

**Dancing Fitzgerald**  
**Bringing the Story to the Stage**

July 9, 2016

Ashley Bowman and Cynthia Meier

*“Jim Powell was a Jelly-bean. Much as I desire to make him an appealing character, I feel that it would be unscrupulous to deceive you on that point. He was a bred-in-the-bone, dyed-in-the-wool, ninety-nine three-quarters per cent Jelly-bean and he grew lazily all during Jelly-bean season, which is every season, down in the land of the Jelly-beans well below the Mason-Dixon line.”*

— opening sentence of *The Jelly-Bean* by F. Scott Fitzgerald

**F. Scott Fitzgerald** (1896–1940), most famous for writing the American classic *The Great Gatsby*, was an American novelist and short story writer. Fitzgerald was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, spent part of his childhood in Buffalo, NY, and eventually attended Princeton University where he wrote and drank until he dropped out in 1917 to join the Army. While stationed at Camp Sheridan in Alabama, he met and fell in love with Zelda Sayre who would later become his wife. In order to support Zelda, he returned to New York and wrote *This Side of Paradise*, a re-telling of his early years at Princeton. The novel, published in 1920, was the most successful work of his lifetime. Even *The Great Gatsby* (1925) was not received well until after his death. Throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s, he wrote many short stories for magazines such as *The Saturday Evening Post* in order to maintain the extravagant and alcohol-infused lifestyle that he and Zelda lived. Zelda was eventually diagnosed with schizophrenia and was admitted



*“The street was hot at three and hotter still at four, the April dust seeming to enmesh the sun and give it forth again as a world-old joke forever played on an eternity of afternoons. But at half past four a first layer of quiet fell and the shades lengthened under the awnings and heavy foliaged trees. In this heat nothing mattered. All life was weather, a waiting through the hot where events had no significance for the cool that was soft and caressing like a woman’s hand on a tired forehead. Down in Georgia there is a feeling—perhaps inarticulate—that this is the greatest wisdom of the South—so after a while the Jelly-bean turned into a pool hall on Jackson Street where he was sure to find a congenial crowd who would make all the old jokes—the ones he knew.”* — final paragraph from *The Jelly-Bean*

to a psychiatric hospital. In the late 1930s, Fitzgerald worked in Hollywood briefly and eventually died of a heart attack in 1940 at the age of 44.

*The Jelly-Bean* (1920), originally written for *Metropolitan Magazine*, appears as one of eleven short stories in the collection *Tales from the Jazz Age*. The story, in particular the gambling scene, was co-written by Zelda Fitzgerald. It tells the story of Jim Powell, an idling young man, who falls in love one night and decides to change his life. “Falling in love” was one of Fitzgerald’s major themes along with “despair” — both of which figure prominently in the story. The collection of stories also contains the novella *May Day* and the story *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*.

**Excerpt from the story of *The Jelly-Bean***

Suddenly the square of yellow light that fell through the door was obscured by a dark figure. A girl had come out of the dressing-room and was standing on the porch not more than ten feet away. Jim heard a low-breathed “doggone” and then she turned and saw him.

It was Nancy Lamar.

Jim rose to his feet.

“Howdy?”

“Hello—” she paused, hesitated and then approached. “Oh, it’s—Jim Powell.

He bowed slightly, tried to think of a casual remark.

“Do you suppose,” she began quickly, “I mean—do you know anything about gum?”

“What?” “I’ve got gum on my shoe. Some utter ass left his or her gum on the floor and of course I stepped in it.”

Jim blushed, inappropriately.

“Do you know how to get it off?” she demanded petulantly. “I’ve tried a knife. I’ve tried every damn thing in the dressing-room. I’ve tried soap and water—and even perfume and I’ve ruined my powder-puff trying to make it stick to that.”

Jim considered the question in some agitation.

“Why—I think maybe gasoline—”

The words had scarcely left his lips when she grasped his hand and pulled him at a run off the low veranda, over a flower bed and at a gallop toward a group of cars parked in the moonlight by the first hole of the golf course.

“Turn on the gasoline,” she commanded breathlessly.

**Excerpt from the adaptation of *The Jelly-Bean***

*Music: “Nancy’s theme”*

*NANCY enters.*

**NANCY** (*quietly*)

Doggone.

**JIM**

Howdy?

**NANCY**

Hello. Oh, it’s—Jim Powell. (*JIM bows slightly, and tries to think of a casual remark.*) Do you suppose, I mean—do you know anything about gum?

**JIM**

What?

**NANCY**

I’ve got gum on my shoe. Some utter ass left his or her gum on the floor and of course I stepped in it. (*JIM blushes.*) Do you know how to get it off? I’ve tried a knife. I’ve tried every damn thing in the dressing-room. I’ve tried soap and water—and even perfume and I’ve ruined my powered-puff trying to make it stick to that.

**JIM**

Why—I think maybe gasoline—

*Music. She grasps his hand and pulls him at a run. Four dancers bring on chairs to represent a car.*

**NANCY**

Turn on the gasoline.