

The Not-So-Great Gatsby

A Comedy in Nine Scenes

By Bryan Starchman

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Playwright's Note

What fascinated me most about adapting this story was how perfectly F. Scott Fitzgerald's themes of wealth, identity, and the American Dream translate to modern teenage life. The desire to reinvent oneself, the pressure to maintain appearances, the gap between who we are and who we pretend to be - these are as relevant to today's teenagers as they were to Fitzgerald's Jazz Age socialites. This show maintains the core elements: the mysterious wealthy neighbor, the green light of hope, the watchful eyes, and the clash between old money and new. But instead of bootlegging, we have cryptocurrency. And instead of the roaring twenties, we have the digital age, where appearance and reality are just as disconnected as they were in Gatsby's world. Some changes were necessary, of course. Others were just fun. Nick Carraway became Nick Coriander, Jordan Baker became Kobe Baker, Daisy Fay is now Violet Fay, and our green light is now the glow of a flickering stage light. But this is still a story about the gap between dreams and reality, about the stories we tell ourselves and others, and about the sometimes destructive power of holding onto the past. While this adaptation takes considerable comedic liberties with Fitzgerald's text, it strives to honor the spirit of the original work while making it accessible and entertaining for audiences. My hope is that this play will not only entertain but might also inspire students to explore Fitzgerald's novel with fresh eyes, recognizing how its themes continue to resonate in our world.

SYNOPSIS

Welcome to East Beverly Hills High, where old money meets new technology in this hilarious contemporary adaptation of F. Scott Fitzgerald's classic novel. When mysterious transfer student Jason "Gatsby" Gatz arrives with designer clothes (price tags still attached) and a suspicious cryptocurrency fortune, he turns the school's social hierarchy upside down. His mission? To win the heart of popular girl Violet Fay, who once shared her graham crackers with him in kindergarten – a memory he's never quite gotten over.

Narrated by sardonic junior Nick Coriander and his crush, golf team captain Kobe Baker, this fast-paced comedy features a delightfully modernized cast of characters including a football star, a drama queen, and an English teacher moonlighting as a questionable crypto advisor.

While paying homage to Fitzgerald's themes of wealth, identity, and the American Dream, it tackles contemporary issues like social media pressure, cryptocurrency schemes, and the eternal awkwardness of high school romance. Students will relate to the modern setting while teachers will appreciate the literary connections and surprising moments of poignancy amid the laughter.

Warning: May contain excessive graham cracker references and questionable financial advice.

About 75-90 minutes.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(4 m, 5 w, 5 - 9 flexible.)

NICK CORIANDER: (M) A junior at East Beverly Hills High, our first narrator.

KOBE BAKER: (F) Captain of the golf team, Violet's best friend, lover of puns, and our second narrator.

JASON "GATSBY" GATZ: (M) The mysterious new transfer student who has a locker right next to Nick's.

VIOLET FAY: (F) The popular homecoming queen.

TROY BUCHANAN: (M) Star quarterback and Violet's boyfriend.

WOLFSHEIM: (Flexible) An enigmatic English teacher and private tutor.

MYRTLE BOUVIER: (F) The lead actress in the drama department and Troy's secret fling even though she is dating the geeky George.

GEORGE WILSON: (M) Myrtle's boyfriend, in charge of the A.V. club, thinks the Dr. Doolittle poster is trying to tell him something.

OFFICER: (Flexible) A comically inept SEC investigator who appears throughout the play in increasingly ridiculous disguises.

COACH KLIPSPRINGER: (Flexible) The school's track coach, moonlights as a butler/maid at Gatsby's parties.

OWL-EYED LUNCH LADY: (F) The school's bespectacled cafeteria manager, doubles as entertainment at Gatsby's parties, and knows all the words to "Shake It Off."

EXTRAS: Assorted students and party guests. *(3-6 actors with doubling.)*

Note: While not a speaking role, the Dr. Doolittle poster should be considered a character in its own right, serving as the silent judge of all drama department shenanigans.

Scene 1: The New Kid

(AT RISE: The hallway of East Beverly Hills High. NICK stands at his locker, organizing books.)

NICK: *(To audience.)* Every school has that one mysterious transfer student who shows up out of nowhere and changes everything. At East Beverly Hills High, that student was Jason Gatsby. And because my locker happened to be next to his, I had a front-row seat to the whole dramatic saga. But before I tell you about Jason, let me paint you a picture of East Beverly Hills High. *(Gestures around.)* This is where the children of the rich and famous come to pretend they're just like everyone else – and fail spectacularly at it.

(Two STUDENTS walk by carrying designer bags.)

STUDENT 1: Ugh, can you believe my dad only got me the regular Porsche instead of the limited edition?

STUDENT 2: That's basically child abuse.

NICK: *(To audience.)* See what I mean? And I'm just your average middle-class kid whose mom happens to be the new school counselor. Which means I get to attend school here... and it also means that I can never skip class. Ever.

KOBE: *(Calling out.)* Heads up!

(A golf ball goes flying across stage. KOBE BAKER enters, carrying a golf bag.)

NICK: *(To audience, with a mixture of admiration and nervousness.)* And that's Kobe Baker - captain of the golf team, straight-A student, and the person I've had a hopeless crush on since she corrected my grip during mini-golf at Katie Chen's birthday party last month. Not that I purposely held the club wrong just so she'd have to show me again... okay, maybe I did. But in my defense, have you seen how their eyes light up when they're explaining proper putting technique?

KOBE: *(Suddenly turning to audience.)* Actually, let me tell this part. *(To audience.)* Nick here is what we call an "unreliable narrator." He turns into a complete goofball around me, but it's kind of adorable.

NICK: *(Shocked.)* Wait, what? Did you just... talk to the audience? That's my thing!

KOBE: *(To audience.)* Oh look, he's surprised. *(To NICK.)* Dude, come on. It's not like we're living in the 1920s. Women have progressed. We too can break the fourth wall.

NICK: But I'm supposed to be the narrator. It says so right in the character description! *(Pulls out script.)*

KOBE: *(Takes script, looks at it.)* Well, this looks like it needs an update. *(To audience.)* Ladies and gentlemen, I'm happy to announce that this adaptation now has two narrators. *(To Nick.)* Got a problem with that?

NICK: *(Shrugs, then to audience.)* I guess there will be two narrators now. *(To himself.)* This actually might work out better — I get to spend more time with Kob— *(Catches himself.)* I mean, we can, uh, share the work of telling the story. Efficiency rules!

KOBE: *(To audience, smirking.)* Smooth recovery.

NICK: *(To audience, blushing.)* Moving on...

(Kobe sets up another ball and is just about to swing.)

NICK: *(Cont'd. Interrupting the shot.)* Kobe! What did Principal Cody say about practicing in the halls?

KOBE: He said, it's "FORE-bidden during class hours." Get it? FORE-bidden?

NICK: *(Rolling his eyes.)* I got it, Kobe.

KOBE: *(Checks watch.)* Besides, it's lunch. Loop. Hole.

NICK: You're going to break something.

KOBE: That's why I'm only using the soft practice balls today. *(Hits another ball.)* See? Totally safe.

(SFX: Sound of breaking glass offstage.)

KOBE: *(Cont'd.)* ...mostly safe.

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(JASON GATSBY enters, wearing "designer" clothes that still have the tags on them. He's trying too hard to look wealthy and is carrying a leather attaché case instead of a backpack. He turns towards the fourth wall "locker" and pantomimes struggling with his locker combination.)

JASON: Come on, open up! I specifically requested a premium locker with Italian hinges!

NICK: Need help? These lockers are kind of tricky. I'm Nick.

JASON: Jason Gatsby. *(Extends hand formally.)* A pleasure to make your acquaintance, old sport.

NICK: Did you... did you just call me "old sport"?

JASON: Is that not what people say here? *(Frantically pulls out a notebook titled "How to Talk Rich.")* I also prepared "dahhhhling" and "I summer in the Hamptons." *(Flips through pages.)* Oh, and "One simply must have a yacht these days."

KOBE: *(To audience.)* And here's our mysterious transfer student, who has clearly learned about wealth from watching the reruns of "Gossip Girl." *(To NICK.)* Is he for real?

JASON: *(Noticing KOBE.)* Ah, you must be a fellow athlete! I myself am quite accomplished at... *(Checks notebook.)* ...polo?

KOBE: I play golf.

JASON: *(Flipping pages frantically.)* Golf! Yes, of course! Love golf. Big golf guy. Huge. The most golf.

KOBE: What's your handicap?

JASON: *(Pause.)* ...Physical or emotional?

(WOLFSHEIM, a suspicious new English teacher, hurries by, checking their phone anxiously.)

WOLFSHEIM: Jason! A moment? *(Pulling him aside.)* Silicon Valley's been calling again about those, ah, "homework assignments."

JASON: *(Nervously.)* Tell them I'm still working on my essay about totally legitimate business practices!

WOLFSHEIM: (*Glancing around.*) And those digital pet rocks you sold to the Pentagon...

JASON: The ones with the little American flag pins?

WOLFSHEIM: (*As phone buzzes again.*) We'll discuss this later. (*Hurries off.*)

(*VIOLET FAY and TROY BUCHANAN walk by, surrounded by their adoring entourage. JASON freezes.*)

NICK: (*To audience.*) And here comes the queen bee herself - Violet Fay, my third cousin six times removed, who barely acknowledges my existence despite the fact that we literally share great-great-great-great-great-grandparents.

(*VIOLET strikes a sexy, look-at-me pose.*)

KOBE: And that hulking specimen next to her? Troy Buchanan, big man on campus with a brain the size of a knockoff Rolex and just as functional.

(*TROY strikes a bodybuilding pose, flexing his muscles.*)

TROY: You know I hate that word, hulking.

NICK: We know! (*Back to audience.*) He's about as loyal as Benedict Arnold. If you missed that reference, pay attention in history class!

KOBE: It's ok, Troy wouldn't get it either. He once asked if Benedict Arnold was the guy who invented "that nasty egg dish."

TROY: (*Loudly.*) And then I told Coach, "Just because I missed practice doesn't mean I'm not committed. I was getting my Ferrari detailed!"

VIOLET: (*Rolling her eyes.*) Troy, you drive a used BMW. (*To her FRIENDS.*) But I really shouldn't question where Troy was yesterday. I trust him inherently! You know what my mom always says: "The best thing a girl can be in this world is a beautiful little fool." (*Fake laughs.*)

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KOBE: *(To audience, disgusted.)* And that's exactly why I avoid most of the social scene around here. Give me a driving range over that performative nonsense any day.

(JASON sees VIOLET and TROY and gets very nervous.)

JASON: I...I have to run, old sport.

NICK: Nice to meet you, Jason Gatsby.

(JASON exits just as VIOLET turns.)

VIOLET: Did someone say... Gatsby? *(Suddenly interested.)*
What Gatsby?

KOBE: Just the new kid.

VIOLET: *(Trying to sound casual.)* Oh. For a second I thought... never mind. It's not important.

TROY: Of course I drive a used BMW, babe. I'm environmentally conscious. Besides, Father says if I keep my grades above a D+, he'll consider letting me lease something Italian.

STUDENT 1: Like a pizza?

TROY: *(Pause.)* No, Jennifer. Not like a pizza.

(JASON creeps back on stage, trying to be casual, but he is staring at VIOLET. He trips and drops his briefcase, spilling a "Rich People for Dummies" book, fake Rolex watches, yacht club brochures, and a half-eaten jar of caviar.)

KOBE: *(Helping HIM pick up his belongings, holds up a Rolex.)* Careful there, better WATCH where you're going.

NICK: You, okay?

JASON: That girl... who is she?

NICK: Violet Fay? Only the most popular girl in school. Don't get any ideas though - she's dating Troy Buchanan.

KOBE: Yeah, they're like our school's power couple. You could say they have... *(Grinning.)* ELECTRIFYING chemistry!

(NICK groans.)

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KOBE: (*Cont'd.*) What? Too much? I thought that one was pretty CURRENT!

NICK: Please stop!

KOBE: I'm sorry, I make puns when I'm nervous.

NICK: (*Looking into her eyes.*) Why are you nervous?

KOBE: (*Looking dreamily back into his eyes.*) No... no reason...

JASON: Ahem! Can we focus on my story? After all, it's my name in the title of this play!

NICK: Oops. Sorry.

JASON: As I was saying... (*Staring off, dreamily.*) Violet Fay... (*Pulls out a worn kindergarten yearbook from his briefcase.*) I knew her, back when we were five. She shared her graham crackers with me during snack time.

NICK: Wait, you went to kindergarten with Violet?

JASON: Before my family moved away. But now I'm back, and I'm going to win her heart! (*Strikes dramatic pose.*)

KOBE: (*To NICK.*) Does he know he's still got a price tag hanging from his sleeve?

NICK: (*To audience.*) And that's how I got pulled into the weirdest love story a fictional high school has ever seen. Well, at least since last semester when drama president William Darcy started dating head cheerleader Elizabeth Bennet. But that's a whole other play...

(*MYRTLE and GEORGE enter, arguing.*)

KOBE: (*To audience.*) Ah, and here comes our school's resident train wreck: Myrtle Bouvier, the drama club star who treats every conversation like it's her Broadway audition, and her oblivious boyfriend George Wilson, who runs the AV club and has definitely developed an unhealthy friendship with that Dr. Doolittle poster in the theater.

NICK: (*To audience.*) They're what happens when a spotlight-chasing drama queen settles for the guy who knows how to operate the spotlight. And trust me, this disaster's about to get a whole lot messier.

End of Freeview

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