

A Full Life
by F. Scott Fitzgerald

(fragment)

At twilight on September 3d, 1923, a girl jumped from the fifty-third-story window of a New York office building. She wore a patented inflatable suit of rubber composition which had just been put on the novelty market for purposes of having fun—the wearer by a mere jump or push could supposedly sail over fences or street intersections. It was fully blown up when she jumped. The building was a set-back and she landed on the projecting roof of the fiftieth floor. She was bruised and badly shaken but not seriously hurt.

She recovered consciousness in the ambulance and gave the name Gwendolyn Davies but in the emergency room when the intern so addressed her she denied it, and insisted on leaving the hospital after necessary stitches had been taken. Several inquiries that were undoubtedly for this girl asked for a different name. The intern, Dr. Wilkinson, gathered that a little orgy after hours had been taking place in the office at the time.

A week later Dr. Wilkinson took out a library book that he had borrowed there some time before. It was a collection of mysterious cases re-written from contemporary newspaper accounts, and the third story, entitled *The Vanished Girl*, read as follows:

In 1915 Delphis, N.Y., was an old town of large, faded houses, built far back on shady lawns—not at all like the Long Island and New Jersey villages where even Sunday is only a restless lull between the crash of trains. During the war there was a murder there, and in 1922 bandits held up a garage. After that nothing happened for a long time till Gwendolyn Davies walked out of her father's house one day and disappeared off the face of the earth.

She was the daughter of a poor doctor and the prettiest girl in town. She had a brave, bright face that made you look at her,

yellow hair and a beggar's lips that would not beg in vain. The last person who ever laid eyes on Gwen Davies was the station master who put her suitcase on the train. She told him lightly that she was leaving for her family's own good—she didn't want to “raise the roof,” but no scandal ever developed about her. When she reached New York she was to go directly to a recommended boarding house adjacent to the college. She didn't appear there—she simply melted like a shadow into the warm September night.

“Height, five feet five inches, weight, one hundred and sixteen pounds. Features, regular and pleasing. Left eye slightly larger than the right. Wearing a blue traveling suit and a red, leather-trimmed hat. Bright personality. We ask everyone to keep an eye out for this girl whose parents are prostrated by her disappearance.”

She was one of many thousands of lost girls, but her beauty and the fact that her father was a reputable physician made it news. There was a “ring” said the tabloids; there was original sin, said the pulpit; and “mark my words,” said the citizens of Delphis, their words being wild suppositions about somebody knowing something more than he or she saw fit to tell. For awhile the town of Delphis was as sad as the village of Hamlin after the Pied Piper had come and gone—there were young men who forgot their partners entirely when the orchestra played “Babes in the Woods” or “Underneath the Stars,” and fanned they had loved Gwen and would never love another.

After a few years a New York judge walked away into the blue and the case of Gwen Davies was revived for a day in the newspapers, with a note that someone had lately seen her or her double in a New York surface car; after that the waters closed over her, apparently forever.

Dr. Wilkinson was sure it was the same girl—he thought for awhile of trying to trace her by going to a newspaper with the story but he was a retiring young man and the idea became shelved like the play he was always going to write and the summer he was going to spend on the Riviera.

But he never forgot—he was forever haunted by the picture of the girl floating slowly out over the city at dusk, buoyed up by delicious air, by a quintessence of golden hope, like a soaring and unstable stock issue. She was the girl for whom a part of him was always searching at cafes and parties and theatres, when his practical wife would ask:

“Why are you staring around, Harvey? Do you see anybody we know?”

He did not explain.