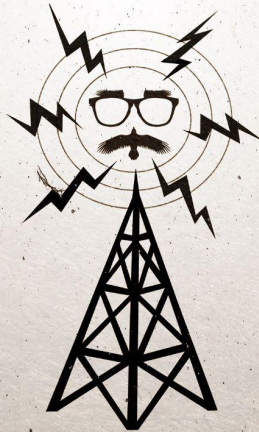


THE CASE OF THE GREATER GATSBY



THE CASE OF THE GREATER GATSBY
EPISODE 12 - MISERY
TRANSCRIPT

[The Case of the Greater Gatsby opening credits music plays]

Announcer: Now presenting Fig and Ford in The Case of the Greater Gatsby. Episode 12: Misery. Written and created by Sean Persaud and Sinéad Persaud. This episode is brought to you by Hunt A Killer.

[The WHIR of the tape recorder starting up.]

F. Scott Fitzgerald: Testing, testing! Why, isn't this grand! January the 5th, 1940. Sheilah has gifted me a brand new tape recorder for Christmas and I confess, I've been somewhat reticent to use it. Perhaps it's the existential dread that comes with new advances in science and technology. The knowledge that the world turns ever on and on and I will fade into dust, into obscurity, into memory. If I'm lucky. Ah Zelda, you know what they say: Misery loves company. We could start a company and make misery. Frustrated, Incorporated. Yes, I think we would do quite well. Ah, enough of that, it's a brand new year and I will embrace this tool and see if it helps me unlock some new ways of thinking and recording my pontifications, especially the more ponderous ones that are often difficult to write by hand, especially when I am in a state or addled on sweets and sodas. I do get out of breath so easily. Well, here's to the future! An endless realm of possibilities and a strange murky void of melancholy. Cheers!

[A beer can cracks open and he GUZZLES.]

F. Scott Fitzgerald: January the 20th, 1940. I say. I've listened to my first audio missive and is that how I sound on tape recorder? Truly, I am sorry to everyone who's ever had to listen to me blather on at a party. All right, all right, why did I hit record? Oh yes! A new job. Mel Hammermeister has enlisted me as screenwriter for her latest film adaptation. Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* will be getting the Hammermeister treatment and apparently I'm just the guy to do it. Or the only guy? I will say that having read Steinbeck's book, our thematic interests are similar, though we clearly approach the subject matter differently. He through the eyes of the dreamers, the workers. Me through the eyes of the elite, the bored, the damned. Although, we are all damned. Perhaps that's the true American Dream, the unifying theory of what it means to be alive. Goodness though...

[Fitzgerald rifles through the pages of his copy of The Grapes of Wrath.]

The prose is workman-like. Dry. Whereas mine is languid. Wet. Hmm... that reminds me. I need a drink. Then we'll get down to the task of trying to make this arid tome into something that sings on screen. Mel will have my head if I don't get my drafts in on time. Though it has been a treat having her around for supper recently. Sheilah and her seem to get on and it's so good for Sheilah to have friends. Even if that friend insists on including seven tap dancing numbers in a movie about displaced farmers being exploited and disgraced by an economic system they can never overcome. Seven!

[A click of the tape recorder.]

F. Scott Fitzgerald: My dearest darling love, Zelda. It's Valentine's Day and no matter what, you'll always be mine. I likely won't have the courage to send you this tape. Who knows if you'd even have the means to listen to it. Do you have tape recorder? I know these types of contraptions are too fussy for your idiotic mind. Said with love of course. I miss you as a bud in winter misses the velvet caress of the sun. I wish you were here so I could tell you all about the idea that's been circling me like a particularly ravenous vulture. A sequel to *The Great Gatsby*. I know

sequels are trite and the book wasn't even that well received. But... there's more to explore there. The spectre of the jazz age haunts us again, here in Hollywood. The things people do for fame. The things I've done... there's something there. Will keep contemplating. But first I'm off to a fancy meeting I've set up with Dorothy Parker. Like a book club meets socratic circle. It's sure to be a rollicking good time catching up with these scholars. But fear not, I've written an outline and now just need to fill in the gaps. *The Greater Gatsby*, I'll call it, because it's not just about one man's obsession this time - no, it's an entire city! Sheilah's agreed to help me with the nuts and bolts. Ah, I shouldn't mention Sheilah when I'm talking to you, Zelda. There are all kinds of love in this world but never the same love twice. I hope that your love for me spins wildly until I die.

[A music cue.]

F. Scott Fitzgerald: Dear Zelda, I'm so happy to hear that you're out of the hospital and back with your mother. Here's to an amazing year, though it be already March. And very nearly the 1920s! Let's keep our promise to visit each other come December. Now I know the hospital bills are past due so I've taken up work writing some advertisements for some local businesses while I workshop my next big script. Trying to come up with a jingle for a place called Mr. Connor's Hat Haven but I'm so wishing that Cole was here to give me a boost!

[SFX: DOORBELL]

Now who could be calling this early in the morning?

[Fitzgerald gets up and goes to the door, which he OPENS.]

Hello?

George Astrum: George Astrum. Astrum appliances. Here to check out your exterior plumbing.

F. Scott Fitzgerald: Exterior plumbing?

George Astrum: Yeah, you know. Pipes that are outside and stuff.

F. Scott Fitzgerald: Well sir, you seem to know what you're doing. Have at it and let me know if I can grab you a cola or something stronger!

George Astrum: Will do my good man. Say, what's that?

F. Scott Fitzgerald: That? That's tape recorder!

[Another music cue. The sounds of outside enter through a large hole - the front door is MISSING. Fitzgerald and Sheilah shout at each other.]

F. Scott Fitzgerald: Well, I don't know what happened!

Sheilah Graham: You were drunk last night.

F. Scott Fitzgerald: That doesn't mean I took our door off its hinges and absconded with it.

Sheilah Graham: Then what happened to it?

F. Scott Fitzgerald: How should I know? I'm just as in the dark as you are about this whole mess!!

Sheilah Graham: Are you recording this? Turn that off!!

F. Scott Fitzgerald: Don't tell me what to do!! I have a brainstorming session scheduled and I don't like my routine to be interrupted!!

Sheilah Graham: Well I'm headed out to a lunch with David O. Selznick and I can't just have the apartment unattended with no door to secure it. Especially with what's been going on! Can you possibly direct your remaining brain cell to write your silly screenplay and also at the same time act as steward to our home, like a man, for once?

F. Scott Fitzgerald: Go, I'll make sure no one comes to rob your extensive teacup collection.

Sheilah Graham: They are not only decorative but also pragmatic, especially when company is -
ugh, I don't need to explain myself to you, I just had my door stolen. I'll see you later, you
layabout!

[She HUFFS out the empty doorway. F Scott turns to the tape recorder, we hear him more clearly.]

F. Scott Fitzgerald: Yes. Well. March the 15th, 1940. You probably heard, but for that squabble we have to thank the mysterious disappearance of our door, taken clear off its hinges in the nighttime. I say who cares?! No door is like an open door! Now the ideas will feel welcome to drop in and stay a bit. But Sheilah's been complaining about some unsolicited affection from someone lately and feels unsafe with nothing separating us from the outside world. Also Citizen Jasper Fox's cars seem to get louder and louder each year. Perhaps I'll ask him to watch the place while I see myself off to the door store. The door store! That rhymes! Perhaps there's something there. The door store... the door store. Ma Joad gets a job at the door store. Hmmm, store of doors, take a tour of my store of doors...

[He trails off until the recording ends. A song plays on the radio in the next segment.]

F. Scott Fitzgerald: June the 5th, 1940. Nazis have finally entered France. My friend, I find myself lamenting the fact that I wasn't able to serve my country in the way I wanted to. I mean, without the war I never would have met my Zelda. But then again... maybe that would have

been best for both of us. What do you think, old sport? Will we Americans join the fray this time? Now, now, Ernest, don't look so glum.

Ernest Hemingway: An impossible task in this city. I felt the dirt under my fingernails as soon as I crossed the state line.

F. Scott Fitzgerald: It isn't shangri-la but certain neighborhoods have their appeals. And the women...goodness. They don't make 'em like this in Minnesota.

Ernest Hemingway: Sure they do. They make them everywhere and they flock here to be seen. Seen by the likes of fools. You and me. We're the fools.

F. Scott Fitzgerald: Come now-

Ernest Hemingway: And all your romantic notions of war heroism are drivel. You must fear the war. Fear the blasts and the hand to hand combat with thy fellow man. Nonetheless, you do what is right for country and for the higher power. Healthy fear and the willingness to soldier on. That is what makes a man a man. That and a good mustache.

Sheilah Graham: And what makes the rest of us, Ernest?

Ernest Hemingway: Sheilah, didn't know you'd be here today.

Sheilah Graham: Disappointed?

Ernest Hemingway: Yes.

Sheilah Graham: Scott was right. You don't mince words.

Ernest Hemingway: I also don't mince meats. Prefer a whole damn steak.

Sheilah Graham: ...whatever you say. Can I get you boys anything? Great minds need some sustenance?

Ernest Hemingway: All I ask is that you tell no one you saw me here.

Sheilah Graham: And why are you here exactly?

Ernest Hemingway: Why else? Hawking my new novel to a producer. This one fellow wouldn't lay off the phone calls. Hasn't even read the book yet! Ink's barely dried on the first draft. It's not in print 'til October! But he's sure it's gonna be a hit. Smiles too much. Didn't like him.

F. Scott Fitzgerald: Who's the fellow?

Ernest Hemingway: Haircreme. Tried to make me say it with an accent. I said, hell no. Too French. Made that picture with the giraffes last year.

F. Scott Fitzgerald: Ah yes Stella! Heard she's not doing too well. Did you sell?

Ernest Hemingway: Course I did. I'm a sellout.

Sheilah Graham: Ernest, will we have the pleasure of your company at dinner?

Ernest Hemingway: I'm leaving soon as the sun sets. That's the only way to do Hollywood as a writer. You throw them your book, they throw you the money, then you jump into your car and drive like hell back the way you came. Plus, I gotta get back to my cats in Cuba. Those felines need their father. Say, is tape recorder on?

Sheilah Graham: Why are you recording this?

F. Scott Fitzgerald: Wouldn't you record your conversations with the greatest writer of all time? One thing, before you leave, my friend. What did you think of my idea? For a sequel to *The Great Gatsby*?

Ernest Hemingway: Hm. If it's honest and provokes thought, then it will be worthy of tackling. But keep it short. Too many writers these days try with futile hubris to keep our attentions through five hundred page tomes. You know what I always say: Less things is more things.

Sheilah Graham: You clearly haven't seen *Gone With the Wind* yet.

Ernest Hemingway: Ha! Drive!

F. Scott Fitzgerald: Seems as good a stopping point as any.

[The tape cuts off.]

F. Scott Fitzgerald: July the 17th, 1940. I may be juggling too much, what with *The Grapes of Wrath*, the commercial writing, the *Love of the Last Tycoon*, and building this social club with Dotty, but -

Sheilah Graham: Oh is that all you're juggling? Don't want to mention anyone else?

F. Scott Fitzgerald: Come now, Sheilah, don't be that way. I'm recording. Where was I? Yes, this is all to say that my focus has been sharpened towards the one thing that I should probably put on the bottom of the pile. A spotlight shining on that which will likely make me no money and even fewer friends. *The Greater Gatsby*. A novel about the excesses of Hollywood and how they reflect the American-

Sheilah Graham: Fitzzy, I don't want to interrupt, but I have a lunch with Mel I need to get to. And I wanted to run an idea by you.

F. Scott Fitzgerald: Yes, of course. (back to the recorder) My partner in house and heart, Sheilah Graham, has agreed to sit with me and provide some tasty morsels of industry gossip, the types of which I may use to thread the drapes of the novel and forthwith draw them into a shadowy-

Sheilah Graham: Well that's just it, you see. First off, I shan't be sharing anything with you on tape. And nothing in writing. I don't play loose with this sort of information, it is highly sensitive and I must maintain control. Except I will say that Tyrone Power needs glasses. Pepper that into the story, will you? He's so high and mighty about his 20/20 vision. Secondly, I agree with you that as a novel, a sequel to *Gatsby* probably doesn't even make its way out of the station. But!

F. Scott Fitzgerald: But?

Sheilah Graham: A movie. A movie about Hollywood? About the ins and outs of the powerful and corrupt? The crevices within which they hide their deepest desires? Their darkest secrets? Movies make money. And a movie that already has the cache of a novel written by one of the country's great minds? Oh honey, you would clean up. Speaking of cleaning, the rumors that Buster Crabbe ran off with his cleaning lady are categorically false. Oh, Sheilah! Shush!

F. Scott Fitzgerald: Hmm. I'd need to write an original screenplay, devoid of my descriptive flourishes and attention to detail. I just don't know.

Sheilah Graham: A small price to pay for the checks you'll be able to cash. For Zelda's hospital bills. For Scottie's college. For all your social *business* out here.

F. Scott Fitzgerald: Ha! You mean you. Just you.

Sheilah Graham: Mmm, yes. Just me. I must go meet Mel. Perhaps I'll run the idea by her and see what she says. I'm late! Speaking of late, did you know there's a rumor that Betty Grable actually died years ago and was replaced by the studios with a lookalike? Anyhow, ta!

[As Sheilah gets up and walks across the room and out the door...]

F. Scott Fitzgerald: A *Greater Gatsby* movie.... that just may be the thing. Wait...(he yells to Sheilah) What was that about Betty Grable?

[A click of the tape recorder]

F. Scott Fitzgerald: August the 13th, 1940. It's taken a month but I've gathered enough fodder for the script. Sheilah's been a remarkable help and so has the social club.

[Fitzgerald shuffles through his notes.]

All right, through my contacts at Hammermeister studios I've found out some very salacious things. There's the speculations on what really happened to that Eugene Punchwhistle, an account of what went down at the party at the Roosevelt last New Year's Eve. Glad I stayed in that night. Now, we'll center on a man. A young man of twenty-six. He's just come to Hollywood to tell stories on the silver screen. Soon he meets a girl with eyes like Medusa. Though she's red of hair, she is certainly no tomato.

[Someone enters the office. It's DONALD OGDEN STEWART - a writer with integrity and a bone to pick.]

Donal Ogden Stewart: Fitz? It's Don Stewart. Let myself in. Door was open.

F. Scott Fitzgerald: Sheilah's probably out in the yard then. Or off somewhere. Who knows. She's been acting strange.

Donald Ogden Stewart: Now look Fitz, I don't want to row with you. We've certainly had enough of them through the years, and despite it all, I still respect you.

F. Scott Fitzgerald: You came all the way here to tell me you respect me? Why Donald! Good man!

Donald Ogden Stewart: I cannot, however, abide what you are about to do. To sell your script, this *Greater Gatsby*, full of tawdry bits of scandal that will have a devastating effect on real human beings - to sell it to Mel Hammermeister?

F. Scott Fitzgerald: It's a business, Donald, surely you know that.

Donald Ogden Stewart: Of course I do. If you could pay attention to anything outside a bottle or a pencil skirt, you'd know that I'm actually quite good at this business, and I manage to do that while maintaining decorum and decency.

F. Scott Fitzgerald: Well congratulations. But perhaps what I'm aiming for is a little bit higher than a comedy of errors starring that has-been Hepburn.

Donald Ogden Stewart: Well, you would know has-beens.

F. Scott Fitzgerald: Excuse me?

Donald Ogden Stewart: I... I am renouncing my membership in the club. Yes, I simply can't be around you. It breaks my heart to do it, it has provided me with hours upon hours of friendship and philosophy, the likes of which we dream upon, but....I can't do it anymore. Some men have principles. I'll show myself out.

F. Scott Fitzgerald: You certainly will.

[A beat.]

He'll be back.

[A click of the tape recorder.]

F. Scott Fitzgerald: September the 2nd, 1940. Having multiple tasks to work on really does something for my creative process. If I get bored with one project, I'll simply procrastinate with another! Almost like having mistresses... (he laughs) But I do really need to put the finishing touches on this Steinbeck script. Though I heard Mankiewicz's last picture started rolling cameras before the pages were even printed!

[The DOOR SLAMS OPEN. MEL barges in with TD in tow.]

Mel Hammermeister: Fitzgerald!

TD Hammermeister: Now announcing, Mrs. Mel Hammermeister!

F. Scott Fitzgerald: TD, usually you announce the person before they loudly enter the room, yelling. Goodness, ever since the Hinge Highwaymen struck, people keep barging into our apartment.

Mel Hammermeister: What sort of espionage you got going on in here?

F. Scott Fitzgerald: Oh! It's tape recorder. So I can listen back to myself blather on and use it for my writing. It's been an absolute life saver. You're going to love my latest draft.

TD Hammermeister: That's actually what Mel's here to see you about.

Mel Hammermeister: That's actually what I'm here to see you about.

TD Hammermeister: Mel has some disappointing news.

Mel Hammermeister: I've got some disappointing news- TD! Make yourself scarce.

TD Hammermeister: As you command! I'll be in the car, you sensual siren of cinema!

[TD leaves.]

Mel Hammermeister: You working on my script?

F. Scott Fitzgerald: Which one?

[He laughs heartily. Mel fake chuckles with him. Then:]

Mel Hammermeister: You're off *The Grapes of Wrath*. Sorry. I'm giving it to someone else.

F. Scott Fitzgerald: But... I'm nearly finished! If this is about how long it has taken, I assure you, it can be on your desk by tomorrow-

Mel Hammermeister: -It isn't that.

F. Scott Fitzgerald: Ah. I see. Well, then who's it going to? Donald? I could see him doing it. Not quite the tone you want though. Sidney Howard? No, can't be him, he died last year.

Mel Hammermeister: We're bringing in some new blood. Up and comer named Darby Farnsworth.

F. Scott Fitzgerald: Farnsworth Farnsworth's daughter?! Isn't she twelve years old or thereabouts?

Mel Hammermeister: She's sixteen and she's winning awards all over the place.

F. Scott Fitzgerald: New blood indeed.

Mel Hammermeister: And your blood is 90% soda and gumdrops. You think I don't watch you at craft services?

F. Scott Fitzgerald: Really rubbing salt in the wound.

Mel Hammermeister: Sorry to do this to you. But hey, you've got your novels. And your beautiful Sheilah. And that other script. *Greater Gatsby*? We're still in business on that one. So everything's fine.

[The sound becomes gradually more distorted, as if we are not there in the room but listening back on tape recorder.]

F. Scott Fitzgerald: I don't understand, Mel. You take a gritty, realistic look at out of work farm workers, a hard, dirty story about labor and greed, and... you try to turn it into a musical? With tap dancing numbers?

Mel Hammermeister: -seven tap dancing numbers-

F. Scott Fitzgerald: -And then on top of it all, you hire an actual, literal child to write it? This is...

Mel Hammermeister: Hollywood. This is Hollywood. See ya 'round. Tell Sheilah I said hi.

[The tape recorder SHUTS OFF. The tape recorder SPINS DOWN as the PHONE RINGS.]

Ford Phillips (Voice Over)/Fig Wineshine (Voice Over): We were interrupted - / Suddenly, the phone -

Oh I thought I was - / Sorry, I figured I -

It's ok, you go ahead- / It's ok, you go ahead-

Ford Phillips (Voice Over): No please, I insist. Yours seemed a little more urgent and engaging.

Fig Wineshine (Voice Over): Well, I am a writer, so that checks out. (clears throat) Suddenly, the phone rang!

Ford Phillips (Voice Over): That's it?

Fig Wineshine (Voice Over): Yeah. You gonna answer it?

[Ford SIGHS and picks up the still ringing phone.]

Ford Phillips: Ford Phillips.

Fig Wineshine: And Fig Wineshine!

Ford Phillips: Shut up!

Claudette Knickerbocker: Hope I didn't catch you at a bad time.

Ford Phillips: Hey Claudette. Just listening to F. Scott's secret tapes.

Claudette Knickerbocker: Well I hate to interrupt but we got a big development in the threatening letters case. Meet me at the station in an hour.

Ford Phillips: We'll be there.

[Ford HANGS UP.]

Fig Wineshine: What's the haps?

Ford Phillips: We gotta head to the station in an hour. But we have a few more tapes to listen to.

Fig Wineshine: Well then, let's start them up.

[The magnetic tape WHIRRS BACK TO LIFE. The Case of the Greater Gatsby closing theme plays.]

Mary Kate Wiles: Shipwrecked Comedy presents The Case of the Greater Gatsby

Written and created by Sean Persaud and Sinead Persaud

Directed by William Joseph Stribling

Featuring:

Daniel Vincent Gordh as F. Scott Fitzgerald

Jon Cozart as George Astrum

Julia Cho as Sheilah Graham

Joey Richter as Ernest Hemingway

Dylan Saunders as Donald Ogden Stewart

Lesli Margherita as Mel Hammermeister

Blake Silver as TD Hammermeister

Sean Persaud as Ford Phillips

Sinead Persaud as Fig Wineshine

And Joanna Sotomura as Claudette Knickerbocker

Original music by Dylan Glatthorn

Audio recording by Noah Hunt Audio

Mixing and Sound Design by Lizzie Goldsmith

Executive Producers Paul Komoroski & Michael Walsh

Produced by Sean Persaud, Sinead Persaud, and Mary Kate Wiles

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