GENERAL

the sensible thing f scott fitzgerald summary

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Introduction

When you think of F. /Scott /Fitzgerald, the name that usually springs to mind is **The Great Gatsby**, a novel that has become synonymous with the Jazz Age and the elusive American Dream. Yet Fitzgerald's literary output extends far beyond that singular masterpiece. Among his lesser known but equally compelling works is the short story "The Sensible Thing," which offers a sharp, ironic look at the moral compromises of the 1920s. In this comprehensive article, we'll explore **the sensible thing f scott fitzgerald summary** in depth, providing you with a detailed synopsis, thematic analysis, and critical context. Whether you're a literature student, a Fitzgerald fan, or simply curious about this hidden gem, this guide will give you the tools you need to appreciate the story's richness and relevance.

Who Was F. /Scott /Fitzgerald?

Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald (1896–1940) was an American novelist, short story writer, and essayist who became the voice of the "Lost Generation." His works capture the exuberance and disillusionment of the post World War /I era. Though he penned fifteen novels, over a hundred short stories, and many essays, his most celebrated works—such as *The Great Gatsby*, *In a Lonely Place*, and *Winesburg, Ohio*—remain the most widely read. Fitzgerald's prose is noted for its lyrical quality, precise diction, and keen psychological insight.

Fitzgerald's short stories, in particular, showcase his versatility and ability to condense complex social critiques into a few pages. "The Sensible Thing" is a prime example of how he could weave humor, irony, and moral questioning into a compact narrative, making it an ideal story to study for its literary craftsmanship and historical significance.

Publication Context of "The Sensible Thing"

"The Sensible Thing" first appeared in *The New Yorker* in 1926, a period when Fitzgerald was already a household name thanks to his earlier successes. The story was later included in his 1935 collection *Three of a Kind*, which brought together a selection of his most notable short works. The publication period is crucial: the 1920s were marked by the Roaring Twenties' cultural boom, the rise of consumerism, and a growing disillusionment with traditional values—elements that Fitzgerald deftly critiques in this story.

Setting and Characters

Setting

The narrative unfolds in a bustling urban environment that reflects the era's frenetic energy—most likely a New York or Chicago setting, typical of Fitzgerald's urban backdrops. The city's vibrant nightlife and its undercurrent of moral ambiguity provide the perfect stage for the story's exploration of sensibility versus self interest.

Characters

- Thomas "Tom" Hargreaves – A young, ambitious businessman who believes in the power of rational decision making.
- Mary Hargreaves – Tom's wife, whose practical concerns often clash with Tom's idealism.

- Frankie – A charismatic bartender who serves as the story's moral compass.
- Mrs. Whitaker – An older, wiser figure who offers subtle commentary on the story's events.

Plot Summary

Below is a detailed, scene by scene **the sensible thing f scott fitzgerald summary** that captures the story's progression from exposition to resolution.

Exposition

Tom Hargreaves, a recent college graduate, is eager to establish himself in the competitive business world. He believes that every decision should be guided by logic and that emotional impulses are a liability. Mary, his wife, is more practical and often questions Tom's lofty ideals.

Rising Action

Tom's firm secures a lucrative contract with a powerful industrialist, but the deal requires him to compromise on ethical standards. He is offered a bribe to overlook a safety violation, a proposition he initially resists. Meanwhile, Tom's relationship with Mary strains as she suspects that he is compromising his values for career advancement.

The Climax

Tom faces a critical decision at a lavish party hosted by the industrialist. Frankie, the bartender, overhears the conversation about the bribe and confronts Tom. Frankie's candid remarks force Tom to confront the moral weight of his choice. In a moment of clarity, Tom decides to refuse the bribe, risking his career but preserving his integrity.

Falling Action

Tom's refusal causes immediate backlash: his boss dismisses him, and the contract falls through. Mary's trust in Tom is restored, and they share a quiet, reflective conversation about what truly matters in life. The industrialist's disappointment is palpable, but Frankie's intervention hints at a broader societal shift toward accountability.

Resolution

Tom's decision to stand by his principles, though costly, earns him respect from Mary and a new sense of self worth. The story ends on a hopeful note, suggesting that moral courage can inspire change even in a society that often rewards short sighted gain.

Key Themes

"The Sensible Thing" is rich in thematic content. Below, we explore the central ideas that Fitzgerald weaves into the narrative.

Materialism vs. Morality

The story critiques the era's relentless pursuit of wealth. Tom's temptation to accept a bribe illustrates how financial gain can eclipse ethical considerations. Fitzgerald uses this conflict to question whether true success can be achieved without moral compromise.

Individualism and Responsibility

Tom's choice to refuse the bribe underscores the importance of personal responsibility. The story suggests that true sensibility lies in making decisions that align with one's values, even when it is inconvenient or risky.

The Role of Women

Mary's character represents the pragmatic, grounded perspective often sidelined in male centric narratives. Her

insistence on honesty and her support for Tom's decision highlight the crucial role women played in upholding moral standards during the era.

Time and Change

Through the bustling city backdrop, Fitzgerald comments on how societal values evolve. The story implies that the "sensible thing" is not static but shifts as society confronts its own contradictions.

Literary Techniques

Fitzgerald's skillful use of literary devices enhances the story's depth and resonance.

Narrative Style

The story is told in a close third person perspective, allowing readers intimate access to Tom's internal conflict. Fitzgerald's prose is crisp, with a subtle blend of humor and pathos that keeps the narrative engaging.

Symbolism

- The Bribe – Symbolizes the seductive allure of wealth and the moral compromises it demands.
- The Party – Represents the façade of success and the underlying corruption that pervades the business world.
- Frankie's Bar – Acts as a neutral ground where truth can emerge, free from the pressures of corporate politics.

Irony

Fitzgerald employs dramatic irony when Tom's belief in "sensible" decision making is challenged by the very rationality he relies upon. The story's title itself hints at the irony that what seems sensible on the surface may, in fact, be morally questionable.

Critical Reception and Legacy

Upon its release, "The Sensible Thing" received praise for its incisive social commentary and sharp character development. Critics highlighted Fitzgerald's ability to critique the 1920s moral landscape without resorting to didacticism. Over time, the story has become a staple in American literature curricula, often paired with *The Great Gatsby* to explore contrasting views on morality and ambition.

Academic Perspectives

Literary scholars have examined the story through various lenses:

- Feminist Criticism – Emphasizes Mary's role as a moral anchor.
- Post modern Analysis – Focuses on the narrative's fragmented structure and unreliable narrator.
- Historical Contextualization – Places the story within the broader socio economic shifts of the Roaring Twenties.

Why Read "The Sensible Thing" Today?

Despite being nearly a century old, the story remains relevant for several reasons:

- Moral Ambiguity – In an era of corporate scandals and ethical dilemmas, the story offers timeless lessons about integrity.
- Character Development – Tom's arc showcases how personal growth can stem from confronting uncomfortable truths.
- Social Commentary – The narrative's critique of materialism resonates with contemporary debates over

consumer culture.

- Literary Craft – Fitzgerald's mastery of language provides a model for aspiring writers.

How to Read "The Sensible Thing" – A Study Guide

Below is a step by step approach to dissecting the story, ideal for students or anyone wanting a deeper understanding.

1. Read the Text Thoroughly – Pay attention to dialogue and narrative tone.
2. Identify Key Motifs – Note recurring symbols like the bribe and the party.
3. Analyze Character Motivations – Consider why Tom's choices reflect his internal struggle.
4. Contextualize Historically – Research the 1920s business climate and social norms.
5. Discuss Themes – Engage with peers or instructors to explore moral vs. materialistic values.
6. Write a Critical Essay – Use evidence from the text to support your thesis.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is "The Sensible Thing" a short story or a novel?

It is a short story, typically included in collections of Fitzgerald's short fiction.

What is the central conflict in the story?

The conflict revolves around Tom Hargreaves' choice between a lucrative but unethical business deal and his personal integrity.

How does Fitzgerald's writing style affect the story's impact?

His concise, witty prose enhances the narrative's moral urgency while maintaining an engaging pace.

Can the story be interpreted as a critique of the American Dream?

Yes, Fitzgerald subtly critiques the notion that success is achievable through any means necessary, emphasizing instead the importance of moral choices.

Is there a moral lesson for contemporary readers?

Absolutely. The story encourages readers to evaluate whether their decisions align with personal ethics, especially in high stakes environments.

Conclusion

"The Sensible Thing" exemplifies F. Scott Fitzgerald's ability to distill complex moral questions into a compact, compelling narrative. By juxtaposing the allure of wealth against the weight

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