

When F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote *The Camel's Back* in 1920, he was newly triumphant, having succeeded in love, literature, and financial matters. A few years before, he had been dumped by a beautiful rich girl because he didn't have many prospects. Fitzgerald used this experience as the basis for his first novel, originally entitled *The Romantic Egoist*, which he edited during his enlistment in WWI. It was praised but rejected by Scribner's. Meanwhile he met Zelda Sayre, but she broke off their engagement, again because Fitzgerald didn't seem to have any prospects. Fitzgerald returned to St. Paul and moved in with his parents. He struggled with the revision of his novel, eating meals in his bedroom and pinning notes to his curtains. In September of 1919 he sent it again to Scribner's, this time titled *This Side of Paradise*. It was accepted. Fitzgerald was so excited that he ran outside and shouted the news to everyone passing on the street. He later wrote, "That week, I paid off my terrible small debts, bought a suit, and woke up every morning into a world of ineffable toploftiness and promise." The novel was published in 1920, became one of the most popular books of the year, and Scott and Zelda's engagement was resumed. A month after the publication of *This Side of Paradise*, the Saturday Evening Post published *The Camel's Back* and paid Fitzgerald \$500 for it, \$100 more than they had paid him for any previous stories. Of this story Fitzgerald said, "it was written during one day ...with the express purpose of buying a platinum and diamond wrist watch which cost six hundred dollars." This watch was reputedly given to Zelda and was further proof to her, perhaps, that he finally did have prospects.

Alcohol is very prevalent in *The Camel's Back*. Certainly, writing it in 1920, Fitzgerald must have been considering Prohibition, which was just descending upon the country.

The 18th Amendment, banning the manufacture, sale and transportation of intoxicating liquors in the U.S., was passed by Congress in December 1918; its ratification by the mandatory thirty-six states was finally achieved on January 16, 1919 (Minnesota was the 37th state to ratify.) The ratified amendment was stipulated to begin in one year on January 16, 1920.

It's possible the revelers appearing in the story (based on actual St. Paul personages from December 1919) were imbibing with a bit more vigor than usual due to the fact that Prohibition was rapidly descending upon them. Then again, St. Paul is reputed to have been a safe haven for gangsters during the Prohibition era. Perhaps all along the St. Paul-ites knew that nothing would get between them and their alcohol. Perhaps it would have been best for Fitzgerald himself if something had gotten between he and his drinking, as alcoholism is reputed to have lead to his young death.

MORE RADIO SHOWS NEXT SUMMER

There was a time, when spooky stories on the radio were best heard under blankets, late at night. Next July, the *Bloomington Art Center Gallery Theater Company* recreates those radio days with spooky stories guaranteed to give you "Cool Chills on a Hot Summer Night." For more info go to www.bloomingtonartcenter.com and click on "theater." Radio personality J.B. Eckert (who has collaborated with the Erstwhilists) will be directing these shows.

BROTHERS ELECTRIC CO.



- ◆Free Estimates ◆Electrical Repair
- ◆Fleet of Qualified Personnel
- ◆Fast Reliable Service ◆Licensed
- ◆New Construction ◆Bonded and Insured
- ◆Code Compliance ◆Remodeling

*You'll be **SHOCKED** by our low prices*

3447 Cedar Ave. S., Minneapolis
612-721-1606



Anthony Shane
Florist

Beautiful Flowers for Every Occasion

1901 Nicollet Ave. S., Mpls. 612-871-9388

Cedar Ave. Repair

4301 Cedar Ave. S. 612-729-8246

*Serving Our
Neighborhood Needs*

ALEX & TERRY

