reasons behind his need for a manager. Joel seems to have trouble discerning the difference between Nat's agent and manager and finds it hard to believe that his friend needs someone to help him control his gambling. It is clear from this that Joel is still quite naïve. Despite the fact that he thinks he knows how to "play the Hollywood game," he still has quite a bit to learn. It is also interesting to look at Nat's gambling problem in light of the problems Joel seems to have with alcohol. The fact that Joel has to make a promise to himself not to drink tells us that he likely has a problem with alcohol. The key difference between Joel and Nat, however, is that Joel does not recognize the fact that he has a problem.

One other topic that should be explored here is the treatment of Stella's character. While we know that Stella is an actress, Fitzgerald does not allow us to learn much about her character beyond that. Rather, he chooses to describe her in terms of her physical





beauty and the effect it has on Joel. In fact, when Joel first spots Stella at the party, he refers to her "beautiful look." Later, he talks of wanting to spend time with her, conversing as though she were simply a girl, rather than a name. Finally, he follows her to see if she pays as much attention to other men as she did to him.



## Part 2

### Part 2 Summary

As Joel listens to the singer, he feels a sense of happiness and friendliness toward those gathered at the party. When the music ends and the party-goers begin making their way toward Stella to say good-bye, Joel decides to entertain them with "Building it Up," a skit he has written himself. Thinking Stella might enjoy it, he seeks her out and asks if he can perform. Stella thinks the idea is wonderful and asks how she can help. Joel assigns her the part of the secretary.

Before long, Joel finds himself performing his skit in front of the assembled group. It is at this moment that he realizes that the man who had just finished singing was a famous radio entertainer. Joel thinks that perhaps he has made an error in judgment by deciding to perform. As he goes through the skit, a humorous story based on an independent producer notorious for certain limitations, he realizes that no one is laughing. As he nears the end of his performance, he is aware that several people are already making their way to the door. Only Nat snickers slightly, and Joel realizes that he has made a fool of himself.

As he stands watching the exodus toward the door, he becomes aware of a solitary voice in the crowd saying "Boo! Boo!" Joel knows that he has failed miserably. Curiously, Stella doesn't seem to share his opinion. Clearly drunk, Joel leaves with Nat.

The next morning, Joel is mortified by his actions. He has become the very type of person that Miles Calman abhors. Joel is sure that Stella thinks the absolute worst of him, too. He arrives at work and sends a note of apology to Calman. Later, when he ventures from his office to have some lunch, he meets Nat, who attempts to encourage him by saying that the opinion of one person shouldn't ruin his outlook. Joel feels better for a short time, but becomes uncomfortable again when he sees a group of people who had been at the party the evening before. He swears to himself that he will never attend another Hollywood social engagement.

The next morning, a telegram from Stella arrives in Joel's office. In the note, Stella tells Joel that he was the most agreeable person at the party and extends an invitation to attend dinner at her sister's home the following Sunday.

### Part 2 Analysis

Again we see the results of Joel's lack of maturity. He quickly regrets his decision to perform his skit. For a time, he even contemplates never attending another social function in Hollywood. Obviously, this course of action is quite unreasonable, given Joel's ultimate goal of being a big player within the movie industry. We are also beginning to learn that his feelings are very easily swayed. For example, while Nat's words of encouragement after the debacle at the Calman's party makes him feel



momentarily better, he becomes embarrassed again when he sees other people from at the party. Similarly, when he receives the telegram from Stella, he seems to feel an instantaneous sense of relief and calls the telegram "the sweetest thing I ever heard in my life." Joel's reaction to this telegram, when "the blood rushed fast through his veins for a feverish minute," gives us an early indication that Joel is becoming quite enamored with Stella. Based on what we know about Joel thus far, we begin to sense that Joel's attraction to Stella may lead him to do some foolish things.

Despite Joel's' apparent immaturity, he knows he must work to repair his tarnished image with Miles Calman, and so he sends the telegram to apologize for his actions. However, it can also be argued that Joel sent this telegram, not to atone to Calman, but to elicit a response from Stella. In fact, in the telegram, he does not apologize to Calman, but to his wife. This is interesting, considering that Joel used to be preoccupied with Miles. It seems that his priorities have shifted somewhat, and he is now making a concerted effort to win over Stella.

## Part 3

### Part 3 Summary

Sunday arrives again, and Joel spends most of the day relaxing with the newspaper and having lunch in his room. He dresses for dinner and drives his second-hand car to the hostess's apartment. Soon after his arrival, Miles and Stella also arrive, wearing riding clothes. It is clear that they have been arguing.

Miles Calman is a tall man, and although enormously successful, Joel thinks he is very unhappy. Before turning his attention to Joel, Miles tells the man standing next to him to not bring up the name of Eva Goebel and implies that there is some issue regarding her. When he turns to Joel, Miles apologizes for missing him the previous afternoon. He was with his psychoanalyst. When Joel questions Miles' need for professional help, he learns that Miles first went for help to overcome claustrophobia and now has decided to straighten out his entire life, a process he believes will take more than a year to complete. Miles suggests that Joel speak with Stella if he would like to learn more about his problems.

When a young woman sits on the arm of Miles' chair, Joel crosses the room to speak with Stella. He thanks Stella for her telegram and says how pleased he was to receive it. Stella is visibly troubled, and the kindness in Joel's eyes causes her to begin talking. Before long, she tells Joel that Miles has been having an affair with one of her closest friends. The affair has been going on for more than two years. Having heard about the affair from several of her other friends, Stella finally confronted Miles this afternoon, and she is still reeling from her discovery.

Wanting to continue their conversation in privacy, Stella leads Joel to a bedroom. As they talk, several people walk by and look at them curiously, but Stella does not seem to notice. She tells Joel that Miles had the same issue in his prior marriage. Miles' psychoanalyst described it as a "mother complex," in which he treats his wife like his mother and then seeks another woman for sexual companionship. This problem seems to have surfaced again, and now Stella is playing the role of the mother. Eventually, Miles enters the room and tells Joel that there is no use trying to understand something in 30 minutes that his psychoanalyst thinks will take more than a year to resolve. Even so, they continue talking, until Miles suggests they all go to their home to continue the conversation.

When they arrive at the Calman's home, the conversation continues. Stella is visibly upset and continues to cry and rage. Joel tries to listen, but instead finds himself admiring Stella. She tells Joel that Miles is extremely jealous and recalls a time when she was in New York. He called her ten times in one day, because she had mentioned she went to the theater with another man. Miles, who has been in the room the entire time, admits that he is extremely jealous and says he was even uncomfortable seeing Stella sitting on the arm of Joel's chair earlier. Upon hearing this, Stella asks Miles how



he thinks she felt when Eva Goebel sat on the arm of his chair. Miles replies that it was worse for him to see her and Joel talking in the bedroom. When Stella says that she still can't believe that he is having an affair with her friend, Miles stops her, saying that he has already admitted that he was wrong and that there is nothing left to say.

In an attempt to change the mood, Miles begins talking about the movie business with Joel. Before long, Stella begins acting as if nothing has happened and asks Miles to tell Joel about some difficulty he has been having with a particular picture. At this instant, Joel realizes that he is in love with her. He quickly excuses himself to go home.

Monday arrives and so does the routine and intensity of the motion picture business. Monday evening, Joel calls the Calman's home. Although he asks to speak to Miles, Stella comes to the telephone. When Joel asks her if things are any better, Stella replies that they are not. Then, she invites him to attend a dinner and theater party being given that Saturday evening, as Miles will be in South Bend attending the Notre Dame-California game. Joel accepts the invitation and promises himself that he will tell Miles that Stella invited him.

Following a particularly long meeting Wednesday afternoon, Joel stays behind to talk to Miles. Miles tells him that he has decided not to go to the ball game, because Stella told him that Joel would accompany her to the party. When Joel points out that Miles is using a double standard, Miles admits that he is, but he wouldn't have a good time at the game knowing Stella is with someone else. Joel tries to assure Miles that he has never made a pass at his wife and says he will cancel his plans with Stella and never see her again. Miles seems resigned to thinking that if Stella isn't with Joel, she will be with someone else. Joel reminds Miles that Stella hasn't been with anyone else. Miles says that, while he couldn't blame Stella if she did have an affair, if he ever learns that she is cheating, he will divorce her immediately. Joel is annoyed at Miles' hypocrisy and asks if Stella has gotten over the news of Miles' affair. Miles says she hasn't, and he is having a hard time ending the affair.

## Part 3 Analysis

In this section of the story, we get another glimpse of Joel's immaturity and lack of discretion. Earlier, Miles apologizes for not seeing Joel at work the previous afternoon. His explanation that he had spent the afternoon with his analyst prompts Joel to blurt out "You're being psychoanalyzed?" However, based on his earlier description of Miles, "tall, nervous, with a desperate humor and the unhappiest eyes Joel ever saw," we see Joel at least suspects that Miles may be having emotional difficulties. Obviously, Joel doesn't fully understand the Hollywood culture. Furthermore, he fails to realize that problems such as those encountered by Nat and Miles are fairly commonplace. Additionally, the blunt way in which Joel refers to Miles' psychoanalyst tells us that he still hasn't learned the art of subtlety.

Joel's lack of discretion is particularly evident as he manages to find himself drawn directly into the middle of the Calman's difficulties. It is interesting that he chooses to



retreat to a bedroom with Stella so they could talk privately. Being alone in a bedroom with the boss's wife is a risky move for someone intent on furthering his career. It seems that Joel's attraction to Stella has overpowered his better judgment. The fact that he agrees to go home with the Calmans to discuss their marital problems even further is another example of his lack of discretion. After all that has transpired that day, the fact that he accepts Stella's invitation to attend a dinner and party the following Saturday is somewhat surprising. In spite of all this, Joel feels at least a small sense of obligation toward Miles, so he decides to tell him that he is escorting Stella to the dinner and theater. When he learns of Miles' suspicions, he offers to stop seeing Stella altogether.

The time Joel spends in the Calman home provides further support of the notion that Joel is attracted to Stella. As Stella unleashes an emotional tirade regarding Miles' infidelity, Joel has difficulty paying attention. He pretends to listen while admiring her. At this point, it is fairly obvious that Joel isn't particularly concerned about Stella's emotional state. His decision to escort her to the party, even though he knows about her marriage difficulties, is another indication that he is letting his attraction to Stella get in the way of his better judgment.

We begin to realize that Stella is probably using Joel against her husband. We know that Stella brings Joel into the bedroom to talk, because she can't stand the sight of seeing her husband with another woman. If Joel were more astute, he probably would have realized that this is precisely the reason why Stella has latched on to him so quickly.



## Part 4

### Part 4 Summary

The night of the dinner and theater party arrives. Work prevents Joel from attending the dinner, but he goes later to the theater to meet Stella. He spots Stella shortly after he arrives and is enchanted by her beauty. Noting that she is alone, he asks where Miles is. Stella tells him that Miles went to South Bend, after all, and is now on his way home. The pair goes into the theater and any doubts or guilt Joel has about being with Stella vanish.

During intermission, Stella tells Joel that the rest of their party is going to a nightclub after the show, but she would prefer to go back to her house so that they could talk. However she thinks Miles may be watching them. When Joel replies that the telegram Miles sent from South Bend proves he was there, Stella tells him that Miles could have easily made arrangements for someone else to send the telegram. This angers Joel, who begins to feel less of an obligation toward his boss.

When the show ends, Miles and Stella say good-night to the rest of the group and make their way to the Calman home. When they arrive, there is a telegram from Miles that tells them he is in Chicago and will return the next night. As Stella goes upstairs, Joel wanders into the sitting room and thinks about all that has transpired during the last two weeks. He begins to see that Stella is using him to get back at her husband for his unfaithfulness.

When Stella comes back downstairs, Joel shares his thoughts and adds that despite this, he has fallen for her. He is interrupted by the ringing of the telephone. When Stella returns, she reports that Miles has wired again from an airplane in Kansas City just to say that he loves her. When Joel asks if Miles asked about him, Stella replies that he did not. She goes on to say that she believes her husband really does love her. When Joel realizes, with a certain sense of relief, that he will not become involved with Stella, he decides it is time to leave and tells Stella he will call for a taxi. Stella tells Joel that is not necessary, and her chauffeur will take him home. Stella realizes that Joel's feelings are hurt, so she kisses him lightly. With that, Joel quickly finishes his drink as the telephone rings and the clock strikes midnight.

### Part 4 Analysis

In this section of the story, Joel continues to demonstrate the fact that he makes poor choices. He meets Stella at the theater and agrees to accompany her home. Joel justifies his actions by saying that he feels no obligation toward Miles, if Miles is indeed watching their actions.

Further support for the notion that Stella is using Joel lies in her decision to invite Joel to her home, despite the fact that she believes Miles may be watching them, a thought she

raises on several occasions. Despite this, Joel chooses to go, underscoring his inability to make good decisions.

There is some symbolism in the manner in which Stella is dressed. Her outfit is described as being "like ice-water, made in a thousand pale-blue pieces, with icicles trickling at the throat." This description is significant because it not only describes her outfit, but it also provides further support of the notion that Stella is using Joel against her husband. The use of the phrase "icicles trickling at the throat" causes the reader to begin to view Stella as a cold, calculating woman. The fact that Joel describes her as such provides an indication that he is beginning to better understand her motives.

Later in the section, although Joel finally confronts Stella about her motives, we can see that he is still very much attracted to her. Again, her manner of dress is described. However, this time, the use of the phrase "the warmth and softness of her body thawing her cold blue costume" implies that Joel has once again been distracted by Stella's beauty and will likely be lured into making another bad choice.





## Part 5

### Part 5 Summary

It is early Sunday morning. Joel and Stella have just made love. As Joel contemplates the peace and quiet of the next twenty-four hours, the telephone rings. Stella answers it and faints, overcome with emotion. Joel picks her up and brings her to the couch before picking up the telephone. When he does, he learns that Miles' plane crashed outside of Kansas City, and Miles is dead.

Desperate to have someone in the house to care for Stella, Joel asks for the name of her doctor or of a trusted friend who could come to be with her. Meanwhile, Stella refuses to believe that Miles is dead. She thinks that this is part of a ruse concocted by her husband. Stella tells Joel that Miles is her only friend and reminds him that her former best friend betrayed her by having an affair with her husband.

When Stella hears a noise by the front door, she assumes it is her husband and is dismayed to find that it is a telegram delivery boy. The telegram repeats the news Joel and Stella had been given over the telephone. Stella reads the letter over and over again, but it is clear that she does not believe the words. While Stella sits staring at the telegram, Joel tries to reach some of Stella's friends. Realizing what he is doing, Stella pleads with Joel to not call anyone and asks him to stay with her instead.

It takes some time, but Joel eventually realizes that Stella's desire for him to stay is rooted in her desire to keep the notion of Miles alive. As long as this scenario between Joel and Stella continues to exist, Joel thinks, Miles could not be dead in Stella's mind. Armed with this realization, Joel telephones the doctor and asks for him to come to the house.

As people begin to arrive, Joel prepares to leave. He promises Stella he will return if she needs him. Stepping outside, he sadly thinks about Miles' genius and realizes that his death will leave a huge void in the motion picture industry. Then, with a hint of bitterness, he resolves to return.

### Part 5 Analysis

In this final section, the events of the final "crazy Sunday" unfold. In the early morning, we learn that Joel has finally succumbed to Stella. In the events that follow, our suspicions regarding Stella's motives are confirmed. Her reaction to Miles' death tells us that she truly loved him and that she was merely using Joel to make her husband jealous. As she vacillates between calling out for Miles and begging for Joel's comfort, Joel comes to the realization that while he may ultimately end up with Stella, he would always live in Miles' shadow.



As we learn the story's outcome, its title seems somewhat inappropriate. While the events that unfold are, in many ways, "crazy," this story has significant tragic undertones in the death of Miles, the loss of Stella's love and the loss of Joel's innocence and naiveté.



# Characters

## Miles Calman

Miles Calman is a Hollywood director who commands a high level of respect in the industry. The narrator explains that he "was the only director on the lot who did not work under a supervisor and was responsible to the money men alone." The films he directs are those he considers worthy of his artistic vision, and he is known for being uncompromising. Still, he is depicted as having problems and frailties: He has been carrying on a lengthy affair with another woman (after cheating on his first wife with Stella); he is "tall, nervous, with a desperate humor and the unhappiest eyes Joel ever saw," and "one could not be with him long without realizing that he was not a well man."

For all his success in his career, Miles is basically insecure. He is jealous of Stella to the point of being hypocritical. He makes excuses for his inability to stop seeing his mistress altogether, yet he cannot think of Stella going to a party with Joel. In all likelihood, it is his insecurity that leads him to seek female attention and admiration in affairs.

## Stella Calman

Stella Calman is Miles's young, beautiful wife. She knew Joel when she was a struggling actress (Stella Walker) in New York. Reunited, she finds herself attracted to Joel for reasons she does not fully understand. She seems to enjoy her ability to capture his attention, but she also seems to sense a certain kinship with him. Perhaps she feels out of her element among the Hollywood elite, and she associates Joel with her past.

When Stella discovers Miles's affair, however, she seems determined to find in Joel the intimacy and validation lacking in her marriage. Her insecurity and self-doubt are clear in her emotional shifts from Miles to Joel and back again. Her naïveté is evident in the fact that she was Miles's mistress during his first marriage, yet she is stunned when he takes a mistress during his marriage to her.

## Joel Coles

Joel Coles is a twenty-eight-year-old screenwriter who has been in Hollywood for six months pursuing a career as a screenwriter. In his first six months, he has landed some "nice assignments" and is proud of his accomplishments and potential. The narrator tells the reader that Joel is "not yet broken by Hollywood," adding that he is an enthusiastic worker. His high opinion of himself is bolstered by the invitation he receives to Miles Calman's home for a party. Imagining the Hollywood celebrities that are sure to be there, Joel pictures himself fitting right in with them and impressing Miles in the process. The embarrassment he endures at the party does not destroy his ego, however, as he is flattered by the attentions of Miles's wife, Stella.



Even as a young man, Joel is no stranger to theater life. His mother was a successful stage actress whose career took Joel back and forth between New York and London. It was during his time in New York that he first met Stella, who was a struggling actress and an admirer of Joel's mother.

Joel is immature and ill-equipped to handle the issues surrounding his relationship with Stella. This may be because his early life revolved around theater, or it may be because at such a young age he has had few meaningful personal relationships. Regardless, he falls in love too easily and for the wrong reasons, and he has difficulty knowing how to have integrity with Miles and affection for Stella. Ultimately, he has no tools to help Stella handle the tragic loss of her husband, and his only recourse is to leave.

## **Nat Keogh**

Nat is a screenwriter and an acquaintance of Joel's, described by the narrator as "the good-humored, heavy-drinking, highly paid Nat Keogh." Although he drinks and gambles too much, he is highly successful in his career; he makes enough money to hire a manager in addition to an agent. Nat is friendly and reassuring to Joel after the embarrassment at Miles's party.



# Themes

## Insecurity

All three of the main characters exhibit insecurity that prompts them to reach out for external approval and reassurance. Fitzgerald shows how insecurity strikes anyone, regardless of background, career success, or personal egoism. More specifically, he seems to be revealing that insecurity is prevalent in Hollywood.

Joel possesses the antithetical combination of insecurity and arrogance that is common in youth. On the one hand, he perceives himself as a talented writer ("He referred to himself modestly as a hack but really did not think of it that way") who is ready to move among the elite in his industry. He even considers himself somewhat superior professionally because he can refuse alcohol (so he claims), unlike many of his peers. At the same time, he desperately seeks approval from others. He seeks the approval of Miles, Stella, and the partygoers, always switching his focus according to whom he thinks he can best impress. When Stella starts paying attention to him, he finds her irresistible, despite the fact that she is married to a powerful director and personal acquaintance of his. Even when he realizes that she is using him, he does not cut her out of his life right away. He is simultaneously disappointed and relieved when she suggests that her chauffeur drive him home. His conflicted feelings stem from his insecurity, his need to feel desirable, and his vague awareness of ethics.

Stella's insecurity is evident in her pursuit of Joel, which accelerates when she discovers Miles's affair. Initially, she enjoys the way Joel admired her and how he reminds her of her past. She knew him during a time of less social pressure, scrutiny, and judgment. His comment that she looks sixteen makes her feel youthful and carefree. When she learns that Miles has been unfaithful, Stella turns to Joel as a confidante and an admirer. She knows he is captivated by her, and in the wake of the rejection and self-doubt brought on by the affair, she needs another man to make her feel desirable. Ironically, this is exactly what Joel predicted in their first conversation.

Despite his professional success and large circle of friends, Miles is deeply insecure. He is repeating the pattern of his first marriage, in which he took a mistress to make him feel sexy. He is seeing a therapist to work out his personal problems, but there is little evidence of progress. In his career, Miles is confident and unconcerned about making everyone happy, but in his personal life he craves reassurance and validation.

## Appearance

In the competitive culture of the Hollywood film industry, appearance is critical. Fitzgerald touches on this in "Crazy Sunday" through Joel. Anticipating his evening at Miles's party, Joel resolves to stay away from alcohol because he knows Miles judges writers who drink too much. Joel wants to make a good impression and show that he fits



in with Miles and his friends. In reality, Joel knows he drinks too much, but he wants his appearance to conform to Miles's standards. The narrator explains, "Calman was audibly tired of rummies, and thought it was a pity the industry could not get along without them." Knowing this, Joel hopes that Miles will be in earshot when he turns down an offer of cocktails. At the party, however, Joel has some drinks and realizes too late that he is humiliating himself before his peers. He fears that the damage to his image may be irreparable, which could mean the end of his career. In his embarrassment, he struggles to maintain the appearance that he is still self-assured, and the narrator remarks that "he clung desperately to his rule of never betraying an inferior emotion until he no longer felt it." Later, Joel, self-conscious in his silk hat, reveals his awareness of appearance when he waits for Stella and Miles at the theater. He is beginning to understand that appearances in Hollywood often mask reality.

# Style

## Foreshadowing

Fitzgerald uses foreshadowing to hint at Joel's misfortune at Miles's party and later with Stella. In Part I, Joel is full of the anticipation of the party and promises himself he will not have anything to drink. The first indication that alcohol is a stumbling block for Joel is when the narrator comments, "Ordinarily he did not go out on Sundays but stayed sober and took work home with him." The first words spoken by Joel in the story are to himself, when he declares, "I won't take anything to drink." Joel's fears about lowering his inhibitions at such an important party foreshadow his humiliation when he breaks his promises to himself and has several cocktails. By the time the narrator reveals "He took another cocktail—not because he needed confidence but because she [Stella] had given him so much of it," the reader knows that his confidence is false.

The closer Joel gets to Stella, and the more attracted he is to her, the more he begins to realize that she lacks the self-assuredness to make her own decisions. This character weakness foreshadows the demise of their relationship when she tells Joel that she is attracted to him but loves Miles. By this time, Joel has learned that Stella is overly influenced by Miles and probably only liked Joel because Miles liked him first. He remembers a conversation in which Miles said, "I've influenced Stella in everything. Especially I've influenced her so that she likes all the men I like—it's very difficult." In retrospect, Joel realizes that the signs of her rejection were there all along.

## Film Industry Setting

As the story opens, the narrator describes the day-to-day reality of working life in Hollywood. He writes:

Behind, for all of them, lay sets and sequences, the long waits under the crane that swung the microphone, the hundred miles a day by automobiles to and fro across the county, the struggles of rival ingenuities in the conference rooms, the ceaseless compromise, the clash and strain of many personalities fighting for their lives.

Besides overt descriptions, the narrator subtly describes the setting of the story in ways that are reminiscent of the film industry itself. Room descriptions sound like settings, and physical environments are sometimes described in relation to their emotional impact. Miles's house is described as having been "built for great emotional moments—there was an air of listening, as if the far silences of its vistas hid an audience." Later, the Calmans' home is described this way: "Under the high ceilings the situation seemed more dignified and tragic." These are aspects that someone in the film industry would notice. In introducing them into the story, the narrator also supports the theme of the importance of appearances.

# Historical Context

## Hollywood in the 1930s

Early in the 1930s, color and sound came to Hollywood movies. This heightened public interest in American movies, which in turn catapulted the celebrity status of actors, actresses, and musicians. Not surprisingly, many studios capitalized on the new capabilities of film by producing musicals. This tendency toward light fare was ideal for moviegoers whose Depression-era lives contained enough tragedy and anxiety. Excitement and adventure was also evident in the popularity of gangster movies and westerns. But the Great Depression dragged on through the years, and while Americans sought the two-hour escapes offered by movies, their ability to afford them dwindled. By 1934, one-third of the nation's movie theaters had closed their doors. To stay afloat, Hollywood studios were forced to utilize less expensive means of production in order to pay the high salaries that popular celebrities earned. Without major names on the marquis, movies were rarely very successful. Among the big names that drew crowds were Katherine Hepburn, Spencer Tracy, Jean Harlow, Gary Cooper, Cary Grant, Mae West, W. C. Fields, Marlene Dietrich, and James Cagney. First introduced in 1934, Shirley Temple movies provided a loveable figure of innocence and hope for struggling moviegoers.

Movies in the 1930s represented everything that real life seemed to lack—romance, adventure, glamour, fantasy, and happy endings. Some historians have noted that in the 1920s, movie protagonists often cruised effortlessly into their happy endings, but in the 1930s movie producers depicted happy endings coming about as a gradual change of fortune. In *The Nickel and Dime Decade: American Popular Culture during the 1930s*, Gary Dean Best quotes Will Hays, the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America president in 1934:

No medium has contributed more greatly than the films to the maintenance of the national morale during a period featured by revolution, riot and political turmoil in other countries. . . . It has been the mission of the screen, without ignoring the serious social problems of the day, to reflect aspiration, achievement, optimism and kindly humor in its entertainment.

## Irving Thalberg and Norma Shearer

The party that Fitzgerald fictionalizes in "Crazy Sunday" is based on an actual party he attended, hosted by Irving Thalberg and Norma Shearer. Thalberg was a very successful Hollywood producer whose rise to prominence was well known among his contemporaries. Having never completed high school, he got a job at a movie studio, where he worked hard and eventually became a major executive at MGM Studios. Thalberg had a special focus on screenplays and worked closely with writers. He was known, however, for protecting the integrity of some projects by having two writers work





simultaneously on a script without letting them know. Born with a heart defect, Thalberg never expected a long life and often overworked himself to the point of collapse, intent on finishing his projects according to his vision. He died of pneumonia at the age of thirty-seven. The movie producer in *The Last Tycoon* is based on Thalberg, as is Miles Calman in "Crazy Sunday."

Norma Shearer was an actress in Hollywood who enjoyed success in silent and sound films. She was nominated numerous times for an Academy Award, winning once. Early in her career, she modeled while she waited for her big break. Her modeling experience helped prepare her for the facial expressions necessary for success in silent movies. Once she began making movies for MGM, her celebrity status rose quickly. Having made numerous silent movies, married Thalberg, and started a family in the 1920s, she and her husband decided to pursue bringing sound to movies. Luckily, she had a voice that allowed her to bridge her career from silence to sound. In the early 1930s, she was one of the highest paid actresses in Hollywood. After Thalberg's death, Shearer continued her acting career and stayed active in the movie business. Although she remarried, she was buried alongside Thalberg upon her death at the age of eighty.

## Critical Overview

"Crazy Sunday" was included in the last collection of Fitzgerald's short stories published in his lifetime, *Taps at Reveille*. Unfortunately, by the time the book was published in 1935, few reviewers were interested in Fitzgerald's work. Those who were interested noticed the changes taking place in Fitzgerald's maturing fiction. In *F. Scott Fitzgerald: The Man and His Work*, Alfred Kazin quotes a *New Republic* review by T. S. Mathews: "The yearning toward maturity is even more noticeable in some of these short stories than it is in his novels." Mathews adds that many of the characters grapple with the fact that life requires them to mature and behave like adults. Although "Crazy Sunday" is well liked among Fitzgerald's readers, there is little critical commentary about it beyond grouping it with Fitzgerald's better-known Hollywood stories, such as the Pat Hobby series of short stories and his unfinished novel, *The Last Tycoon*.

Much commentary on Fitzgerald's short fiction in general sheds critical light on "Crazy Sunday." In *Student Companion to F. Scott Fitzgerald*, for example, author Linda Pelzer observes that Fitzgerald's best short stories share connections with his novels. She writes, "All of his best stories are connected thematically to his novels. In fact, several seem to anticipate or repeat not only thematic concerns, but also plot elements and figurative motifs that are integral to the novels." "Crazy Sunday" is set in Hollywood, and a main character (Miles) is said to be based on Irving Thalberg. Both of these elements are repeated in *The Last Tycoon*.

# Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2



# Critical Essay #1

*Bussey holds a master's degree in interdisciplinary studies and a bachelor's degree in English literature. She is an independent writer specializing in literature. In the following essay, Bussey examines F. Scott Fitzgerald's "Crazy Sunday" and how its main character, Joel Coles, exhibits emotional immaturity in all of his relationships.*

Based on an embarrassing incident from F. Scott Fitzgerald's own experience in Hollywood, "Crazy Sunday" is part autobiography and part pure fiction. The main character, Joel Coles, is a young screenwriter who has recently arrived in Hollywood and is enjoying a measure of success. Trying to impress all the right people, he instead humiliates himself and finds himself in the middle of a marriage on the rocks. Throughout the story, Fitzgerald portrays Joel as emotionally immature in every relationship he has. He is immature in his relationship to himself, creating a self-image that is often convenient and reassuring if not always accurate. He is immature in his relationships with others, seeking approval and validation from whoever is most likely to give it. And he is immature in his relationship to his career and his industry, setting professionalism aside in favor of soothing his ego. As the story progresses from beginning to end, Joel experiences no personal growth and misses opportunities to gain wisdom because he is too immature to seize them.

First, Joel lacks the maturity to be honest with himself and exercise discipline or self-control. He knows that he drinks too much, and he promises himself not to have any drinks at Miles Calman's party. Within the first hour, he has broken this promise, accepting a cocktail because Stella, Miles's beautiful wife, gives it to him. Rather than exhibit the self-assuredness to refuse the drink politely, he feels that he has no choice but to take it and drink it. He makes excuses that he believes are legitimate reasons to make poor decisions. Once he begins drinking, he is unable to moderate his behavior at all. To him, the first drink is never the last, and he paves his own road to ruin.

Fitzgerald shows how Joel's mind-set changes with the effects of the alcohol. He feels warm and friendly toward the others at the party, and he feels overconfident in his ability to conduct himself appropriately. This reveals his immaturity because he has been drunk enough times to know better; he should know that drinking lowers important inhibitions and alters the good judgment he needs in the company of his industry peers. However, living in the moment, he leaves such wisdom behind and once again falls prey to the deceptive powers of alcohol.

Joel also fails to be completely honest with himself about his own talent and importance in the Hollywood studio scene. He has only been working for six months, yet he exhibits admittedly false humility about his talent, feels completely entitled to be among the Hollywood elite at Miles's party, and sees himself as superior to other writers such as Nat Keogh. He initially looks down on Nat because of his reputation for being a heavy drinker, which is not only hypocritical but also ignores the fact that Nat is extremely successful and very well paid for his work in their competitive industry.



Second, Joel is immature in his relationships with other people. He is insecure and tends to shift his focus away from those who might reject him, moving toward those who are likely to accept and even admire him. When he feels vulnerable, he is less honest with others than he is with himself. Trying to shrug off the bad reception of his performance, Joel keeps his disgust to himself and clings "desperately to his rule of never betraying an inferior emotion until he no longer felt it." He craves external validation, especially from people he considers impressive. When he receives the invitation to Miles's party, he imagines all the ways he will impress the important director, but after one cocktail, he practically forgets about Miles and focuses entirely on Stella. Similarly, when he feels accepted by the group at the party, he feels warm toward them. The narrator comments that Joel "felt happy and friendly toward all the people gathered there. . . . He liked them—he loved them. Great waves of good feeling flowed through him." But when he senses their rejection during his performance ("the thumbs down of the clan"), he puts on emotional blinders and concentrates on Stella. In the morning, his first order of business is to send an apologetic note to Miles, but when he receives an ego-boosting message from Stella, he forgets about Miles again.

Joel's relationship with Miles is somewhat complicated. On the one hand, he wants to stay in his good graces for personal and professional reasons, but on the other hand, he continues to see Stella. He likes being on the "inside" with Miles, and at some level, he wants to be honorable. His integrity, however, is too shallow to motivate his decision with and about Stella. When she asks him to accompany her to a party while Miles is away, Joel makes sure to let Miles know. Yet when Joel finds himself unexpectedly alone with Stella, he does not leave. In the story, the purpose of Joel's relationship with Miles is to force him to make adult decisions. Joel struggles—and fails—to be mature, but this relationship seems to be the first one that has ever forced him to face such issues.

In his relationship with Stella, Joel exhibits the most immaturity. He knows her from their years in New York, but now things are different in the Hollywood scene. Their familiarity is what brings them together, and Joel feels a little awkward at first. The narrator writes, "He felt he should say something more, something confident and easy—he had first met her when she was struggling for bits in New York." Perhaps this is why when they first talk at the party, Joel makes inappropriate remarks to her about possible insecurities. Because he is insecure, he assumes she is, too. He says:

So you have a baby? That's the time to look out. After a pretty woman has had her first child, she's very vulnerable, because she wants to be reassured about her own charm. She's got to have some new man's unqualified devotion to prove to herself she hasn't lost anything.

Despite these remarks, Stella still feels comfortable with Joel. Although he actually knows very little about her emotional reality, she probably thinks that he understands her intuitively and may even be inviting her to consider him as her "new man." While Stella talks to Joel about her feelings, her marital problems, her own insecurities, and other personal matters, Joel all but tunes out her words and ponders her beauty. He allows himself to be distracted by her appearance, her clothes, and her mannerisms,



with no real interest in getting to know her as a person. At her sister's house, she begins venting her emotions to him about Miles's affair:

She sat down vehemently on the arm of Joel's chair. Her riding breeches were the color of the chair and Joel saw that the mass of her hair was made up of some strands of red gold and some of pale gold, so that it could not be dyed, and that she had on no make-up. She was that good-looking□

Only a few paragraphs later, the narrator explicitly tells the reader that Joel often ignores Stella's words in favor of taking in the details of her clothing and appearance: "Sometimes he pretended to listen and instead thought how well she was got up." Stella believes that Joel is paying her the attention she wants, when really he is only admiring her beauty. Particularly revealing is that Joel realizes he is in love with her when she suddenly switches from indignation about Miles's affair to protectiveness of him in his career. Perhaps he sees in her a lack of emotional maturity and a short emotional attention span. For Joel, of course, being in love with her only means that he wants to be around her to admire her, feel admired by her, and perhaps pursue a physical relationship.

In the end, when Stella receives the news that Miles is dead, she needs Joel the most, and his response is to call her friends so he can leave. Here is his opportunity to undergo personal growth and be in a supportive adult relationship, but he is too insecure. Not only is he intimidated by the presence of Miles, even in death, but he realizes he does not love Stella because he believes she only likes him because Miles liked him first. Neither of these factors is good for his ego, so he cannot stay. If he had possessed more maturity earlier, he would never have let the situation with Stella go as far as it did anyway.

Third, Joel is immature in his handling of his career. He is fortunate that his arrival in Hollywood is met with opportunity equal to his talent. This initial success, however, leads him to believe he is a seasoned writer ready for great things in his industry. While it is important to be confident in his work, he allows himself to become overconfident, which will stunt his growth as a writer. Not believing he needs to improve much will prevent him from working on perfecting his craft. The other reason he does not take his career seriously enough is that when he is faced with a conflict between professionalism and ego, he chooses ego. At Miles's party, he should never have asked to perform. In the moment, however, he believed he had the chance to impress his peers and enjoy their applause. By allowing his judgment to be clouded, he humiliated himself professionally and retreated to Stella's (and, the next day, Nat's) reassurance. He is incapable of managing his own career in a mature and responsible way.

Although Joel experiences no growth over the course of the story, there is hope for him. Amidst his inappropriate remarks, drinking, self-centeredness, and insecurity, he makes occasional comments that reveal substantial insight. When Stella learns that Miles has died in the plane crash, she begs Joel to stay with her. A moment of insight actually overcomes him despite the effect her attention must have had on him:

He stared at her, at first incredulously, and then with shocked understanding. In her dark groping Stella was trying to keep Miles alive by sustaining a situation in which he had figured—as if Miles' mind could not die so long as the possibilities that had worried him still existed. It was a distraught and tortured effort to stave off the realization that he was dead.

To be successful as a writer and as a man, Joel will have to mature and grow as a person and overcome his own self-consciousness and need for validation. He will have to allow more moments of insight to reveal themselves so that he can write believable, moving, and compelling screenplays. Only by developing sensitivity to the human condition will his talent be able to make him the writer he already believes himself to be.

**Source:** Jennifer Bussey, Critical Essay on "Crazy Sunday," in *Short Stories for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2005.



## Critical Essay #2

*Martinelli is a Seattle-based freelance writer and editor. In this essay, Martinelli examines how the public exposure of private relationships inhibits the characters' ability to develop a meaningful love for one another.*

In "Crazy Sunday" F. Scott Fitzgerald tells the tale of Hollywood citizens Joel Coles, a young, up-and-coming screenwriter; Miles Calman, a powerful movie director; and Stella Walker (Calman), a beautiful, famous actress and Miles's wife. As to be expected, the lives of famous, Hollywood inhabitants receive much more exposure and attention than an ordinary, everyday citizen. Calman and Walker are no exception. Their public actions are scrutinized, watched and reported. Yet beyond what they do in public, Calman and Walker are under a constant, inquisitive eye that desires to see past their public actions, deep into their private lives. Coles, on the other hand, experiences no overt analysis from the public realm. He lives his life publicly in a way that is similar to most individuals. He moves through life as an active participant and contributor, but when he returns to his private realm, he feels removed from the public realm. Also, because of his ordinary stature, his private life is of no interest to the public. Thus, his private life is truly his own, in that he can decide to share it or to keep it completely isolated. However, as his life overlaps with Calman and Walker's life and relationship, the destructive, invasive power that public scrutiny holds over the private realm becomes unwaveringly apparent.

To better examine the concept of a public realm overpowering the private in "Crazy Sunday," it is best to turn to German-born philosopher, Hannah Arendt. For Arendt, the public realm is common. This means that everything that is seen or heard in this realm is intended to have the widest possible publicity. There is no expectation that what occurs in the public realm would be, in any sense, unavailable to any other person. The public realm is used to communicate and validate reality. To bring ideas, stories or art into the view of the public realm brings them into reality. The existences of things in the private realm, e.g., thoughts, feelings or passions, are inherently shadowy. This means, of course, that anything completely internalized lacks any alternative perspective and, thus, an individual has no way to verify the validity of such a thing without the analysis of another person. Arendt writes in *The Human Condition*, "Each time we talk about things that can be experienced only in privacy or intimacy, we bring them out into a sphere where they will assume a kind of reality which, their intensity notwithstanding, they never could have had before." With the new reality of private things in the public realm, the privacy of the things inherently dissolves; Meaning that when an individual discusses feelings or thoughts, these thoughts necessarily lose their shadowy reality.

Of course, Arendt does not only delve into the nature of the public realm. However, it is with respect to the public realm that she derives the meaning of "private." For Arendt, the extreme definition of private is to live outside of reality. Arendt states that the denial of this movement from private to public "means above all to be deprived of things essential to a truly human life." However, Arendt also does not believe that a wholly public life is worthwhile. The private realm holds as much importance in the definition of





the human condition as the public realm. The private realm is removed from the scrutiny of the prying and inquisitive eyes of the public. For Arendt, "the four walls of one's private property offer the only reliable hiding place from the common public world, not only from everything that goes on in it but from its very publicity, from being seen and being heard." The thoughts, feelings and passions that exist only in the shadowy sphere outside of the public realm remain outside of reality. They are perfectly and completely intimate. Therefore, just as it is necessary to be seen and heard in the common realm, to be empowered with the ability to retreat from it is also essential to a truly human life. Roughly, what Arendt proposes as a truly human life is an individual's ability to facilitate the ebb and flow between the public, common realm and the private, personal realm. To live exclusively within the public or the private realm is not simply the denial of the other, it is the denial of what it means to be human.

With this Arendtian framework in mind, Fitzgerald's "Crazy Sunday" explodes with deeper meaning. In the story, Coles is a young screenwriter with a bright future in Hollywood. When he is invited to a Sunday night party at the home of powerful director, Calman, and his famous actress wife, Walker, he has his future in mind. Coles is aware of his position in the public realm at the Calman's home. He intends to keep himself sober, as he knows that his actions will be under a great amount of scrutiny at such a high-profile party. Fitzgerald writes, "Miles Calman's house was built for great emotional moments□there was an air of listening, as if the far silences of its vistas hid an audience." Here, in Calman's house, Fitzgerald describes the Calman's private realm as a deeply inadequate separation from publicity and it would appear that the stage was set for the performance of Miles's and Stella's private affairs. Oddly, the first blunder of the story is at the hands of Coles.

The night of the party, Coles meets the beautiful and alluring Walker. Against his better judgment, her actions result in a drink finding its way into his hand. As the party and socializing continues, Coles becomes slightly intoxicated and, with the persuasion of Walker, decides to perform in front of Calman's guests. Unfortunately, Coles's skit pokes fun at Hollywood's shallowness. His performance reveals his personal disgust with Hollywood, which is not only the industry he courts; it is also the industry that supports his audience. Needless to say, his performance is ill received and he is booed off stage. It would appear, from Fitzgerald's descriptions of the house, that only Calman and Walker would suffer because it is their home and privacy that is overexposed to the public. However, Coles's actions the night of the party foreshadow the power of the public realm and how the exposure of thoughts, feelings or passions to publicity changes their reality. Coles feelings are no longer his own; he has now opened himself and his ideas to the interpretation and scrutiny of all other individuals within the public sphere.

The next Sunday, to Coles's surprise, the Calman's invite him to another party. This time, however, the stage is set for Calman's own private destruction at the hands of prying publicity. Coles enters the party and discovers the Calman's marriage in disarray because of the director's infidelity. Walker is distraught and upset as she expounds on her husband's affairs. However, the performance of her feelings is almost too theatrical. Fitzgerald writes, "She hovered somewhere between the realest of realities and the



most blatant of impersonations." In this moment of crushing despair, Walker finds herself unable to shed the feeling of being viewed and continues to perform. Even in emotional pain, she does not allow herself a complete retreat into privacy—possibly because she lacks any truly private realm. With the actions of both Calman and Walker, inviting and exposing Coles to their innermost privacies, Arendt's statement that "love is killed, or rather extinguished, the moment it is displayed in public" is substantiated. The necessity of a private realm to retreat to, especially under the emotionally heavy circumstance of an exposed, extramarital affair, is revealed as a clear and obvious need in order for an individual to love and to lead a truly human life. If such a need is not met, then it is obvious that Arendt's statement about love and the public realm is resoundingly true. Essentially, Calman and Walker's overexposed private life never gives them a true sense of privacy and, thus, they are damned to never develop a truly human concept of love for one another.

Through these two *crazy Sundays*, Coles becomes more and more physically attracted to Walker. Even though he knows that the powerful director could crush his career, Coles is eager to seduce Walker. Maybe he is so drawn to her because he can see that their relationship is almost completely theatrical. Maybe he is simply so physically attracted to her that he cannot resist the temptation of her flesh. Whatever the impetus, Coles is persistent and Walker is only slightly resistant to his advances. On the third Saturday, Coles sets out to seduce Walker since Calman plans to be out of town watching a Notre Dame football game. Oddly, Calman originally intended to cancel his trip on account of Coles. In a conversation with Calman, Coles states:

"I hear you're flying to the Notre Dame game."

Miles looked beyond him [Coles] and shook his head.

"I've given up on the idea."

"Why?"

"On account of you." Still he did not look at Joel.

"What the hell, Miles?"

"That's why I've given it up." He broke into a perfunctory laugh at himself. "I can't tell what Stella might do just out of spite—she's invited you to take her to the Perrys, hasn't she? I wouldn't enjoy the game."

Coles lies and convinces Calman that his intentions are only to accompany her as a friend. However, Calman still insists that he cannot attend the Notre Dame game, because if Coles does not go with his wife, someone else will. Regardless, Calman asks Coles to attend the party because he would enjoy his company. Coles agrees, but when he arrives at the party, it turns out that Calman changed his mind and decided to leave town. Again, Coles is motivated to seduce Walker. Calman's account of his worry that Coles would seduce his wife, then his decision to leave nonetheless is a tell-tale sign of his listless attempt to separate his private feelings from the public realm. In *The Short*



*Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald: New Approaches in Criticism*, Sheldon Grebstein writes, "[Calman's] spontaneous revelation of private matters hint that despite his show of regret and anguish at his tangled emotional condition, he secretly relishes its complications as 'good material.'" Again, Calman's relationship with his wife not only suffers; it lacks any foundation in love because of his persistence to continually create heartache and then expose these private intimacies. Nothing is sacred between Calman and Walker, thus their marriage is meaningless.

After the dinner, Coles and Walker return to the stage that is the Calman's home. Coles wants to sleep with Walker. She resists, but only meekly, seeming almost inviting in her rejections of his advances. Coles continues, telling Walker, "I'm in love with you anyhow" and "come sit beside me." With his attempts falling short, Coles decides to leave the Calman's house, yet as the clock begins to toll midnight—opening the door to the third Sunday—Walker's decision to resist falters and the two make love. After their affair, Walker receives a phone call informing her of Calman's death and "Crazy Sunday" concludes with a crescendo, dashing the façade of love of the Calman's marriage against the steps of their staged, publicly exposed, and completely inadequate private lives.

Although "Crazy Sunday" was written nearly two decades before *The Human Condition*, it is apparent that Fitzgerald witnessed the destruction of the private realm at the hands of the public. Strangely, just as Coles mocked the industry that he courted (Hollywood), so did Fitzgerald. The author Fitzgerald worked diligently and made money as a screenwriter, but it was apparent through his short stories and novels—especially "Crazy Sunday"—that Hollywood writ large was both a simile for failed love and the conflict that Arendt aptly called the human condition.

**Source:** Anthony Martinelli, Critical Essay on "Crazy Sunday," in *Short Stories for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2005.



## Topics for Further Study

Besides Fitzgerald, William Faulkner also worked in Hollywood in the 1930s. Research Faulkner's experience in Hollywood and draw comparisons and contrasts with Fitzgerald's Hollywood years. Prepare a "movie pitch" about these two literary figures in Hollywood. For fun, consider casting your movie with contemporary actors and actresses.

In what ways did the Great Depression affect the Hollywood film industry? What kinds of films were produced during this time, and who were the prominent actors and actresses? What insights does your research give you into American culture and the American psyche?

What do you think happens with Joel and Stella after the events of the story? Write another section for the story, trying to mimic Fitzgerald's narrative voice, letting the reader know what the nature of their relationship was, what direction Joel's career took, and any other additions you would like to make to the story.

Imagine you are a psychologist in Hollywood at the time and one of the main characters (Joel, Stella, or Miles) is your patient. Prepare notes from your first few sessions, along with your assessment of your patient's psychological health, problems you observe, and solutions or exercises you would like to suggest. Feel free to include predictions.



## Compare and Contrast

**1930s:** Despite the Great Depression, this decade is a memorable one for the American film industry. Shirley Temple movies, epics like *Gone with the Wind*, and feel-good films like *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* make this an important decade in American film and culture.

**Today:** In 2003, American moviegoers spent almost \$9.5 billion on tickets. In decidedly more stable and prosperous years than the Depression era, Americans have more to spend on movies but do not rely as heavily on them for emotional relief and escape.

**1930s:** In 1933, the Twenty-First Amendment is ratified, overturning the Eighteenth Amendment's prohibition on alcohol. This is the first time a constitutional amendment is repealed.

**Today:** Laws regarding the sale of alcohol primarily dictate the legal age at which a person can purchase alcohol. There are still counties that are "dry," meaning that the sale of alcohol is illegal in that area.

**1930s:** Fitzgerald's status as a popular author wanes, as most readers and critics have lost interest in his work. Because he is so strongly associated with the Jazz Age (1920s), he finds it difficult to sell his fiction in the 1930s.

**Today:** Fitzgerald is considered one of the great American authors, and his works are taught in schools and universities around the world. According to Scribner, readers buy half a million copies a year of his works.

## What Do I Read Next?

Considered by most critics to be the definitive biography of Fitzgerald, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur: The Life of F. Scott Fitzgerald* (1981), by Matthew Bruccoli, provides a unique depth of understanding of the author and his work.

Fitzgerald's last and unfinished novel, *The Last Tycoon* (1941), was inspired by his experiences and acquaintances in Hollywood. Set in the 1930s film industry, it explores themes of true love, power, and greed.

Aaron Latham's *Crazy Sundays: F. Scott Fitzgerald in Hollywood* (1975) provides a context for Fitzgerald's fiction and screenwriting produced during his years in Hollywood. Latham recreates Fitzgerald's day-to-day life in Hollywood, drawing from original interviews, anecdotes, and existing research.

*The Great Depression: America, 1929—1941* (1985), by Robert S. McElvaine, provides a comprehensive look at America's Depression years. McElvaine covers economics, politics, entertainment, family, culture, and more.

## Further Study

Fitzgerald, F. Scott, *Short Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald: A New Collection*, Scribner, 1995.

Edited by Fitzgerald expert Matthew J. Bruccoli, this collection contains forty-three of Fitzgerald's short stories. In his selections and introductions, Bruccoli makes a case for Fitzgerald's stature as an important short story writer.

French, Warren, ed., *The Thirties*, Everett/Edwards, 1967.

Students interested in reading more about Fitzgerald's life and work in Hollywood will be interested in the chapter by Jonas Spatz titled, "Fitzgerald, Hollywood and the Myth of Success." Spatz comments on such works as *The Last Tycoon* and the Pat Hobby stories, as they relate to the Hollywood phase of the author's career.

Kuehl, Richard, *F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Study of the Short Fiction*, Twayne Publishers, 1991.

Focusing on eight of Fitzgerald's hundreds of short stories, this treatment explores the evolution of the author's themes, subjects, and structure in his short fiction.

Tate, Mary Jo, *F. Scott Fitzgerald A to Z: The Essential Reference to His Life and Work*, Facts On File, 1997.

Ideal for students of Fitzgerald's work, this reference includes correspondence, biographical information, work summaries, and critical commentary in an accessible format.

Westbrook, Robert, *Intimate Lies: F. Scott Fitzgerald and Sheilah Graham: Her Son's Story*, HarperCollins, 1995.

While in Hollywood, Fitzgerald had a stormy romance with a columnist named Sheilah Graham. Although she published her memoir about the relationship after Fitzgerald's death, this book (written by her son) seeks to tell the story objectively, culling information from letters, diaries, and other accounts.



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## **Introduction**

### **Purpose of the Book**

The purpose of Short Stories for Students (SSfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's □For Students□ Literature line, SSfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels



frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SSfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

### Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SSfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel; and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of "classic" novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members—educational professionals—helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

### How Each Entry Is Organized



Each entry, or chapter, in SSfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- **Introduction:** a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- **Author Biography:** this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- **Plot Summary:** a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- **Characters:** an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in *Invisible Man*—the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch" would head the listing for the narrator of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- **Themes:** a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- **Style:** this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- **Historical Context:** This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- **Critical Overview:** this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- **Criticism:** an essay commissioned by SSfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).



- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an "at-a-glance" comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

### Other Features

SSfS includes "The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature," a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Short Stories for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.



Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

### Citing Short Stories for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Short Stories for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from SSfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from SSfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Short Stories for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

### We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Short Stories for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: [ForStudentsEditors@gale.com](mailto:ForStudentsEditors@gale.com). Or write to the editor at:

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