



Living Well
Is the
Best Revenge

Calvin
Tomkins

MoMA

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C O N T E N T S

<i>Foreword</i>	7
T W O F A M I L I E S	11
P A R I S	29
<i>An Album</i>	45
A N T I B E S	91
H O M E	115
<i>Fifteen Paintings</i>	125

F O R E W O R D

by
Calvin Tomkins

In writing, as in other pursuits, it helps to be lucky. Meeting Gerald and Sara Murphy was an enormous piece of luck for me, both professionally and personally, and I have my two young daughters to thank for it. We had recently moved out from New York City to Snedens Landing, on the west bank of the Hudson River twelve miles north of the George Washington Bridge. One spring afternoon, Anne and Susan, who were then five and three years old, wandered off across the neighboring property and found Gerald pruning his rose garden; when my wife and I caught up with them, conversation had flourished, and Sara, appearing from the house, was taking orders for ginger ale. The Murphys were in their sixties then, but the warmth and liveliness of their attention—amused, focused, festive—seemed almost miraculous to me at the time, and still does. I remember thinking how delightful it would be to know these people.

The Murphys didn't talk about the past in those days, and it was some time before I realized that they were the people Scott Fitzgerald had used as models for Dick and Nicole Diver in *Tender Is the Night*. That book had had an extraordinary effect on me a few years earlier, when I happened on it in a rented house in Santa Fe, New Mexico; it had enthralled and upset me more than any book I had ever read, and I was still haunted by the memory of Dr. Diver's "virtuosity with people" and his gradual self-destruction. ("Wanting above all to be brave and kind, he had wanted, even more than that, to be loved.") The Murphys' own story was very different from the romance that Fitzgerald had constructed, but as I came to know them better I felt that there was a powerful resonance between the book and their lives, and I couldn't help asking questions about the years that Gerald and Sara had spent in France, in the nineteen twenties. Somewhat reluctantly at first, but less and less so over time, they consented to reopen this long-closed chapter in their lives. Gerald was a natural storyteller, with the Irish gift for phrase and cadence. I kept trying to tell him he should put his recollections down in a written memoir, but he scoffed at the notion—he had too much respect for the craft of writing, he said, to attempt something which could only be second-rate.

When I proposed to write their story myself, in the form of a profile in *The New Yorker*, Sara was very dubious, but they both sensed that it might be a real opportunity for me—I had recently moved from *Newsweek* to *The New Yorker*, and the Murphys, who by now were like surrogate parents, had developed a personal interest in my career. They agreed to give it a try, experimentally. Two or three times a week, I brought a bulky, reel-to-reel tape

recorder to their living room and let it run for an hour or more, while Gerald and Sara talked in a sort of musical counterpoint, Gerald's tenor leading but never occluding Sara's alto, accompanied by the sostenuto snoring of their two pugs, Edward and Wookie, who slept through it all on the white sofa. When the Murphys went to East Hampton for the summer, Gerald wrote to me. "I *feel* that there is something to be written," he said in one letter. "I *know* that you can do it.... (Our life was fresh, new, and invented, I feel.)" That long-ago life in Paris and on the French Riviera had been a joint creation, as he often said, with their marriage as its centerpiece—a marriage that he described to me as "a strange alchemy [which] had nothing to do with a happy marriage per se." In spite of Gerald's encouragement, I wasn't at all sure I could write about them. Their story sometimes seemed too private, and too sad. Sara never mentioned the deaths of their two sons, and Gerald could only allude to them glancingly.

The profile appeared in *The New Yorker* issue of July 28, 1962. Both Gerald and Sara seemed pleased by it (or maybe just relieved to have it over and done with) and our friendship endured. When the book came out in 1974, with additional material and photographs, Gerald had been dead for ten years, and Sara, who died in 1975, was no longer aware of the world around her. For this new edition I have made a few minor corrections to the text, and revised the last chapter to take account of new information that has come to light since 1974 about Gerald Murphy's career as a significant modern artist. The largely posthumous recognition of his paintings is one of many elements that make Gerald and Sara's story seem to me more interesting than the myths that Scott Fitzgerald and others made up about them.

TWO FAMILIES

*Even though it happened in France,
it was all somehow an American experience.*

—GERALD MURPHY

A writer like F. Scott Fitzgerald, whose life has always attracted more attention than his work, may have to wait a long time before his literary reputation finds its true level. The legendary quality of the Fitzgerald saga still dazzles and intrudes; we search the novels for clues to the celebrated life that has become, through various tellings and retellings, a kind of nineteen-twenties morality drama, a tragedy of squandered talent. The novel in which Fitzgerald attempted to deal more or less directly with his own tragedy, *Tender Is the Night*, has nevertheless been assuming over the years something like the status of an American classic. The book, which was generally considered a failure when it first appeared (even by Fitzgerald, who tried to improve its standing by writing a revised version that nearly everyone agreed was not as good as the original) and which had gone out of print when the author died in 1940, has now become required reading in any

number of modern literature courses. If many critics still regard it as a failure, they now tend to see it as a noble failure, a flawed masterpiece; and if they still complain that the disintegration of Dick Diver, its psychiatrist hero, is never satisfactorily resolved, most of them concede that Diver is one of those rare heroes in American fiction about whom the reader cares deeply and that the account of his disintegration, ambiguous though it may be, is so harrowing that it makes the glittering perfection of plot in a novel like *The Great Gatsby* seem by comparison almost too neat.

The real trouble with the book, as every college English major knows, is that Fitzgerald started out by using a friend of his named Gerald Murphy as the model for Dick Diver and then allowed Diver to change, midway through the narrative, into F. Scott Fitzgerald. To a lesser degree, he did the same thing with his heroine, Nicole Diver, who has some of the physical characteristics and mannerisms of Sara Murphy, Gerald's wife, but is in most other respects Zelda Fitzgerald. The double metamorphosis was readily apparent at the time to friends of the Fitzgeralds and the Murphys. Ernest Hemingway wrote Fitzgerald a cutting letter about the book, accusing him of cheating with his material; by starting with the Murphys and then changing them into different people, Hemingway contended, Fitzgerald had produced not people at all but beautifully faked case histories. Gerald Murphy raised the same point when he read the novel, and Fitzgerald's reply nearly floored him. "The book," Fitzgerald said, "was inspired by Sara and you, and the way I feel about you both and the way you live, and the last part of it is Zelda and me because you and Sara are the same people as Zelda and me." This astonishing statement served to confirm a long-held conviction of Sara Murphy's

that Fitzgerald knew very little about people and nothing at all about the Murphys.

When *Tender Is the Night* came out in 1934, after many delays, the lives of these four friends no longer bore much resemblance to the lives of their fictional counterparts. The Murphys had left Europe, where they were living when Fitzgerald met them. Gerald Murphy was to spend the next twenty-two years in his father's old position as president of Mark Cross, the New York leather-goods store, a position he took out of necessity and from which he retired, with relief, in 1956. Neither of the Murphys particularly enjoyed reading the novel that Fitzgerald had dedicated "To Gerald and Sara—Many Fêtes." Sara, who was rather offended by it, said once that she rejected categorically "any resemblance to us or to anyone we knew at any time." Gerald admired the quality of the writing and the emotional depth of certain passages, but the book as a whole did not seem successful to him. Years later, on rereading it, he was fascinated to discover (he had not noticed it the first time) how many details Fitzgerald had drawn from life during the years the two couples spent together in Paris and on the Riviera—the years from 1924 to 1929. Almost every incident, he became aware, almost every conversation in the opening section of the book had some basis in an actual event or conversation involving the Murphys, although it was often altered or distorted in detail.

"When I like men," Fitzgerald once wrote, "I want to be like them—I want to lose the outer qualities that give me my individuality and be like them." Fitzgerald wanted to be like Gerald Murphy because he admired Murphy as much as any man he had ever met and because he was thoroughly fascinated, and sometimes thoroughly baffled, by the life the Murphys had created for them-

selves and their friends. It was a life of great originality and considerable beauty, and some of its special quality comes through in the first hundred pages of *Tender Is the Night*. In the eyes of the young actress Rosemary Hoyt, the Divers represented “the exact furthest evolution of a class, so that most people seemed awkward beside them.” Dick Diver’s “extraordinary virtuosity with people,” his “exquisite consideration,” his “politeness that moved so fast and intuitively that it could be examined only in its effect”—all were qualities of Gerald Murphy’s, and the Divers’ effect on their friends had many echoes in the Murphys’ effect on theirs. “People were always their best selves with the Murphys,” John Dos Passos, a lifelong friend, said of them. Archibald MacLeish, another old and very close friend, remarked that from the beginning of the Murphys’ life in Europe, “person after person—English, French, American, everybody—met them and came away saying that these people really are masters in the art of living.”

Fitzgerald saw this, and something more besides. With his great gift for catching the social tone and texture of his period, Fitzgerald had a tendency to look for the real essence of an era in terms of certain individuals living in it—personal heroes like the “romantic” Princeton football player “Buzz” Law or the maverick Hollywood producer Irving Thalberg. “At certain moments,” he wrote in his notes for *The Last Tycoon*, “one man appropriates to himself the total significance of a time and place.” For Fitzgerald, Gerald and Sara Murphy embodied the significance of that remarkable decade in France, during which, as he once wrote, “whatever happened seemed to have something to do with art.” Even though Fitzgerald himself showed little interest in the art of his time, and ignored it almost completely in *Tender Is the Night*,

he did respond to the atmosphere of freshness and discovery that characterized the period.

When the Fitzgeralds arrived in France, in the spring of 1924, the Murphys had been there for three years and had become, according to MacLeish, a “sort of nexus with everything that was going on.” In the various apartments and houses they rented in or near Paris, and at a villa they were renovating at Cap d’Antibes, on the Riviera, one met not only American writers like Hemingway and MacLeish and Dos Passos but a good many of the Frenchmen and other Europeans who were forging the art of the twentieth century: Picasso, who had a studio near them in Paris and who came down to visit them in Antibes; Léger, who liked to take them on nocturnal tours of Paris’s earthy little cafés, bars, dance halls, and *foires foraines*; Stravinsky, who came to dinner and unfailingly commented on the flavor of the bread, which Sara sprinkled with water and put into the oven before serving. “The Murphys were among the first Americans I ever met,” Stravinsky has said, “and they gave me the most agreeable impression of the United States.” The couple had come to know most of their European friends through the Ballets Russes of Serge Diaghilev, for whom they had both volunteered to work as unpaid apprentices soon after their arrival in Paris in 1921, when they learned that a fire had destroyed most of the company’s scenery. The Murphys, who had been studying painting with one of Diaghilev’s designers, Natalia Goncharova, went to the company’s atelier in the Belleville quarter to help repaint the décors for *Schéhérazade*, *Pulcinella*, and other ballets, from the original *maquettes*, using long-handled, soft brushes like brooms to apply the color, and climbing up thirty-foot ladders to get the proper perspective. Picasso, Braque, Derain,

Bakst, and other Diaghilev artists came by frequently to supervise the work and comment on it. "In addition to being the focal center of the whole modern movement in the arts," Murphy said, "the Diaghilev ballet was a kind of movement in itself. Anybody who was interested in the company became a member automatically. You knew everybody, you knew all the dancers, and everybody asked your opinion on things." The Murphys went to rehearsals, attended the premières, and were invited to the spectacular soirées at the house of the ballet's great patroness, the Princesse de Polignac (née Winaretta Singer, heiress to the Singer sewing machine fortune, a formidable American woman, whose profile was said to resemble Dante's and whose ambition, according to Stravinsky, was to have her bust placed next to Richelieu's in the Louvre). They had arrived in Paris at a moment when the twentieth-century revolution in the arts, which had begun before the First World War, was taking a variety of fresh new forms, and when the activity in all fields of art was intense and closely linked. The Cubist juggernaut had been succeeded by the inspired madness of Dada and the aggressive eroticism of the Surrealists. Intellectuals had fallen in love with the popular arts—the movies, the circus, *le jazz hot*. All the arts seemed poised on the verge of a new Golden Age, the product of postwar energies and a sense of personal freedom that encouraged limitless experimentation. "Between 1920 and 1930 nobody doubted but that he was on the way to creating something," the French critic Florent Fels wrote. "We were not out to change the world, but we were trying to make it look different and think differently."

• • •

Certainly no two Americans could have been better conditioned than the Murphys were, by background and temperament, to respond to everything that was going on or to feel so thoroughly sympathetic to the excitement of the modern movement. Sara Murphy, the eldest of three daughters of a Cincinnati ink manufacturer named Frank B. Wiborg, had spent a large part of her childhood in Europe with her mother and sisters. The three girls were strikingly beautiful, in entirely different ways: Olga, the youngest, had a serene, classic face; Mary Hoyt ("Hoytie") was dramatic, dark, and intense; and Sara's fresh, delicate beauty and golden hair reflected the family's Scandinavian heritage (their paternal grandfather was Norwegian). The girls had all been given voice lessons, and at parties where, in that era, the guests were often expected to "perform" in one way or another, the Wiborg sisters were a sensation. They had a wide repertory of folk songs, which they sang in three-part harmony (Sara singing contralto, Hoytie tenor, and Olga soprano) with an unselfconscious "American" directness that delighted European listeners. As their *pièce de résistance* they would stand behind a semitransparent curtain, take down the straps of their evening gowns, wave their arms, and sing the Rhine-maidens' theme from *Das Rheingold*. Lady Diana Cooper introduced them to London society. They were presented at the Court of St. James's in 1914, and, as Lady Diana wrote in her autobiography, "That year the Wiborg girls were the rage of London."

By the time she was sixteen Sara Sherman Wiborg (she was named for General William Tecumseh Sherman, her mother's favorite uncle) had learned to speak fluent French, German, and Italian. She was not in the slightest degree impressed by fashionable

society, however, and she said just what she thought to everyone. “I love Sara,” Lady Diana said to Mrs. Wiborg. “She’s a cat who goes her own way.” Sara became a great favorite of her mother’s friend Stella Campbell (Mrs. Patrick Campbell), who used to insist that Sara accompany her when she went to buy clothes for one of her theatrical roles. “Sara, darling,” she would say, in her deep, Italianate voice, “does the dress walk? Or does it make me look just like a cigar?” Gerald Murphy said once that although he had known Sara for eleven years before they were married and could hardly relate an incident in his life in which she did not play a part, she had remained so essentially and naïvely original that “to this day I have no idea what she will do, say, or propose.”

Until 1921, Gerald’s contact with Europe had been largely vicarious. His father, Patrick Francis Murphy, for twenty-five years spent five months a year studying the details of the upper-class Europeans’ way of life and the implements contrived for it, which he screened and, in many cases, improved upon before putting them on sale in the Mark Cross store, then at Fifth Avenue and Twenty-fifth Street. The elder Murphy introduced, among other things, Minton china, English cut crystal, Scottish golf clubs, and Sheffield cutlery, as well as the first thermos bottle ever seen in the United States. Moreover, he designed and marketed the first wrist watch, at the suggestion of a British infantry officer who complained that a pocket watch was too cumbersome for trench warfare.

Patrick Murphy had taken over Mark W. Cross’s modest Boston saddlery shop in the eighteen-eighties and built it into an elegant New York store, but he was far from being typical of the successful merchants of the era. He spent most of the day read-

ing the English classics in his office (he had a special passion for Macaulay); he was known as the wittiest after-dinner speaker of his day; and he wrote his own business advertisements—a column in each of the New York newspapers once each week, headed by fifty words of philosophy and wit and ending with a slogan such as “Mark Cross—everything for the Horse but the Rider and Everything for the Rider but the Horse.” Furthermore, he had not the slightest desire to become any wealthier than he was. “How many times must I tell you I don’t *want* to make more money?” Gerald remembered their father saying when Frederick Murphy, Gerald’s older brother, argued for an expansion of the business. Their disputes on this subject led eventually to an estrangement that was not made up until Fred lay dying, as a delayed result of wounds suffered while serving as a tank officer in the First World War. (Along with one other officer in his regiment, Major George S. Patton—who carried a pearl-handled revolver even then—Fred had volunteered for the first French tanks corps, in the days when tank officers ran alongside the tanks to direct their operations.) Fred and Gerald were never particularly close. According to Monty Woolley, the actor, who was a class ahead of Gerald at Yale, “The relation between the brothers was something that always seemed comical to me. Their politeness to one another was formidable. They never relaxed in each other’s presence.” Gerald’s relationship with his sister Esther, who was ten years younger, was also rather ceremonious. A precocious, phenomenally well-read child and a nonstop conversationalist even at age nine, Esther survived two unsuccessful marriages—the second to Chester Arthur, a grandson of the twenty-first President—and later became a permanent resident of Paris.

Gerald Murphy was born in 1888, in Boston. Four years later his father moved the business to New York, and the family re-established itself in a modest brownstone house on lower Fifth Avenue. Although he grew up in comfortable surroundings, Gerald's childhood was not a happy one. His father believed that children should be strictly brought up, and the Murphy children were not allowed to complain; one winter day, when Gerald fell through the ice of the Central Park lake, his father kept him outdoors, his underwear freezing to his skin, until they had completed their walk. Soon after this he was sent away to a Catholic boarding school near Dobbs Ferry, where, he remembered vividly, he was "flogged by nuns" for wetting his bed. The nuns used to take errant boys to an abandoned shed and paddle them with pieces of wood lath. The experience left Gerald with a lifelong antipathy to Catholicism and all its trappings.

Later he went to Hotchkiss, where he graduated in 1907; but because his father thought he was not ready for college, he spent the next year at Andover. Patrick Murphy hoped that his second son would go to Harvard—Fred had already graduated from Yale—but Gerald chose Yale. He soon regretted the decision. "I hated New Haven," he said later, "and never felt I got anything of what I wanted out of it. You always felt you were expected to make good in some form of extracurricular activity, and there was such constant pressure on you that you couldn't make a stand—I couldn't, anyway. The athlete was all-important, and the rest of the student body was trained to watch and cheer from the sidelines. There was a general tacit Philistinism. One's studies were seldom discussed. An interest in the arts was suspect.

The men in your class with the most interesting minds were submerged and you never got to know them."

By not making a stand, Murphy was elected to the top fraternity (DKE), was tapped for Skull and Bones, was made manager of the glee club and chairman of the dance committee, and was voted the best-dressed man in the Class of 1912. Tall and handsome, with reddish hair, perfectly assured manners, and a quick intelligence, Gerald was a sort of beau ideal to many of his classmates. Somehow, though, he lacked the competitive drive that would have made his achievements seem worthwhile to him; the qualities that made him a big man in the Class of 1912 did not appear in the least admirable to Murphy. Archibald MacLeish, who was in Bones three years behind Gerald, said that when he and his wife went over to Paris in the twenties, and everybody told them that they must meet the Murphys (he had not known Gerald at Yale), he got the distinct impression that the Murphys were avoiding them; afterward, when they had become close friends, MacLeish decided that Murphy had simply been reluctant to meet another Bones man. The only two college friends that Murphy continued to see much of after his graduation were Monty Woolley and Cole Porter—one of the most interesting minds of the Class of 1913, who owed much of *his* success at Yale to Murphy's friendship.

Murphy loved to describe his first meeting with Cole Porter: "There was this barbaric custom of going around to the rooms of the sophomores, and talking with them to see which ones would be proper material for the fraternities. I remember going around with Gordon Hamilton, the handsomest and most sophisticated boy in our class, and seeing, two nights running, a

sign on one sophomore's door saying, 'Back at 10 p.m. Gone to football song practice.' Hamilton was enormously irritated that anyone would have the gall to be out of his room on visiting night, and he decided not to call again on this particular sophomore. But one night as I was passing his room I saw a light and went in. I can still see that room—there was a single electric light bulb in the ceiling, and a piano with a box of caramels on it, and wicker furniture, which was considered a bad sign at Yale in 1911. And sitting at the piano was a little boy from Peru, Indiana, in a checked suit and a salmon tie, with his hair parted in the middle and slicked down, looking just like a Westerner all dressed up for the East. We had a long talk, about music, and composers—we were both crazy about Gilbert and Sullivan—and I found out that he lived on an enormous apple farm and that he had a cousin named Desdemona. He also told me that the song he had submitted for the football song competition had just been accepted. It was called 'Bulldog,' and of course it made him famous."

Famous, but not entirely accepted at Yale. Although he received the second largest personal allowance of any boy in his class (the largest was Leonard Hanna's), Cole Porter did not fit easily into the social mold of a Yale man. At Murphy's insistence, however, he was elected to DKE that year, and soon afterward Murphy persuaded the glee club, of which he was manager, to take Porter in as a sophomore—something that was never done—so that he could sing a new song he had written on the glee club's tour that spring. The song was the hit of the show. It was a satire on the joys of owning an automobile, and Porter came out in front of the curtain to sing it in the next-to-closing spot, with his hands

folded behind him, while the seniors and juniors behind him on the stage went "zoom, zoom, zoom."

After graduating from Yale in 1912, Murphy spent the next five years working for the Mark Cross company. His father expected both sons to carry on the business—Fred was then running the Mark Cross factory in England—and Gerald was not as yet prepared to do anything other than what was expected of him. The seeds of dissatisfaction had begun to germinate, however; his Irish imagination rebelled against the life that unrolled so smoothly in his path. The one person to whom he confided his doubts and uncertainties was Sara Wiborg.

Gerald and Sara had known each other since 1904. Soon after the Wiborgs moved from Cincinnati to New York, Gerald had become a sort of adopted "cousin" to the three Wiborg girls, looking out for them at parties and dances and visiting them in the summers at their big house in East Hampton, where Frank B. Wiborg had bought a six-hundred-acre tract of ocean-front property bordering on what is now the Maidstone Club. Mrs. Wiborg did not appear to contemplate the possibility of her daughters' marrying; she depended on them as companions for her annual travels (one year they toured India, going by arduous stages as far north as the Khyber Pass) and as ornaments of her formidable social existence. By 1914, though, Gerald had begun writing letters to Sara that were increasingly personal in tone, and among whose slightly stilted phrases ran a strain of deep melancholy. He admitted to being subject to frequent "glooms" and depressions: "the black service do get after me at times," as he put it. He confided to her his scorn for the social code that prevented a man from discussing books, music, or paintings with another man,

because it would be considered effeminate: “I long for someone with whom, as I walk the links, I can discuss, without conscious effort—and with unembarrassed security—the things that do not smack of the pavement.” Of his own life to date, he wrote Sara, “For me it has been a life of such sham and utter unreality (for which *I* am to blame), that I wish everything that deserves to should go thro’ the sieve.”

Early in February, 1915, they became engaged. The letters that followed this event—sometimes two or three in a single day—show a man who has suddenly gained confidence in his own instincts, tastes, and desires: “I feel almost as though we alone knew where caskets of gold and jewels were buried.... I feel more and more as if we had registered at the office of Civilization a claim to a place in the world—and that it had been granted.” Sara’s mother strongly opposed the match, without bothering to give reasons, and the weekends at East Hampton became increasingly oppressive. Gerald, who got little support in emotional matters from his own family, occasionally worried that his character would prove too weak “to carry us both over the bumpy parts of life.” But an enormous optimism was taking root. The life that he envisioned for them was to be an entirely new experience, something that neither of them had known before and which they would somehow collaborate to bring into being. “Do you know,” he wrote her, “I think we shall always enjoy most the things we plan to do of our own accord,—and together, even among others, but in our *own* way.” Their life together would be fresh, new, and invented; it would be their own joint imaginative creation.

They were married on December 30, 1915, in New York. For the next two years they lived in a small house at 50 West

Eleventh Street, which Patrick Murphy had given them as a wedding present, and which they proceeded to decorate in Victorian style—a rather startling innovation that enabled them to buy inexpensively a number of excellent pieces of furniture that had only recently been discarded as hopelessly “out of date.” The first of their three children, Honoria (named for no one in either family), was born two years later. Eleven days after Honoria’s birth, Gerald left for Kelly Field, Texas, where he received his basic training in the aviation section of the U.S. Signal Corps. Training for aviation pilots in the First World War consisted then of twelve weeks in ground school, followed by a period of flight instruction somewhere else. After a few more weeks at Roosevelt Field (now Mitchell Field) on Long Island, Murphy was assigned to the Handley-Paige flight training unit in England. The armistice was declared on the day he was due to sail, however, and he returned, somewhat disappointed, to civilian life.

By then Gerald knew that he did not want to continue working for his father at Mark Cross. What, his father inquired, *did* he want to do? Gerald, who had had no clear idea until that moment, announced that he wanted to study landscape architecture. “I had to say something,” he recalled later, “and that’s what came out.” Bitterly disappointed though he must have been, Patrick Murphy did not try to argue against his son’s decision. The young Murphys spent the next two years in Cambridge, where Gerald took the graduate course at the Harvard School of Landscape Architecture. Cambridge seemed to them far more stimulating than New York. They saw quite a lot of Alice James and her circle, and Mrs. Winthrop Chanler introduced them to Amy Lowell. “You must meet her,” Gerald wrote to Sara, who

had been in New York when he was first introduced. “She knows everything *about* everything—yet she’s so cordial and human. I was talking to her alone one time and suddenly she said: ‘Repeat that’—I was very much frightened and did. She whipped out a pencil and wrote it down, and said casually: ‘Now, go on.’ I had merely said that the characters in the Russian novels seemed to me such weak animals that the hopelessness of it all became unreal. She jumped—and kept saying to herself: ‘Weak animals, weak animals is right, weak animals is good!’” Gerald also grew fascinated at this time with botany and took courses in it at Harvard. “I feel now that I should like to know all the flowers, trees, grasses, stars, rocks, and the very air itself,” he wrote Sara. “It repays one so, the beauty that is revealed *with* the knowledge.”

But even in Cambridge the pressure of two powerful and demanding families—Sara’s especially—put a strain on the new life that they were trying to create for themselves. There was, in addition, the oppressive sense that conditions in the United States were becoming increasingly unfavorable to innovations of any kind. As Murphy put it, “You had the feeling that the bluenoses were in the saddle over here, and that a government that could pass the Eighteenth Amendment could, and probably would, do a lot of other things to make life in the States as stuffy and bigoted as possible.” Early in 1921, like a good many of their fellow countrymen, the Murphys decided to go abroad and live there for a while. Although two more children had come along by this time, there was enough money for all of them to live comfortably in Europe, where the rate of exchange was so highly favorable to Americans; Frank Wiborg had recently divided his fortune into equal shares, and the income from Sara’s portion came to seven

thousand dollars a year. That spring, with their three children—Honorina, aged three; Baoth, aged two; and Patrick, a baby of eight months—the Murphys sailed for England. They spent a pleasant summer in the countryside. Gerald still planned to become a professional landscape architect, and he wanted to see and study the famous English gardens. In the fall they crossed the Channel and settled for the winter in Paris, first in the Hotel Beau Site and then in an apartment at 2, rue Greuze, near the Étoile.



Gerald in 1917, after completion of pre-flight training.



Sara's engagement picture, October 17, 1915.



Some 1924 visitors—Monty Woolley, with Baoth (*above*); Rudolph Valentino at La Garoupe (*above, right*); Ernest Hemingway with his son John (“Bumby”).



Zelda and Scott Fitzgerald.



Monty Woolley and Cole Porter.



The Fitzgeralds at Antibes, with their daughter, Scottie.



The Murphy children called their father “Dow-Dow” and delighted in his daily rituals. Sara’s deep contentment fascinated Scott Fitzgerald; he once described her face as looking “hard and lovely and pitiful.”



PHOTOGRAPH CREDITS

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In France in the 1920s, Gerald and Sara Murphy lived an extraordinary life. First in Paris and then in Antibes, on the Mediterranean not far from Cannes, these two American expatriates played host to some of the most memorable creative spirits of the era, including Pablo Picasso, Cole Porter, Fernand Léger, Ernest Hemingway, and Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald. Gerald Murphy was himself a painter, and although he practiced for only eight years, and left few canvases behind, his work holds its own in the collection of The Museum of Modern Art. *Living Well Is the Best Revenge* is Calvin Tomkins's now-classic account of the Murphys' lives. First published in 1971, and now proudly republished by the Museum, the book is illustrated with nearly seventy photographs from the Murphy family album and features a special section on Gerald Murphy's paintings. *Living Well Is the Best Revenge* is as charming and fascinating as Gerald and Sara themselves.

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