



The Perfect Hour: The Romance of F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ginevra King, His First Love

By James L.W. West III

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In *The Perfect Hour*, biographer James L. W. West III reveals the never-before told story of the romance between F. Scott Fitzgerald and his first love, Ginevra King. They met in January 1915, when Scott was nineteen, a Princeton student, and sixteen-year-old Ginevra, socially poised and confident, was a sophomore at Westover School. Their romance flourished in heartfelt letters and quickly ran its course—but Scott never forgot it. Ginevra became the inspiration for Isabelle Borgé in *This Side of Paradise* and the model for Daisy Buchanan in *The Great Gatsby*. Scott also wrote short stories inspired by her—including “Babes in the Woods” and “Winter Dreams,” which, along with Ginevra’s own story featuring Scott are reprinted in this volume. With access to Ginevra’s personal diary, love letters, photographs, and Scott’s own scrapbook, West tells the beguiling story of youthful passion that shaped Scott Fitzgerald’s life as a writer.

For Scott and Ginevra, “the perfect hour” was private code for a fleeting time they almost shared and then yearned after for the rest of their lives. Now West brings that perfect hour back to life in all its freshness, delicacy, and poignant brevity.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Perhaps because Fitzgerald himself epitomizes the romantic hero whose end was tragic, the writer's first romance, when he was a Princeton sophomore, with 16-year-old Ginevra King, engenders an interest beyond its brief, and mainly epistolary, flowering. Using excerpts from Ginevra's diary, discovered in 2003, West adds depth to what is known about their relationship while demonstrating how characters inspired by Ginevra turn up again and again in Fitzgerald's fiction, most famously as Daisy in *The Great Gatsby*. It's generally accepted that meeting Ginevra was Fitzgerald's introduction to the world of privilege, inspiring his oft-used theme of the poor boy rejected by a wealthy young woman. General editor of the Cambridge edition of Fitzgerald's work, West is on solid ground when he says, "from an artistic standpoint, Ginevra King was nearly as important to him as Zelda." West's text makes up about half this slim volume; the appendix contains five letters from Ginevra, entries from her diary and two short stories in which Ginevra is the model for the heroine. While the information here confirms rather than startles, aficionados will be glad to find reliable background material that enriches understanding of Fitzgerald's work. Together with the recently published *Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald*, this book helps illuminate the women in Fitzgerald's life. B&w photos. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From [Booklist](#)

Fitzgerald's most famous romance was with, of course, his wife, Zelda Sayre; but before Zelda, Fitzgerald fell hard for a charismatic society girl from Lake Forest, Illinois, named Ginevra King. The two met in 1915, when Fitzgerald was an 18-year-old sophomore at Princeton, and Ginevra was 16 and attending an exclusive boarding school. The attraction between the pair was instantaneous, but most of the resulting two-year romance was conducted through letters. West asserts that Ginevra--or, more correctly, Fitzgerald's idea of her--had a big influence on several of his stories and early novels. He asserts that she was the inspiration for the female characters in "Babes in the Woods" and "Winter Dreams," and even Daisy Buchanan in *The Great Gatsby*; and he backs up his theory with Fitzgerald's text. This charming account, which also includes a story of Ginevra's, several of her letters (Fitzgerald's did not survive), and a look at other historical beauties bearing the name Ginevra, is a must-read for Fitzgerald aficionados and literature lovers in general. *Kristine Huntley*

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Review

"Transporting . . . a poignant, captivating book."

—Janet Maslin, *The New York Times*

"A fascinating portrait not only of a first love, but of how a writer used the unspoiled memories of youthful idealism and bittersweet emotion to fuel his career."

—Entertainment Weekly

"What is remarkable, as West conveys superbly, are the varied literary forms in which King would surface in Fitzgerald's fiction."

—Chicago Tribune

"[A] charming account . . . a must-read for Fitzgerald aficionados and literature lovers."

—Booklist

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