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**Love Notes Drenched In Moonlight; Hints of Future Novels In Letters to Fitzgerald**

By DINITIA SMITH

She was in nearly every girl F. Scott Fitzgerald ever saw in moonlight: rich, beautiful, forever unattainable. She was Isabelle in ''This Side of Paradise,'' ''under moonlight and pale starlight,'' and Daisy Buchanan in ''The Great Gatsby,'' humming a melody on the steps of Gatsby's mansion, ''sweetly, following it.''

''Each change tipped out a little of her warm human magic upon the air.''

Her name was Ginevra King, and she was a celebrated Chicago debutante whom Fitzgerald met in 1915 when she was a 16-year-old at the Westover School and he was a 19-year-old at Princeton. They were smitten. Ginevra wrote about him in her diary, and for two years they corresponded. When they broke up, Fitzgerald asked her to destroy his letters, and she did. But he kept hers and had them typed up and bound with the title ''Personal Letters: Property of F. Scott Fitzgerald (Not Manuscript.)'' Fitzgerald died in 1940, and some 10 years later his daughter, Scottie, returned them to Ginevra.

Ginevra died in 1980 at 82, but the letters remained in her family. Now her daughter and granddaughters have donated them, along with Ginevra's diary and an unpublished short story written by her, to Princeton, the repository of Fitzgerald's papers.

''Ginevra is arguably the most important romance Fitzgerald ever experienced, more than Zelda,'' his wife, said James L. W. West III, a professor of English at Penn State University and editor of the ongoing edition of Fitzgerald's works published by Cambridge University Press. ''He lost her, but his ideal of her remained throughout his life.''

Ginevra's diary has never been seen by scholars, except Professor West, an expert on Fitzgerald, who is preparing an essay on the Princeton donation. ''There, she lets her emotions show,'' he said. ''She says she loves Scott. In her letters she was more guarded.''

He added: ''The letters help us understand the fictional process by which he transferred this ideal creature into an interesting literary character. He gave her some edge and some flaws.''

Fitzgerald's early biographers, Arthur Mizener and Andrew Turnbull, saw the letters, though they barely mention them. For nearly 40 years they have been unavailable to scholars. ''We can now examine the letters more carefully,'' Professor West said, ''and we can trace details from them that Fitzgerald adapted for his stories and novels.''

The papers provide a window into the world of the wealthy elite of pre-World War I America, a world of unlimited privilege and a strange innocence, of moonlit mansions, dances, football weekends. Through it, Ginevra moved like a blithe spirit, carefree and cosseted. In many ways her writings are typical teenage musings, but in them can be heard the voices of Daisy Buchanan, Isabelle and other of Fitzgerald's female characters: breathy, coy, wistful.

Ginevra was born in Chicago in 1898, daughter of Charles Garfield King, a wealthy stockbroker, and his wife, also named Ginevra. The younger Ginevra -- dark-haired, petite, with large eyes -- was the third daughter in five generations named after Leonardo's painting ''Ginevra de' Benci.''

Fitzgerald met her at a sledding party over Christmas break in his hometown, St. Paul, where she was visiting her Westover roommate. He was one of St. Paul's most eligible bachelors, though his family was of modest means. His father had lost his furniture business, and the Fitzgeralds were supported by his mother's family. But he lived among the rich on Summit Avenue, attending their parties, part of their world yet always outside it.

''Scott perfectly darling,'' Ginevra wrote in her diary on Jan. 4, 1915, after meeting him. ''Am absolutely gone on Scott!'' she wrote the next day. And the following month, ''I am madly in love with him.''

Her letters are filled with underlinings, exclamations, misspellings and fanciful punctuation. In her first letter, on Jan. 11, 1915, she asks for his photograph: ''I have but a faint recollection of yellow hair and big blue eyes and a brown corduroy waist-coat that was very good-looking!'' She signs it ''Yours Fickely sometimes but Devotedly at present -- Ginevra,'' setting the tone for their relationship in which she alternately beckoned him to her and pushed him away. ''I know I am a flirt and I can't stop it,'' she tells him in another letter.

Fitzgerald habitually saved letters and sometimes used material in them for his writing. It appears from her responses that Fitzgerald constantly begged her to reveal her inmost thoughts and details of her past.

''He used to irritate people -- Sara Murphy, Hemingway, with his insistent questions,'' Professor West said. ''We see it here when he was only just a teenager, the incipient writer.''

Fitzgerald's interest sometimes seems voyeuristic. Ginevra writes, ''You ask 'Describe your last affair.' I'm inclined to say -- 'None of yoyr affair' but thats too snitty!! The last one was -- let me see I dont know -- the last real one was last summer and then it wasn't horribly heavy.''

At another point it seems that she and Fitzgerald have planned, perhaps not seriously, to elope. ''Don't forget our plan of elopement -- That mustn't fall through.''

She dreams of him: ''Last night I dreamt you were calling on me, but it went off all right. Only you had purple hair, and would insist upon strutting around and tapping on all the walls.''

Fitzgerald it seems doesn't trust her: ''Why wont you believe what I said about your standing first,'' she writes. ''I cant tell you any better or any more truthfully.''

He asks if she would be angry if he had kissed her. She replies: ''The truth is, I'm afraid I wouldn't have been. Of course, I would have led you to believe I was.'' She continues, ''I'm afraid I wouldn't have had strength of character enough to have resisted you.''

''The moon is on my head again tonight!'' she tells him in another letter. ''Oh Scott if only our perfect hour comes true.'' ''Oh Scott,'' she writes. ''Why aren't we at a dance in summer now with a full moon in a big lovely garden and soft music in the distance.''

In June they met in New York. ''For one night,'' Fitzgerald wrote in ''My Lost City,'' one of his few direct descriptions of her, ''she made luminous the Ritz Roof.''

Then, on May 22, 1916, Ginevra writes that she and some friends have been expelled from school for talking to boys from their dorm window. The headmistress has called them ''bold, bad hussies,'' and ''adventuresses.'' Ginevra was later readmitted, but completed her education at a New York finishing school.

That August Fitzgerald visited Ginevra in Lake Forest, Ill. Afterward he wrote in his ledger foreboding words, spoken to him perhaps by Ginevra's father, ''Poor boys shouldn't think of marrying rich girls.''

The correspondence slowed, and by January 1917 the relationship had ended.

A year later Ginevra wrote that she was engaged to Bill Mitchell, another wealthy young Chicagoan who was the son of a business associate of her father's. She said she wanted Fitzgerald to be the first to know.

''To say I am the happiest girl on earth would be expressing it mildly,'' she wrote him. In the only letter extant to her from Fitzgerald, he congratulated her: ''From all I've heard of him he must be one of the best ever -- Doesn't it make you sigh with relief to be settled and think of all the men you escaped marrying? As Ever, Scott.''

Fitzgerald pasted Ginevra's photograph and a newspaper clip about the marriage in his scrapbook. ''There has never been a more beautiful bride,'' a reporter wrote of the 18-year-old Ginevra, praising the couple's ''gay and gallant air, their uncommon good looks, the distinguished appearance of both sets of parents.'' At the bottom of the scrapbook page is Ginevra's handkerchief, and in Fitzgerald's handwriting, ''The End of a Once Poignant Story.''

Ginevra and her husband eventually settled in a large house built in the English country style in Lake Forest. In 1920 she wrote one last letter thanking him for a copy of his book ''This Side of Paradise'' and inviting him to visit her. Like Daisy in ''The Great Gatsby,'' she had had a child. ''He's quite a boy,'' she wrote, and congratulated Fitzgerald on his forthcoming marriage to Zelda Sayre. ''I do wish you all the success in the world.''

Along with one of the letters to Fitzgerald, Ginevra in 1916 sent a short story she wrote in which a rich, restless wife with a neglectful husband seeks out an old love. His name is Scott, and he is now rich, a movie producer. ''His handsome stern face showed few traces of boyhood,'' the story reads. ''Around his mouth was a determined yet melancholy look.'' But he doesn't recognize her. The story continues, ''The vision of a perfect hour -- She -- Scott -- the quiet dream fire -- perfect peace, for an hour only and now this was fading away like a spent rose.''

The story also contains details tantalizingly similar to some in ''The Great Gatsby,'' which Fitzgerald published in 1925. As in ''Gatsby,'' there are a mysterious servant, a clock, and ''The Wedding March.''

Some 19 years after her marriage, Ginevra left Mitchell and their three children for John T. Pirie Jr., another wealthy Chicagoan whom she eventually married.

In 1937 Ginevra and Fitzgerald met again in California. He was working in Hollywood and trying to stop drinking. ''She was the first girl I ever loved and I have faithfully avoided seeing her up to this moment to keep that illusion perfect,'' Fitzgerald wrote to his daughter, Scottie.

The couple went to a bar. Fitzgerald began drinking. Ginevra King's granddaughter, Ginevra King Chandler, said that her grandmother asked which of his characters were modeled after her. ''Which bitch do you think you are?'' Fitzgerald replied, Ms. Chandler said.

Later Ginevra told Arthur Mizener that Fitzgerald's deterioration made her ''heartsick as he had been behaving himself for some months.''

But Ginevra ''was never in love with Fitzgerald,'' said her daughter, Ginevra Mitchell Hunter. ''She enjoyed him and said he was very bright, very witty,'' Mrs. Hunter said. ''She said he was always on the outside, looking in.''

Photos: Pages from the diary of Ginevra King, in which she wrote of her youthful love for F. Scott Fitzgerald, whom she met at a sledding party when she was 16 and he 19. (Photo by Laura Pedrick for The New York Times); Above, Ginevra King, in a photograph pasted in F. Scott Fitzgerald's scrapbook, and Fitzgerald's early passport photo. Left, a letter he wrote to her on her engagement. (Photographs from Princeton University Library)