Bernice Bobs Her Hair

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

Though he was born in the American Midwest, Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald—known as Scott Fitzgerald to personal acquaintances—lived most of his early life in New York, where his father worked. He enrolled at Princeton University in 1913, where he honed his craft by writing for the *Nassau Literature Review* and pursued various independent works, including an early rejected novel. When his academic performance suffered, he decided to drop out of Princeton and join the U.S. Army as a commissioned officer. Not long afterwards, Fitzgerald met Zelda Sayre, who would famously become his wife. The glowing success of *This Side of Paradise* in 1920 marked the beginning of their marriage—and as Scott's career gained traction, the Fitzgeralds' tumultuous relationship would become as sensational as his fiction. Through the 1920s and 1930s, living with Zelda as an expatriate in Paris, Fitzgerald wrote over 60 short stories for the *Saturday Evening Post* alone, as well as others for *Collier's Weekly*, *Esquire*, and *Redbook*. *The Great Gatsby*, his best-acclaimed novel, was published to some popular success in 1925; *Tender is the Night*, published in 1934, was less warmly received. Mental illness and alcoholism ruined Fitzgerald's health by the time he reached middle age, and mounting expenses for Zelda's hospital treatments—she was first admitted for schizophrenia in 1930—left the writer struggling financially. He sustained himself by writing for Hollywood until his death in 1940. Critics have subsequently remarked on how this writer who so eloquently captured the decadence, excess, and crippling ennui of the "Jazz Age" lived a life cut short by these very things.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Social competition and its hollow rewards is a key theme in "Bernice Bobs Her Hair" and in many of F. Scott Fitzgerald's other works. *The Great Gatsby* famously discusses this theme across class and racial boundaries, and several of Fitzgerald's earlier short stories touch upon it from various angles. Similar to "Bernice Bobs Her Hair," "Dice, Brassknuckles & Guitar" is a relatively lighthearted short story about a poor Southern man who finds himself on the social periphery of New Jersey's wealthy young people. "A Diamond as Big as the Ritz," meanwhile, dispenses with Fitzgerald's usual realist or semi-realist style in order to satirize old American wealth of the kind seen in "Bernice Bobs Her Hair." Other coming-of-age stories from this literary period tend to be more serious and introspective; the closest match to "Bernice Bobs Her Hair," structurally and tonally, comes in the works of Roald Dahl, some 25 years later. Dahl's short stories for adults were published in nearly all of the magazines to which Fitzgerald submitted stories, and follow a structure leading to some kind of "zinger" or "twist" or otherwise punchy climax like the ending of "Bernice Bobs Her Hair," albeit usually darker. Dahl's "Dip in the Pool" is a prime example of this. Structurally, the story resembles the build-and-payoff of "Bernice Bobs Her Hair," while thematically it discusses the financial desperation and self-destructive gambling that Fitzgerald discusses in several of his other stories.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** "Bernice Bobs Her Hair"
- **When Written:** 1920
- **Where Written:** New York
- **When Published:** May 1, 1920
- **Literary Period:** Jazz Age, Modernism
- **Genre:** Short Story, Realism, Coming-of-Age
- **Setting:** The Harveys' home; various country clubs of the New England elite
- **Climax:** Bernice succumbs to pressure and gets a short bob haircut.
- **Antagonist:** Marjorie Harvey
- **Point of View:** Third Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Dear Annabel. This story was inspired by a letter which F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote to his sister, Annabel, on how to win boys' attention. The full letter is archived, and available to read in the *Complete Correspondence of F. Scott Fitzgerald*.

Counter-Culture Cut. The first bob haircut, which appeared in 1909, was inspired by Joan of Arc, who wore her hair short. Far from having connotations of saintly purity, however, it took the reputation of the counter-culture "flapper" generation.

PLOT SUMMARY

At a summer dance being hosted at a country club, teenagers from well-to-do families flirt, dance, and socialize in rituals incomprehensible to the older guests. Standing out from this crowd is Bernice, an awkward 18-year-old girl whose unworldly ways and old-fashioned values clash with the modern manners of her peers. She is staying with her cousin Marjorie for yet another summer—and though the vivacious Marjorie has subtly tried to set Bernice on the path to social

success, Bernice continues to falter at every step. Despite her beauty, she is hopelessly unpopular, boring every one of her dance partners. Warren McIntyre, Marjorie's childhood friend, has made a habit of dancing with Bernice in order to win Marjorie's good graces—but even Warren, considered by all to be a handsome young man and a fine prospect, finds no success with her. Though they dance, Bernice cannot keep pace with Warren's attempt at flirting, and the two descend once more into dull, listless small talk.

Late that night, after the dance has ended, Bernice overhears Marjorie and her mother, Mrs. Harvey, discussing her in private. Though Mrs. Harvey praises Bernice for her ladylike manners and sweet disposition, just as many adults have, Marjorie quickly dismisses these qualities as old-fashioned, unappealing, and indicative of a weak, self-righteous character. Bernice hears her cousin mock her, disavow her as a lost cause, and even indulge in some racist speculation on her ancestry.

The following morning, Bernice confronts Marjorie about this conversation. She threatens to leave immediately—and Marjorie, far from feeling embarrassed about it, readily encourages her to do so. The two girls abide by opposite ideas of what femininity should be: in tears, Bernice invokes time-honored sentiments of female camaraderie, while Marjorie firmly states that the traditional "ladylike" woman is a bland, useless creature who lacks any real personality, and that whatever moral high ground Bernice claims over lively, flirty, opinionated girls like Marjorie is founded in mere jealousy. Bernice, devastated, secludes herself for some time, but eventually she returns to Marjorie with a proposal.

Hurt though she is, Bernice admits to finding herself at a loss as to why she is so unpopular. Desperate for some relief, she agrees to unquestioningly follow Marjorie's advice on fashion, conduct, and anything else pertinent to solving this problem. In response, Marjorie raises the question of whether Bernice should get her **hair** cut in a more fashionable bob. Even though she's horrified at this prospect, Bernice agrees to consider it. Soon this hypothetical haircut becomes a tantalizing piece of gossip that Bernice, at Marjorie's instruction, can use to attract attention. Following Marjorie's precise coaching, including a script sprinkled with witty quotes from Oscar Wilde, Bernice soon achieves popularity among the other teenagers. Where before she had only a few dance partners, none repeating, she now finds herself "cut in" on constantly, the boys eager to listen to her. Though she falters a bit at first, she gradually learns self-confidence and an internal sense of social ease.

Eventually Bernice comes to attract the attention of Warren McIntyre, who considers Bernice nearly as appealing as the ever-distant Marjorie. Jealous, and embarrassed by the ensuing gossip, Marjorie then turns against Bernice. She undercuts her socially wherever possible, and calls her promise to cut her hair a bluff. Embarrassed, and backed into a corner, Bernice agrees to get her hair bobbed, despite knowing that it will certainly not flatter her. A crowd gathers at the barbershop to watch the spectacle. In the end, it is Marjorie's goading smile that pushes Bernice to commit to the haircut—and when it proves embarrassingly ugly to all present, especially Warren, Bernice finds herself a social outcast once more.

As the insidiousness of Marjorie's betrayal becomes clearer in the following days, Bernice decides to get revenge. Late at night, she packs her bags and writes a farewell note to her aunt, explaining that she will be returning home. Then she sneaks into Marjorie's room, stealthily cuts her braids off with a pair of scissors, and makes her way to the train station by herself. Free, happy, delighted at her mischief, Bernice tosses the cut braids onto Warren's front porch as she passes, and walks on with new confidence and strength.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Bernice – Marjorie's cousin and the story's titular protagonist. Bernice is an 18-year-old girl from an exceptionally wealthy family in New England. She regularly spends her summers with her Aunt Josephine, whose daughter Marjorie, also 18, shows by comparison how far Bernice stands from her peers in terms of social ability. Bernice feels intimidated by Marjorie at first, finding her cruel and unfeminine. Sheltered from the realities of dating, peer pressure, and teenage culture—let alone the struggles of anyone beneath her family's socioeconomic sphere—Bernice begins the story believing earnestly in the conservative mores of her parents' generation. She is prudish and ladylike, but also childish, naive, and awkward. Challenges to her values frequently end in confusion, tears, and embarrassment. Bernice's resentment towards Marjorie is eventually replaced by admiration, as Marjorie teaches her how to be popular and trendy. Gradually, through Marjorie's advice, Bernice gains self-confidence and social savvy, though she still falters occasionally. Much of her success is due to Marjorie's precise coaching, but her downfall is also Marjorie's doing. Jealous at the newfound attention Bernice is getting, Marjorie tricks her cousin into getting a **bad haircut**. This swiftly destroys Bernice's popularity, but it also causes her to find the willpower and courage she has been missing. At her core, Bernice proves to be strong and clever. Her critical thinking skills are what led her to seek Marjorie's help in the first place—and together with her newfound self-reliance, they help her cast aside the insecurities and misconceptions about popularity that kept her from actualizing her potential. With newfound bravery, she strikes back at Marjorie by snipping off her braids in the dead of night, and leaving for home on her own terms, cleanly cutting ties with her cousin.

Marjorie Harvey – Bernice's cousin and Mrs. Harvey's daughter. Presented as a foil to Bernice, Marjorie Harvey is

shallow, witty, charming, fashionable, and unscrupulous. Ever seeking the spotlight, she takes pleasure in stringing along Warren McIntyre, her longtime friend and a very attractive prospect, for the conspicuous popularity it gives her. She rejects the traditional brand of femininity that her mother and Bernice represent in favor of a modern model that permits more freedom and boldness of expression. Marjorie clearly values the skill, intelligence, and willpower that a young woman needs to assert her agency in a male-dominated society—but where she herself excels in all of these qualities, she lacks kindness, integrity, and guiding principles. She views popularity as a goal unto itself, and she doesn't seem to enjoy the fruits of her social conquests beyond the prestige they offer. Marjorie is quite willing to manipulate someone, or betray them, to achieve her ends. She does this in different ways to both Warren and Bernice—yet this eventually leads to her downfall at Bernice's hands when Bernice snips off Marjorie's braids.

Warren McIntyre – Warren McIntyre is Marjorie's longtime friend and former childhood playmate, who aims to win her affections. A 19-year-old attending Yale University, he boasts of good looks, familial wealth, fine taste, a respectable name, and the interest of most girls his age. Consequently, his opinion of himself is rather high. He seeks the popular and attractive girls, and expects his attention to be met with flirting and flattery in turn. Warren's opinion is critical to a fault, and decidedly fickle: initially he finds Bernice dull, but later he finds her an attractive prospect after she has won some measure of popularity. Likewise, only when he pursues Bernice does Marjorie, previously uncaring, show an interest in him. However, Warren just as soon drops Bernice when **her haircut** ruins her looks, despite having been one of the crowd pushing her to get her hair bobbed in the first place. Together with Marjorie, Warren illustrates the emptiness of social conquest for its own sake; the attention of someone so shallow and heartless, Fitzgerald seems to suggest, is hardly a prize worth seeking.

Mrs. Harvey / Aunt Josephine – Marjorie's mother and Bernice's aunt. Josephine Harvey is a middle-aged lady of considerable wealth and privilege. Representing an earlier generation, she gives voice to the conservative values against which the teenage characters rebel: prudence, reserve, marriage-oriented goals, and strict gender roles. Thus she informs a crucial part of the story's setting and main conflict. Mrs. Harvey is dismissive of her daughter's generation, unable to understand their values and tastes, which are so radically different from the ones she had been taught as a girl. She approaches the topic of this generation gap with a mixture of weariness, boredom, disdain, and mild amusement. Comfortable with their narrow perspective, uninterested in changing, she and her acquaintances—other wealthy older ladies, such as Mrs. Deyo—form an echo chamber of opinions, believing earnestly in the immorality and foolishness of youth. All of this having been said, Mrs. Harvey is not especially malicious. She praises Bernice not just for her manners and looks, but for her sweet disposition. Even so, it cannot be said that Fitzgerald depicts Mrs. Harvey or her views in a flattering light.

Otis Ormonde – A minor recurring character, 16-year-old Otis Ormonde is something of a laughingstock among his peers, being easily the youngest of the crowd attending the dances. His eagerness and immaturity in dating speaks to how the modern teenager is shaped by his social environment, and the older teenagers' opinions of him show how harsh this social environment can be. Both of these points illustrate the obstacles that Bernice faces in learning how to socialize with her peers.

MINOR CHARACTERS

G. Reece Stoddard – A popular boy and desirable bachelor who begins to give Bernice attention as she climbs the ranks of popularity.

Mrs. Deyo – Mrs. Harvey's friend, who is vehemently opposed to bobbed **haircuts**.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

SOCIAL COMPETITION

"Bernice Bobs Her Hair" tracks the social climb of its titular protagonist—Bernice, a teenage girl from a wealthy family who proves to be awkward, old-fashioned, and unsocial among her peers. In 1920, when F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote this story, teenagers had just come into their own as a distinct age group, with their own culture, values, and norms. For the first time in America, teenagers freely dated one another without adult supervision, and Fitzgerald saw how harshly teenagers judged each other's worth by their success or failure in this arena. Through Bernice's relationship to her cousin Marjorie, he explores the psychosocial effects of competing so viciously with one's peers. With Marjorie's help, Bernice rises to popularity—but she just as soon falls when Marjorie proves to be a competitor herself, and tricks Bernice into getting an unflattering bob **haircut**. Thus Bernice loses the attention of attractive young "stag" Warren McIntyre, but she also gains the confidence to strike back. Fitzgerald suggests that while competition seems inevitable in such a volatile social climate, its rewards lie not within the competition itself, but within the individual who rises above it.

Marjorie, a foil to Bernice, is shown to be clever and socially savvy, but also insensitive, shallow, and cruel. Investing herself wholly in social competition has made her incapable of healthy interpersonal relationships. She professedly has "no female intimates—she considered girls stupid." Competing for boys' attention has made her hostile to her own gender and age group. The best she can muster is praise or condemnation based on social clout: Martha Carey is "cheerful and awfully witty" by Marjorie's estimation, and Roberta Dillon is "a marvellous dancer." These qualities help a girl win attention and praise—and therefore, they win Marjorie's respect. Little else seems to merit this response from her. Conversely, Marjorie dismisses her cousin's worth as a person because Bernice is unpopular, with old-fashioned mores and poor fashion sense. To the notion that her flirtatious, frivolous ways will lead to a bad end, Marjorie simply responds that "All unpopular girls think that way." For Marjorie, popularity seems to be a measure not just of someone's credibility, but of their character.

This apathy to the thoughts and feelings of "unpopular girls" becomes outright antagonism towards anyone popular enough to compete with her socially. For years, Marjorie showed little overt interest in her childhood friend Warren McIntyre, who was always vying for her attention—but as soon as Bernice becomes his companion of choice, Marjorie goes out of her way to sabotage Bernice's looks and win Warren for herself. Warren himself seems to matter little here; rather, Marjorie craves the social status his attention represents, and she is willing to hurt others to get it.

From the other side of this situation, Bernice experiences deep social anxiety as she fails to attract boys—and the more she invests in the race to do so, the more her mental state depends on it. At first, Bernice is caught between her old-fashioned principles and her desire for social validation, and the conflict is made all the worse by her lack of social grace. Out of nervousness, she mishandles Warren's first attempt at flirting, feeling "a faint regret mingled with her relief as the subject changed." When Marjorie later mocks Bernice for her social ineptitude, Bernice is reduced to tears and tantrums as she tries to justify her traditional feminine manners. She cannot engage this problem from either side without getting upset.

Even when Bernice follows Marjorie's social coaching and wins many admirers, her emotions are still precariously balanced on whether she succeeds or fails in amusing her peers. She feels embarrassed when she makes a mistake—and when she succeeds, her mood reaches giddy, dizzying heights, such as when she falls asleep to fanciful thoughts of Warren. Neither state is healthy or sustainable. It is this insecurity that leads Bernice to accept Marjorie's dare to bob her hair. Though "she had known [the haircut] would be ugly as sin," Bernice fears losing her peers' approval still more. Her investment in the social competition with Marjorie, too deep to retract gracefully, is what leads her to harm and shame.

Despite this, Bernice undeniably gains confidence and strength of character from learning how to navigate social situations, which Fitzgerald seems to suggest is a far richer reward than "winning" the social competition against Marjorie. Marjorie's lessons form "the foundation of self-confidence" for Bernice. Once she learns how to be witty and well-liked, she can do it herself, without Marjorie's explicit coaching. She doesn't merely follow instructions, but she learns, and in learning she gains strength of character.

This newfound confidence serves her well, even when she is no longer popular. After the disastrous haircut, Bernice has the strength and forethought to return home in the dead of night, without seeking her aunt's or her cousin's approval—but not before snipping off Marjorie's pigtails while she sleeps, and tossing them onto Warren's porch with a laugh. Fitzgerald sets this final scene in direct contrast to Part III, in which Bernice cannot commit to her resolution to take a train home, crying when Marjorie reacts apathetically to her departure. Though she has lost her popularity and most of her hair, Bernice has clearly overcome the weaknesses that kept her so tightly chained to Marjorie's social expectations, and Fitzgerald frames this as the greater victory.

Bernice's journey from weakness to self-confidence, including the pitfalls along the way, shows how the young people of the 1920s faced peer-to-peer social competition unlike any generation prior. Through Marjorie, the story also shows just how toxic this competition can be, even if participation in it is mandatory. Ultimately, Bernice is better for both her victories and her losses because she grows from them internally, and she is happier for having left Marjorie's social circle on her own terms. Fitzgerald clearly values this growth over the fleeting benefits of popularity itself, especially the fickle affections of cruel, shallow people like Marjorie and Warren.

GENDER AND FEMININITY

"Bernice Bobs Her Hair" is largely a discussion of the value of femininity, and of what society expects of a young woman in 1920s America. Nearly every character in this story, major or minor, holds some opinion on the matter—and both Bernice and Marjorie evaluate themselves against the traditional feminine standard, to different conclusions. Fitzgerald uses this very difference to underscore the struggle that teenage girls faced in 1920: that is, being forced to define themselves as a demographic while lacking the maturity to do so in a healthy way. The older model of femininity, represented by Marjorie's mother, Mrs. Harvey, values women who are delicate, quiet, and marriage-minded. By the 1920s, this approach had become useless in preparing young women for the world. However, the new model that Marjorie represents—aiming to shock, amuse, and allure as many boys as possible—tends to reward only personalities like hers, and offers only shallow rewards at that. Bernice can find

no comfortable place between these two extremes, and both sides threaten unpleasant consequences if she fails to conform. Ultimately, Fitzgerald doesn't propose a solution to this problem, but shows, in Bernice, the impossibility of perfectly conforming to society's standards of femininity.

At the beginning of the story, it's clear that Bernice has inherited her view of womanhood—one which prioritizes quiet grace and delicacy above all else—from her mother's generation, and that it fails to serve her among her peers. Mrs. Harvey speaks rather highly of Bernice, yet none of her praise resonates with her daughter's generation. In Part II, Mrs. Harvey lauds Bernice for being demure and ladylike, "pretty" and "sweet," and able to cook—but Marjorie scoffs at all of this. She knows that these "feminine" qualities win Bernice no positive attention from her peers, not even kindness beyond the bare minimum of courtesy. They consider Bernice an old-fashioned bore, and mock her behind her back. She impresses a middle-aged woman, but not her own peers.

Bernice's idea of femininity is informed by fiction more than anything else. For example, when appealing to Marjorie's sympathy, Bernice quotes *Little Women* (1868), thinking it a worthy example of camaraderie between girls because Louisa May Alcott's characters were "models for our mothers." Though Bernice's feminine ideal is not necessarily bad, it is disconnected from reality, and it grows more so with each passing year. Her faux pas with Warren on the dance floor, getting flustered and offended at his attempt to flirt, speaks to how ill-prepared she is for real-life social situations. Her outdated model of femininity, ostensibly meant to help young women find and please husbands, has left her unable to communicate with boys her age.

Marjorie, meanwhile, rejects traditional femininity on the very grounds that it doesn't reflect her social reality. Though her concerns are ultimately shallow—popularity, attention, sex, and so on—her objections are well-reasoned, and clearly based in a higher sense of women's individual worth than what Bernice was taught. As cruel as it is, Marjorie's stance that ladylike girls like Bernice are jealous, full of "whining criticisms of girls like me who really do have a good time," nonetheless reflects the reality that she is successful while traditionally feminine girls are not. Marjorie dismisses the "inane females" modeled by *Little Women*, and moreover says that "our mothers were all very well in their way, but they know very little about their daughters' problems." In other words, while traditional femininity may have been appropriate for past generations, it now falls flat. By contrast, the qualities that Marjorie values, such as wit and fashion sense, contribute directly to her social success. Where tradition tells women to suppress their egos, Marjorie develops hers—and as a result, though she is vain and often insincere, she is also confident and self-sufficient.

When she follows Marjorie into the public spotlight, Bernice's social status becomes wrapped up in one of her most feminine qualities: her **hair**. In her conflict over whether to bob her hair, either decision would be succumbing to pressure to conform to a certain model of femininity—and she only feels completely free when this feminine status symbol is lost entirely, and any expectations with it.

Initially, Bernice disapproves of bob haircuts just like her mother's generation does; her opinion is informed by theirs. She "collapse[s] backwards upon the bed" when Marjorie suggests it the first time, and calls it "unmoral" even as she jokes about it. Later, Mrs. Harvey is aghast at the sight of Bernice's haircut, as her friend Mrs. Deyo has devoted considerable time to a public denouncement of bobbed hair. It is implied that she never expected such a thing from Bernice, who has always conformed to traditional ladylike ways.

When Bernice finally agrees to cut her hair, she does so specifically to spite Marjorie and avoid shame. Though "she had known it would be ugly as sin," she commits to the haircut regardless because Marjorie has goaded her to it, escalating the situation to the point that Bernice couldn't change her mind without losing face. In that moment, conforming to her peers' expectations of a fashionable young woman is more important to Bernice than the certain reality that longer hair looks better on her.

When her hair is ruined and she has no more dignity to lose, Bernice feels free to take revenge against Marjorie—and perhaps more tellingly, to laugh and show her emotions in an unladylike way, "no longer restraining herself." Fitzgerald seems to be suggesting that absolute freedom exists only outside of arbitrary gender norms, though he does not go so far as to advocate the abolition of these norms. Rather, he frames the trials leading up to this moment as an inevitable part of a girl's coming of age. Bernice, like Marjorie and Mrs. Harvey and all the other female characters, must navigate society's broad expectations of women for the rest of her life, even if she can enjoy the occasional moment of freedom.

YOUTH AND GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCE

Though the story's main conflict focuses on Bernice and Marjorie, a broader, subtler conflict is shown to play out between the older and younger generations. At the start of the 1920s, when Fitzgerald was writing, a new teenage culture was coming into being, and adults, especially of the conservative upper class, reacted with indignation and scorn. "Bernice Bobs Her Hair" uses this generational conflict to apply pressure to its protagonist, as Bernice must weigh the lessons of her upbringing against her desire to fit in among her peers. The difficulty of Bernice's dilemma, and the lack of a clear answer weighing towards either side, speaks to how deep the rift between generations ran at that time.

Mrs. Harvey's generation not only fails to understand young

people, but seems largely uninterested in understanding them. Never before had American teenagers been so united in their rejection of their parents' norms. It was, to all eyes, an anomaly, and so older adults dismissed it as such. The very first scene of "Bernice Bobs Her Hair" begins with observations of how each generation conducts themselves at a party. While the middle-aged ladies gossip and "the younger marrieds [...] performed ancient waltzes and terrifying fox trots to the tolerant amusement of their younger brothers and sisters," the teenagers, caught in "the drama of the shifting, semicruel world of adolescence," make an elaborate social competition of the dance. The narrator muses that unlike these "younger marrieds" of the previous generation, who dance in set couples like their parents before them, "youth in this jazz-nourished generation is temperamentally restless, and the idea of fox-trotting more than one full fox trot with the same girl is distasteful, not to say odious." The teenagers act with different goals and priorities in mind, and so the space of the summer dance is fragmented between generations.

This reflects the state of cross-generational relations at this time, which were likewise fractured. During her argument with Marjorie, Mrs. Harvey lazily ascribes her daughter's behavior and opinions to a generation-wide lack of courtesy. Fitzgerald makes a point to say that her tone of voice "implied that modern situations were too much for her. When she was a girl all young ladies who belonged to nice families had glorious times." The simple worldview afforded by age and privilege stays fixed in her mind, despite what her daughter tells her is happening to the contrary. As the narrator remarks later in this section, "At eighteen our convictions are hills from which we look; at forty-five they are caves in which we hide."

The bob **haircut** in particular seems to draw the ire of the elder generation, likely because it so radically departs from any feminine styles seen prior in America. Somewhat comically, Mrs. Harvey's friend Mrs. Deyo wrote an entire paper titled, "The Foibles of the Younger Generation," of which fifteen minutes of speaking time were devoted to denouncing bobbed hair. The fact that this paper doesn't seem to have left "the Thursday Club," evidently a social circle of wealthy middle-aged ladies, speaks to how insular and close-minded that demographic often was.

Against such opposition, the younger generation can only respond negatively. Marjorie carves out her own social space, away from her mother, and defends her control over it by any means necessary. She defends it from the outside by arguing persistently against her mother's way of thinking, and from the inside by deceiving and undercutting competition like Bernice. Warren McIntyre, meanwhile, asserts his independence by driving his own car wherever he chooses, to parties all over New England. Nowhere are his parents even mentioned. Bernice, on the other hand, is completely cowed by her elders' expectations, and winces in fear at the mere thought of her mother's disapproval. Her first conversation with Marjorie ends in sobs as she considers that "if I go home my mother will know" that something had gone wrong. Even after she becomes popular and gets her hair cut, it stings her when Mrs. Harvey asks, "Oh, Bernice, what'll your mother think?" Whether they share their parents' values or not, the young people of this story have largely negative relationships to the older generation. Obedience means internal conflict, while rebellion only makes that conflict external. Fitzgerald suggests somewhat bleakly that the relationship between generations—especially the power imbalance between parent and child—simply does not permit straightforward, healthy communication.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

HAIR

The central symbol of the story, Bernice's hair represents her femininity and selfhood as they waver between two different sets of values: those of her mother's generation, represented by her long hair, and those of her own generation, represented by the bob haircut.

Long hair is broadly considered a symbol of femininity, and in inherited European tradition it refers specifically to a state of virgin girlhood, as a married woman in medieval Europe would cover or braid her hair. This correlates to Bernice's childlike naivete at the beginning of the story, as she continues at age 18 to perform the infantilizing role of the "good girl" which her parents' values instilled in her. She has none of Marjorie's sexual knowledge, nor does she seek it; on the contrary, she feels bewildered and embarrassed when she is forced to consider such things. When Bernice opens herself up to Marjorie's worldview, and starts to date boys—which is to say, when the question of her sexual availability enters the conversation between Bernice and her peers—the state of her hair also comes into question. Bernice's teasing as to whether she will bob her hair is charged with risqué insinuation, even if she does not fully perceive or intend it. In the 1920s, after all, short bobbed hair had connotations of wild freedom and loose morals; Mrs. Harvey and several other characters comment on this.

When at last Bernice gets her hair cut, despite knowing that it will look bad, the experience is humiliating and violating and harmful. She has allowed her body, as she was most comfortable with it, to be shaped by her peers' desires. Her femininity, likewise, is damaged—she looks bad, and more importantly, looks as she never wished to look. This parallels the many different ways in which teenage girls are pressured to

perform certain versions of sexuality and femininity for their peers. When Bernice cuts Marjorie's braids in the dead of night, sabotaging her haircut just as her own was sabotaged, she is striking at Marjorie's ability to perform sexuality and femininity successfully, which throughout the story is a power that Marjorie holds over Bernice.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Scribner edition of *The Short Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald: A New Collection* published in 1995.

Part 1 Quotes

The main function of the balcony was critical. It occasionally showed grudging admiration, but never approval, for it is well known among ladies over thirty-five that when the younger set dance in the summer-time it is with the very worst intentions in the world, and if they are not bombarded with stony eyes stray couples will dance weird barbaric interludes in the corners, and the more popular, more dangerous girls will sometimes be kissed in the parked limousines of unsuspecting dowagers.

Related Characters: Marjorie Harvey, Warren McIntyre

Related Themes:

Page Number: 25-26

Explanation and Analysis

In this early passage, the narrator is describing the balcony from which the middle-aged ladies attending the party observe—and judge—the young people below. The ladies regard these teenagers with suspicion, assuming that they have no morals or restraint in matters of romance and sexuality. This section establishes the difficult relations between the older generation and the younger. The physical distance from the balcony to the veranda reflects the difference between the two groups' social realities, and the use of words like "barbaric" and "dangerous" speaks to the sense of moral righteousness that these older ladies feel over the younger crowd. These are the social conditions which make the party "just pleasantly warm" compared to the "riotous Christmas dances" that Warren and the other "stags" enjoy. Fitzgerald later presents this generational conflict playing out through specific characters—Marjorie, Warren, Bernice, Mrs. Harvey, and Mrs. Deyo—but well before that, this passage serves to illustrate it in general terms.

No matter how brilliant or beautiful a girl may be, the reputation of not being frequently cut in on makes her position at a dance unfortunate. Perhaps boys prefer her company to that of the butterflies with whom they dance a dozen times an evening, but youth in this jazz-nourished generation is temperamentally restless, and the idea of foxtrotting more than one full fox trot with the same girl is distasteful, not to say odious.

Related Characters: Otis Ormonde, Bernice

Related Themes:

Page Number: 28

Explanation and Analysis

This passage is an aside given by the narrator as Warren relieves Otis Ormonde from having to dance with Bernice. Here, the narrator muses on these young people's social rituals: dancing is not merely dancing, but a complex, fast-paced exchange that determines who is popular and who is not. The more boys cut in on a girl's dance, the more evidently desirable she is—but although these boys are fiercely competing to dance with a single girl, actually spending the entire dance with her would not excite them nearly as much. The competition itself is what makes her desirable, rather than her own merits. Fitzgerald shows this playing out between Otis and Bernice, who, despite her sweet disposition, has become the target of Otis's malicious jokes. Jazz was wilder, freer, faster music than had ever been popular before—and these were the qualities that young people in 1920 valued. Bernice is, of course, none of these things. This passage situates her as a victim of the bad relations between the younger and older generations, despite being a teenager herself. "Youth," in this context, is as much cultural as it is a person's literal age, and culturally Bernice is completely misaligned with her "jazz-nourished" peers.

Warren fidgeted. Then with a sudden charitable impulse he decided to try part of his line on her. He turned and looked at her eyes.

"You've got an awfully kissable mouth," he began quietly.

Related Characters: Warren McIntyre (speaker), Bernice

Related Themes:

Page Number: 28

Explanation and Analysis

Warren says this pickup line to Bernice after their dance, during which Bernice's usual small talk left him bored and exasperated. He flirts with her not out of genuine interest but out of pity—the word "charitable" implies some pride on his part for even stooping to the act. This moment not only offers further insight into Warren's character; it also provides a specific example of how these teenagers flirt and interact. It shows the very beginning of what is meant to be a coy back-and-forth exchange, and context established earlier in Part I suggests that this often leads to sex. By comparison, Bernice's small talk is not only bland, but aimless and impersonal.

Part 2 Quotes

"Marjorie never giggled, was never frightened, seldom embarrassed, and in fact had very few of the qualities which Bernice considered appropriately and blessedly feminine.

Related Characters: Bernice, Marjorie Harvey

Related Themes:

Page Number: 29

Explanation and Analysis

This thought occurs to Bernice in the beginning of Part II, as she brushes her teeth and prepares herself for bed. Despite their familial connection, Bernice's relationship with Marjorie has always been distant, even strained, because Marjorie has never shown interest in the girlish activities and behaviors that Bernice participates in. The "appropriately and blessedly feminine" qualities mentioned here all suggest immaturity or weakness of character—the ideal woman, in Bernice's mind, is dainty, easily flustered, and childlike. The effect of this passage is ironic and humorous: the reader sees Bernice's misconceptions about femininity, while she herself remains oblivious. This small passage effectively characterizes Bernice as naive, sheltered, and misinformed.

It also characterizes Marjorie from a different perspective than Warren's, which, up until Part II, is the only view of Marjorie that Fitzgerald provides. Warren, a boy, sees Marjorie as lively, frivolous, and girlish—but Bernice, another girl, sees some of the hardness beneath this exterior, since Marjorie only behaves this way in front of men.

"Sarah Hopkins refers to Genevieve and Roberta and me as gardenia girls! I'll bet she'd give ten years of her life and her European education to be a gardenia girl and have three or four men in love with her and be cut in on every few feet at dances."

Related Characters: Marjorie Harvey (speaker), Mrs. Harvey / Aunt Josephine, Bernice

Related Themes:

Page Number: 31

Explanation and Analysis

Marjorie says this to her mother, Mrs. Harvey, during their private conversation in Part II. She is explaining that the qualities for which Mrs. Harvey praises Bernice—her sweet temperament, ladylike demeanor, and ability to cook—are not desirable among young people, and that girls like Bernice are actually jealous, spiteful, and self-righteous. Though this assessment of Bernice's character is only partly true, it nonetheless speaks to Marjorie's feeling that she must justify her lifestyle to others. Marjorie is prideful, aggressive, and unapologetic, and this quote neatly characterizes her as such.

On a broader scale, this quote illustrates Bernice's ultimate choice between the respect of her elders and the admiration of her peers. Bernice may not be giving "ten years of her life and her European education," as Marjorie quips about Sarah Hawkins—but she *is* risking the loss of her aunt's high regard, all so that she gain some of the popularity that Marjorie enjoys. In the end, Bernice loses both to her bad haircut.

"I think it's that crazy Indian blood in Bernice," continued Marjorie. "Maybe she's a reversion to type. Indian women all just sat round and never said anything."

Related Characters: Marjorie Harvey (speaker), Mrs. Harvey / Aunt Josephine, Bernice

Related Themes:

Page Number: 31

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Marjorie is continuing her argument to her mother that helping Bernice socialize is a hopeless cause. Having just argued that Bernice is self-righteous, prudish, and secretly jealous of the popular girls, Marjorie approaches

the matter from a different angle. She quips that Bernice's behavior is some sort of evolutionary throwback to her "Indian" ancestry, most likely Native American rather than continental Indian. At the time this story was published, this kind of racist rhetoric was used by the American upper class to explain their successes over the apparent failures of non-white people—failures which were, in fact, the result of systemic racism. With this single line of dialogue, Fitzgerald reminds the reader that the Harvey family belongs to this wealthy upper class, and that both Marjorie and Mrs. Harvey have the same prejudices as their socioeconomic peers. This moment also shows how racist thinking was used to justify all manner of inequalities—even between relatives. Marjorie will defend her social superiority over Bernice by any means available to her, including the racism she has evidently learned from her upbringing.

Part 3 Quotes

"Girls like you are responsible for all the tiresome colorless marriages; all those ghastly inefficiencies that pass as feminine qualities. What a blow it must be when a man with imagination marries the beautiful bundle of clothes that he's been building ideals round, and finds that she's just a weak, whining, cowardly mass of affectations!"

Related Characters: Marjorie Harvey (speaker), Bernice

Related Themes:

Page Number: 34

Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes from Marjorie, when Bernice confronts her for a second time about how she has been treated as a guest. Bernice's appeal to "common kindness" has fallen flat with Marjorie, as has her appeal to their mothers' wisdom and authority—but when Bernice accuses Marjorie of being unfeminine, Marjorie finally shows outright anger at her cousin and gives her thoughts on the ideal of "the womanly woman."

This passage illuminates Marjorie's character beyond what the reader has seen thus far. Marjorie's disgust for traditionally feminine girls, when inverted, shows what she values and respects: ego, intellect, individualism, competence, strength, and the courage to be bold in public society. As selfish and unkind as she may be, Marjorie does have *some* principles, albeit harsh ones. Bernice is not entirely wrong in calling her cousin's way of thinking unfeminine; Marjorie's attitude would have been regarded as masculine in the 1920s and earlier. The early social theory of "separate spheres" kept women confined to a domestic homemaker role, while men worked outside of the home at jobs where a strong ego was, at least in theory, rewarded. In behaving as she does, Marjorie is attempting to claim social power which once belonged only to men.

Marjorie represents a new type of woman to America in 1920: not just the independent-minded "new woman," but something closer to the "flapper." Flappers were a counterculture movement of young women who sported short hair, wore short dresses, and blatantly disregarded gender norms. They smoked and drank publicly like men, danced freely, and professed little interest in marriage. Today, they are regarded as one of the most distinctive cultures of the Jazz Age—and at the time of Fitzgerald's writing, they were timely enough to warrant a vocal representative in the character of Marjorie.

"I hate dainty minds […] But a girl has to be dainty in person. If she looks like a million dollars she can talk about Russia, ping-pong, or the League of Nations and get away with it."

Related Characters: Marjorie Harvey (speaker), Bernice

Related Themes:

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis

Here, after Bernice has agreed to follow Marjorie's advice on how to conduct herself in public, Marjorie explains how exactly she manages to navigate society. Though she has no tolerance for the dainty, girly behaviors that Bernice considers ideal, Marjorie recognizes that a girl's strongest asset in society is her ability to present an attractively feminine image. The better she conforms to the model image of femininity, the more her behavior can deviate from the traditional model without consequences. Where Bernice performs femininity through her actions and demeanor, Marjorie performs femininity through her appearance alone. This grants Marjorie an advantage which women traditionally never had. The topics she lists—sports, international affairs, and so on—are all conventionally masculine talking points. By presenting a sexually appealing image to the men discussing these issues, she prevents them from dismissing her opinion outright, because to do so would ruin their chances with her. Thus Marjorie cleverly uses her femininity to escape the confining expectation that she must perform a demure, ladylike persona in public.

Part 4 Quotes

"Do you believe in bobbed hair?" asked G. Reece in the same undertone.

"I think it's unmoral," affirmed Bernice gravely. "But, of course, you've either got to amuse people or feed 'em or shock 'em."

Related Characters: Bernice, G. Reece Stoddard (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 37

Explanation and Analysis

This exchange takes place at a dinner dance, where Bernice, following Marjorie's instructions, attempts to make her debut as a witty, charming "society vampire." Through her conversation with Charlie Paulson, a decidedly unremarkable boy on whom she intends to practice her lines, Bernice has just announced to the table that she is going to cut her hair into a short and stylish bob. The remark attracts attention from G. Reece Stoddard, "a most desirable and distinguished young bachelor."

The phrasing of G. Reece's question speaks to how bobbed hair was viewed in the 1920s. It was not merely a radical fashion choice for the time; it carried connotations for a girl's character. The bob haircut was synonymous with loose morals and a flagrant disregard for decorum—it was designed to shock people. Thus Bernice's reply that she thinks bobbed hair is "unmoral" is not just an amusing bit of characterization, but rather a pertinent comment for the time.

She follows with a paraphrase of a quote from Oscar Wilde's play, *A Woman of No Importance* (1893): "To get into the best society, nowadays, one has either to feed people, amuse people, or shock people—that is all!" First of all, the success of this quote with the crowd around Bernice is telling of their shallow values. Second, the omission of the first half of the quote, "To get into the best society, nowadays," is a subtle, ironic comment on what Bernice is doing in this scene. She is quoting Wilde, as per Marjorie's coaching, for precisely that purpose: getting into "the best society." These aren't Bernice's sincere opinions, but merely a performance meant to attract attention. However, because Marjorie cut the first clause of the original quote, that purpose is veiled from the other partygoers. She has repurposed this quote from Wilde to help Bernice win popularity through cheap shock appeal—when the original quote is, in fact, a comment on that very process, and something of an insult to the people being charmed.

But a few minutes before she fell asleep a rebellious thought was churning drowsily in her brain—after all, it was she who had done it. Marjorie, to be sure, had given her her conversation, but then Marjorie got much of her conversation out of things she read. Bernice had bought the red dress, though she had never valued it highly before Marjorie dug it out of her trunk—and her own voice had said the words, her own lips had smiled, her own feet had danced.

Related Characters: Marjorie Harvey, Bernice

Related Themes:

Page Number: 39

Explanation and Analysis

This passage follows the dinner party at which Bernice won the crowd's favor and danced with a long line of young men. Stunned by her success, full of gratitude for Marjorie's help, Bernice thinks these thoughts as she drifts off to sleep. This is a pivotal moment of development for Bernice, small and private though it is, because it marks the beginning of her new confidence in herself. Having seen the process behind popularity—dressing well, dancing well, speaking a certain way, and so on—she is no longer daunted by it, and she sees how she might manage it herself. Bernice's thinking is still somewhat naive here, as she has yet to perceive how little power she has in this situation, nor does she realize what will happen if she fails in the future. Even so, she is beginning to take mental steps towards independence, which foreshadows both her competition with Marjorie and her choice to leave for home at the end of the story.

Part 5 Quotes

It was all she could do to keep from clutching her hair with both hands to protect it from the suddenly hostile world. Yet she did neither. Even the thought of her mother was no deterrent now. This was the test supreme of her sportsmanship; her right to walk unchallenged in the starry heaven of popular girls.

Related Characters: Bernice

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 42

Explanation and Analysis

This selection is taken from the moment before Bernice enters the barber shop to get her hair bobbed. She has been pressured by Marjorie and the other teenagers to get her hair cut right then and there—and she no longer has a way to back out of this commitment without losing face. The importance of her hair becomes eminently clear here. To Bernice, it represents more than just beauty or femininity or even status with her mother's generation. Deeper than this, her hair represents the parts of herself which her peers consider undesirable—parts of herself which she still treasures. In symbolic tradition as well as the particular context of this story, long hair symbolizes a state of innocence—something that is now under attack from the wider world, led by Marjorie.

Despite all of this, Bernice is willing to sacrifice her hair for the lofty, abstract honor of popularity. She envisions it as a kind of martyrdom, or perhaps like hazing in order to enter a club or sorority, in that her suffering will merit an equal reward. Now caught up in social competition with other girls, namely Marjorie, Bernice does not fear her mother's disapproval as much as she desires her peers' acceptance, and so she is willing to undertake this sacrifice.

❝ It was ugly as sin—she had known it would be ugly as sin. Her face's chief charm had been a Madonna-like simplicity. Now that was gone and she was—well, frightfully mediocre—not stagy; only ridiculous, like a Greenwich Villager who had left her spectacles at home.

Related Characters: Bernice

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 43-44

Explanation and Analysis

This passage immediately follows Bernice's haircut, which shocks and disappoints everyone around her. Fitzgerald's use of the phrase "ugly as sin" is very deliberate here—it pairs with the "Madonna-like" quality of Bernice's face that has now been lost, creating a sense that something good and beautiful has been violated, a very biblical definition of sin. Bernice has been betrayed by the "serpentlike" Marjorie, and she lost her innocence along with the symbol of it, her hair.

The comparison to a "Greenwich Villager" refers to New York's Greenwich Village, a neighborhood in Manhattan that is known historically for housing bohemians and radical leftists from as early as the 1910s. Many of these people belonged to demographics which society today identifies as LGBTQ, including lesbian women who preferred a more masculine style—and so the implication here is that Bernice's haircut does not resemble a trendy feminine bob, but rather looks like the masculine haircut of a minority considered unfashionable by the mainstream at the time.

Part 6 Quotes

❝ "Why, child," cried Mrs. Harvey, "in her paper on 'The Foibles of the Younger Generation' that she read at the last meeting of the Thursday Club she devoted fifteen minutes to bobbed hair. It's her pet abomination."

Related Characters: Mrs. Harvey / Aunt Josephine (speaker), Mrs. Deyo , Bernice

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 44

Explanation and Analysis

Mrs. Harvey says this in response to Bernice's haircut, which has shocked her along with her husband—not least of all because Mrs. Deyo, a friend of hers who absolutely despises bobbed hair, has organized a dance for Bernice and Marjorie. Not only does this quote show the bad consequences that Bernice feared coming to pass, but it also offers a clear, albeit ridiculous, example of the older generation's reaction to bob haircuts. The very fact that Mrs. Deyo dedicated an entire paper to voicing her disapproval of her son's generation, coupled with the absurd formality of the title, "The Foibles of the Younger Generation," paints a decidedly ridiculous image of her social circle. Furthermore, the fact that it was delivered only to the Thursday Club—presumably a group of wealthy middle-aged women like Mrs. Deyo herself—and not published anywhere else, speaks to how little interest these ladies have in actual communication. They voice their unified opinion, then look to each other for validation. The generational divide which pervades the story is never so

clear as it is here.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PART 1

On Saturday nights, well-to-do country clubs host summer dances, which are "pleasantly warm and exciting" for all ages. The partygoers break off into groups according to age, gender, and marital status—most notably, the older ladies, unable to understand "the drama of the shifting, semicruel world of adolescence," maintain a judgmental distance from the teenagers on the veranda. They feel that unless the young people are watched, they will get up to lewd or indecent activities. Meanwhile, handsome young "stags" like Warren McIntyre feel that the party is, on the whole, too tame. The 19-year-old takes a break from the dance to smoke a cigarette and wander the grounds, reminiscing about those in attendance.

The positioning of the partygoers reflects the social rift between young and old that opened up in the 1920s, as teenagers began to assert their own culture and values against those of their parents. The older generation sits up high in a position of authority—but it is also a position of some distance. They can observe the veranda, but they cannot hear, feel, or truly understand what is happening down below. Even so, this atmosphere is enough to dampen the ambitions of young men like Warren, who are eager for something more intimate and exciting than just a dance. "Stag" is a term for a young bachelor, with connotations of manliness and sexual availability; in the 1920s, and still today in the United Kingdom, a bachelor party was called a "stag party."

Warren's thoughts come to rest on his longtime childhood friend, Marjorie Harvey, whose "fairylike face" and "dazzling, bewildering tongue" had long won the crowd's admiration and Warren's desire. To win favor with her, Warren has made a habit of dancing with her cousin Bernice, who has been visiting all month, when asked—Bernice's socially awkward ways have always left her neglected and unpopular. Marjorie approaches Warren and makes this very request of him, saying that Bernice has been "stuck with little Otis Ormonde for almost an hour." Disappointed, Warren nonetheless agrees, feeling that Marjorie's approval is worth the trouble.

This early section establishes the main relationships at play in this story: Warren to Marjorie, Warren to Bernice, and the two girls to each other. It also illustrates the social hierarchy of this group of teenagers. Marjorie is clearly popular because she can afford to refuse Warren. They both stand over 16-year-old Otis, and Bernice sits beneath even him.

Warren finds Otis waiting for Bernice, making jokes to the crowd at her expense while she fixes her hair in the bathroom. Otis even remarks that he'll use a stick he has found to club Bernice on the head, in order to avoid dancing with her any more. Warren "howl[s] with glee," then informs Otis that he will be relieving him as Bernice's dance partner.

This passage highlights how teenagers can be vicious, especially when social standing is at stake. Otis seems to be motivated in part by his desire to earn approval from the older boys, but Warren is simply cruel. His laughter at Bernice is his most intense—and most authentic—display of emotion throughout the entire story, and it speaks to his true character.

Warren and Bernice take the next full dance together. The conversation is limited to small talk—the weather, Bernice's schedule, and so on—and the atmosphere between them is generally tense. In "a sudden charitable impulse," he tries a pickup line that has proven successful for him in the past: "You've got an awfully kissable mouth." Far from succeeding, the line makes her blush "an ungraceful red." Embarrassed and offended, she calls him "fresh," realizing too late that she should play amused instead. Irked, Warren changes the subject, and Bernice feels "a faint regret mingled with her relief," as she is unaccustomed to men flirting with her. She bumbles through small talk for the rest of the dance with Warren, inadvertently coming across as snobbish.

The narrator looks into Bernice's thoughts as well as Warren's, allowing the reader to see the miscommunication between them as it happens. Even when she does not mean it, Bernice defaults to the social vocabulary of a middle-aged woman because it's all she knows.

PART 2

As she brushes her teeth and readies herself for bed, Bernice thinks on the disappointments that her summer visits with Marjorie bring. For one, Marjorie seems wholly uninterested in female companionship; she "considered girls stupid," and never indulged in the "confidences flavored with giggles and tears" that Bernice considers an essential part of female bonding. Second, Bernice cannot understand why she is so unpopular outside of her hometown. Back home in Eau Claire, she has no trouble getting positive attention—and she cannot grasp that this is because her family, the wealthiest in the community, has set her up for success with dinners, parties, and a car of her own. Bernice is completely ignorant of her cousin's role in what few dances she had that evening—and furthermore, she cannot draw a correlation between her failure and the success of girls she considers "unscrupulous."

Because she has never truly participated in teenage culture, Bernice is still a child in many ways that her peers are not. She has yet to stop drinking the "warm milk" of the fanciful literature she grew up reading, which informs more of her worldview than reality does. Believing that a woman succeeds socially by possessing the "mysterious womanly qualities" of the heroines from her books, she cannot perceive the actual causes of her success: money, class privilege, and the unseen help of family.

Deciding on a whim to chat with her Aunt Josephine before bed, Bernice goes down the hall to hear voices coming from her aunt's room. Not intending to eavesdrop, she lingers outside and overhears the conversation. Marjorie is complaining to her mother that Bernice is "absolutely hopeless" socially, and that no amount of old-fashioned feminine grace can salvage her dull, unfriendly personality. Mrs. Harvey dismisses Marjorie's view as overly concerned with "cheap popularity," yet Marjorie pushes ahead. She describes how all of her hints about boys, beauty, and fashion were coldly received—and so judges Bernice to be prudish, self-righteous, and jealous. She speculates, half-jokingly, that it's "that crazy Indian blood in Bernice" which makes her unsociable, as "Indian women all just sat round and never said anything." Mrs. Harvey laughs, yet says dismissively that she thinks Marjorie's ideas are "perfectly idiotic." By the time Marjorie leaves her mother's room, Bernice has left the hallway.

This conversation shows the limits of both Marjorie's perspective and Mrs. Harvey's. The latter sees marriage as a young woman's main goal in life, and a source of status—while Marjorie's idea of status, popularity at parties, hinges on the fact that she is single. Neither woman can understand the premise for the other's argument, and so each simply repeat her own argument without really engaging the other person's point of view. It should also be noted that both Marjorie and her mother show a close-mindedness of the upper class—not just in their shared focus on parties and leisure, but also in their casual racism towards Bernice.

PART 3

At breakfast the next morning, Bernice confronts Marjorie about what she said to Mrs. Harvey the night before. On the verge of tears, Bernice says that she had "better go back to Eau Claire—if I'm such a nuisance." She then proceeds to list her grievances against Marjorie: that she has neglected her as a guest, been overcritical of her fashion sense, spoken to her unkindly, and insulted her behind her back. Sprinkled throughout this little speech, Bernice also includes several self-pitying remarks on her apparent lack of social skill.

Bernice is clearly trying to prompt some sympathy from Marjorie, which shows her insecurity. Even as she scolds and berates Marjorie, Bernice craves the approval of someone with higher social status.

Far from responding with pity, Marjorie says that she "wasn't trying to be nice" when she criticized Bernice, then bluntly asks Bernice when she would like to leave. When Bernice breaks down in tears, Marjorie, bored and unimpressed, says that she has called her cousin's bluff. Clearly Bernice does not intend to go home; she seems terrified at her mother's scorn, should she return home early. Marjorie, at this point trying to get Bernice to leave, offers her month's allowance for hotel and travel expenses—but to this, Bernice only flees the room, sobbing.

The end of this conversation shows the social hierarchy in Bernice's mind: Marjorie is above her, by virtue of her popularity and superior social skills, but Bernice's mother looms far above Marjorie, as a figure of authority. Bernice's fear of disappointing adults is a recurring point of her character, and it comes into play in Part VI.

The girls' conversation continues some time later, as Bernice returns, red-eyed. When Marjorie refuses to respond with any kind of sympathy, Bernice prompts her with the comment, "I suppose I'd better get my railroad ticket." Once again, Marjorie refuses to take her cousin's threats seriously; she agrees that Bernice had better return home if she isn't enjoying herself. To this, Bernice begs a little "common kindness," but Marjorie cuts her off, exasperated, saying that *Little Women* is "out of style" and that she shouldn't quote it. Marjorie goes on to say that the "inane females" modeled in that book are of no use to modern girls, and are responsible for ruining lives and marriages by modeling "ghastly inefficiencies that pass as feminine qualities," turning a woman into "a weak, whining, cowardly mass of affectations." Her criticisms then turn to Bernice in particular: Bernice is beautiful and wealthy, "starting life without any handicap," yet she still refuses to cultivate herself, simply begging pity while criticizing those girls who do succeed in society.

Here, Marjorie outlines her values and principles. Cruel, shallow, and selfish though she may be, her behavior is nonetheless based in a set of beliefs. Marjorie values competence, skill, drive, and individualism—all qualities which traditionally belong only to adult men. As such, though she remains an immature teenager in temperament, she possesses the confidence and social savvy of an adult, and she uses this skill to justify her attitude towards Bernice. The social competition in this story is very American in character: there is a prevailing notion that hard work earns social success, even when wealth and privilege are plainly shown to be advantages for both Bernice and Marjorie. From Marjorie's distinctly American point of view, Bernice is demanding rewards that she has not earned—while Bernice, whose old-fashioned values hearken back to Europe, believes that there are certain boundaries of politeness and decorum which should never be crossed.

After spending still more time away in thought, Bernice returns to Marjorie with a proposition. Conceding that Marjorie might be right, she agrees to give Marjorie's ideas a chance, and accept whatever recommendations or instructions she gives without question. Immediately Marjorie lists several points for Bernice to improve: her eyebrows, her grooming, her dancing, her posture, and her attire. Bernice is bewildered but grateful. Marjorie also advises her on how to target the clumsy boys, the "sad birds" among the crowd, as practice to get people talking about her. She concludes with a remark on whether Bernice should **bob her hair**, a thought which causes Bernice to reel backwards on the bed.

The gender politics of this section offer a glimpse into the state of gender relations in the 1920s. In earlier times, a woman's appearance was important for maintaining the bare minimum of dignity, and perhaps for attracting a husband. From the 1920s onward, however, femininity could be "weaponized," so to speak, as a tool for social advancement.

PART 4

The following Wednesday, Bernice picks out a decidedly lackluster boy on whom she can try out several lines that Marjorie scripted for her. At dinner, she asks him whether she should get a haircut, as she intends to become a "society vampire," and **bobbed hair** is an easy way to attract attention. Her rehearsed quips—that she plans to sell admission to the barber's shop, that "you've either got to amuse people or feed 'em or shock 'em"—win approval from the entire table, especially the boys. Even desirable bachelor G. Reece Stoddard turns his attention to her.

It's fitting that Marjorie chooses quotes from Oscar Wilde for Bernice to use on boys, as Wilde was famous for his wit and his artistic indulgence in superficiality. Believing in the artistic value of appearances and exteriors, or aesthetics for their own sake, he would often indulge in amusing, superficial dialogue—not just to flex his wit, but to contribute to an artistic point that he was trying to make. Removed from this context, Wilde's quotes are simply clever, superficial banter. This speaks not only to Marjorie's taste, but to what these teenage partygoers value.

Later that evening, Warren McIntyre spies Bernice dancing with G. Reece Stoddard, only to have their dance cut in on by yet another boy. He notices how beautiful she looks, and how genuine her delight seems to be, yet he still dismisses her as "dull." Nonetheless intrigued, he approaches the "stag line" waiting to dance with her—and bumps into Stoddard, who is still eager to dance with her. The signs of Bernice's budding popularity are evident.

Again, Warren proves himself to be shallow, unkind, and completely uninterested in Bernice's actual character. Just like in Part I, when he judged her for her behavior instead of attempting to see her intentions, Warren is only interested in her exterior here.

After the dance, Bernice showers Marjorie in gratitude, and voices the concern that she eventually ran out of material. Marjorie dismisses this, yet still promises to "fix up some new stuff" with her tomorrow. The two girls bid each other good night, and as Bernice falls asleep, she entertains the "rebellious thought" that it was she herself, not just Marjorie, who had achieved that night's grand success. Her last thoughts before she falls asleep are of Warren.

This is the beginning of Bernice's self-confidence. Having seen the process behind Marjorie's popularity, it no longer seems impossible to Bernice. Here, as elsewhere, Warren's attention represents social status—but Bernice's idea that he is a "nice boy" also shows that she cannot yet separate a person's public persona from their authentic inner self, despite having made this separation in herself. In other words, Bernice's innocent belief in other people has made Warren not into a "trophy," as Marjorie later sees him, but a "Prince Charming" figure.

PART 5

Over the next week, Bernice enjoys the positive attention of her peers as she continues to impress them and get along well with them. She makes the occasional *faux pas*—such as when she flirts with a young man studying to become a minister—but on the whole, she find success with boys, and builds a new sense of self-confidence. Throughout this time, the teasing promise that she will get a **bob haircut** continues to serve her well, though she has no intention of actually committing to it.

Here already, Fitzgerald shows that Bernice's promise to bob her hair is not a sustainable way to win popularity. Even though this is the last week of her visit, it's unlikely that she can avoid getting a haircut without negative consequences. Bernice's inability to realize this shows just how naive she still is.

The chief marker of Bernice's success is the attention of "the hypercritical Warren McIntyre," who seems to have lost interest in Marjorie in favor of someone more accessible. Though his motives remain unclear, his intentions are unmistakable: he is interested in Bernice, not Marjorie. Gossip ensues, and Marjorie avoids humiliation by pretending to be indifferent to Warren's choice, even supportive of it. Privately, however, she warns Bernice to give up on Warren, saying that he "doesn't care a snap of his fingers about you." Bernice, though angry, is horrified and guilty to have "stolen Marjorie's property" inadvertently.

Marjorie's refusal to date Warren only worked in her favor because Warren was not interested in anybody else, and so he continued to pursue her. Now she seems foolish—and moreover, Bernice seems the more attractive girl by virtue of Warren's choice. Again, Warren is a status symbol for these girls—but despite reducing him to this, they still lack power compared to him. It is his choice, not their efforts, which ultimately determines which girl is more popular.

Later that day, at a party, Marjorie remarks to those present that Bernice is merely bluffing about **her hair**. The other teenagers question Bernice about it—and Bernice, backed into a corner, feeling pressure from Warren's eyes "fixed on her questioningly," eventually responds with the lie that "I like bobbed hair […] and I intend to bob mine." Marjorie demands to know when, and soon everyone is convinced to have a "summer bobbing party" at the barber shop that very day. Bernice is mortified as she approaches the barber shop but feels that this "was the test supreme of her sportsmanship; her right to walk unchallenged into the starry heaven of popular girls," and so she does not let herself be dissuaded.

Fitzgerald shows peer pressure and crowd behavior at work, as one conclusion quickly leads to another, prompted only a few comments from Marjorie. Though this group of teenagers has already been shown to be eager, superficial, and unforgiving, here that attitude is compounded by the sheer number of them present.

Before entering, Bernice imagines that the barber has been waiting for her the entire time. She imagines the barber's chair as the site of an execution and her shed **hair** as blood. When she enters the barber shop and requests that the barber bob her hair, the man is astonished. From outside, passers-by remark on her long, beautiful hair. The adults seem genuinely shocked that Bernice would cut her hair, but Bernice is so focused on the task ahead of her that she does not notice.

Bernice's insecurities have skewed her perception of reality. Where Bernice imagines a hostile, judgmental world all around her, the adults in this scene are merely curious. If anything, rather than judging Bernice for not having come sooner, the barber sees little good in cutting long hair as lovely as hers.

As she settles into the barber's chair, it is the sight of Marjorie's goading smile that gives Bernice the determination to commit to the haircut. There is a "curious narrowing of her eyes" as she does so, "that Marjorie remarked on to some one long afterward." Bernice submits to the haircut knowing that it will be ugly, and indeed it is "ugly as sin." Her face's "Madonna-like simplicity" is not served well at all by short hair, and she looks instead "like a Greenwich Villager who had left her spectacles at home." There is an awkward silence as she climbs down from the chair, as everyone realizes how ugly **her hair** looks now. With "serpentlike intensity," Marjorie steals Warren's company for that evening by asking his help with an errand. His eyes "rested coldly on Bernice before they turned to Marjorie," as he leaves Bernice for her.

Fitzgerald foreshadows that the look Bernice gives Marjorie will be significant later. For only that moment—when Bernice narrows her eyes at Marjorie—the narrator omits Bernice's internal thoughts. Where before they were so close to Bernice as to see her visions of being beheaded in the barber's chair, the reader is now left looking upon her from outside. The only comment on this look is from "long afterward," from a future Marjorie, indicating that this moment of betrayal will not be the final blow struck between these two girls. Another point of note here is the "Madonna-like simplicity" of Bernice's face, now ruined by her haircut, symbolizing the loss of innocence which took place when her cousin betrayed her.

PART 6

Later that day, Bernice realizes just how badly she had been tricked when her Aunt Josephine remarks, aghast, that **her bobbed hair** will offend Mrs. Deyo, who is holding a dance for Bernice and Marjorie before the former's departure. Mrs. Deyo detests bobbed hair so much that she "devoted fifteen minutes" of speaking time to it, in a paper on "The Foibles of the Younger Generation" that she read before the Thursday Club. Mrs. Harvey chides Bernice, "Oh, Bernice, what'll your mother say? She'll think I let you do it." The rest of the evening passes miserably. Bernice fails to style her bob, receives "faintly hostile" comments from her uncle, and fails to entertain the boys who visit her that evening.

Perhaps the strongest symbol of the generational divide at work in this story is Mrs. Deyo and her article. The title is laughably over-formal, given the subject matter—and the very fact that Mrs. Deyo spent 15 minutes of a serious speech about the immorality of bobbed hair is, frankly, ridiculous. The absurdity of it illustrates just how far removed these middle-aged people are from their teenage daughters' lives. The hostility Bernice receives from her family further drives this point: they see her haircut as a direct offense against them, instead of seeing any of the pressure Bernice felt to conform to popular trends.

Smugly and insincerely, Marjorie insists that the **haircut** looks fine—but after the girls bid each other good night, "something snapped within Bernice." Immediately she packs her bags and plans her departure home for that very night, writing a brief letter to Mrs. Harvey to explain her reasons for going. Smoothly, with confidence, she calculates the time needed to reach the train station by walking and then taking a taxi cab.

This moment stands in direct contrast to Bernice's meltdown in Part III. Where before she feared adults' disapproval, here she calmly explains herself to her aunt and shows no hesitation about returning home to her mother, despite her ugly new haircut.

Before Bernice leaves the house, "an expression flashed into her eyes that a practised character reader might have connected vaguely with the set look she had worn in the barber's chair—somehow a development of it." With set determination, she stealthily enters Marjorie's bedroom. Making no sound, taking care not to wake Marjorie by her touch, she snips off her cousin's pigtails with scissors, ruining **her hair** just as her own was ruined. Feeling "oddly happy and exuberant," Bernice steps off the porch and leaves for home—and as she passes Warren McIntyre's house, she tosses Marjorie's braids onto his porch. "Scalp the selfish thing!" she giggles, as she "set[s] off at a half-run down the moonlit street."

Childish though it is, Bernice's revenge on Marjorie is not only well-earned, but predicated on her new confidence and willpower. Like Marjorie, Bernice now has the strength and social savvy of a young adult—but unlike Marjorie, she uses this power in just, discerning ways, even if they are not completely mature. It seems that the loss of her hair and status has allowed Bernice to embrace the "unfeminine" parts of herself which previously she refused to acknowledge as good.

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