The Gilded Curtains

The golden columns lined the cream coloured walls as the floor to ceiling curtains blew into the windows, a beautiful ripple of fabric dancing in the moonlight. Shelves lined the room, proudly displaying smart books suffocated by a layer of dust. Zelda sat with her legs crossed at the end of the grand oak table, lending an odd sense of unity to a space so divided in function and design.

Her sequinned dress continued to dazzle long after she had returned from the party, illuminating all her best features and hiding the ones that needed hiding. In her small hands, a delicate tea cup with rose petals hugged her palm. She drummed her pink nails against its surface, echoing in the vast room. She stared into the nothingness outside, her eyes slightly out of focus, observing the night at its darkest before the stars added their magic.

Tom sat at the opposite end of the twenty-seat table, his jet black hair diligently oiled into perfection, reflecting light from the jewel encrusted chandelier above him. His shiny bow tie undone and his gold cuff links scattered on the table top, his oceanic blue eyes fixated on hers. His once perfectly crease-free pants were now crumpled as he readjusted the collar of his silk shirt.

Zelda's piercingly grey eyes shifted to his, arching her sculpted eyebrow in contempt. An invisible tear silently caressed her pink cheek as it rolled down, dropping at her collarbone. She didn't dare wipe it away.

Icy fingers held out Tom’s cigarette, the smoke rising and flowing out the window like waves in the ocean. His patent leather shoe tapped on the marble floor against the beat of Zelda's rhythm in anticipation of uncertainty. Narrowing his eyes in an expression Zelda couldn't quite place, he took another drag of his cigarette, contemplating his next move.

Drowning in toxic thoughts, Zelda held onto her cup, perhaps the only thing still keeping her upright. The drumming had fizzled into quiet background noise as she took a deep breath. Her heartbeat was quickening like rain before a storm as she ran her finger tips along the rim.

Tom eyed his wife, motionless, except for the arm that fed him his cigarette. The blue vein was bugling out of his neck and his shoulders were flexed, wrinkling his jacket.

“Sir, you have a phone call.”

Releasing her gaze, Tom aggressively twirled his cigarette into ash on the table and sneered at the man to his left. He pried himself off the chair, his arms pushing off the table as a squeak escaped from under his chair. Shrinking, the butler quickly handed Tom the telephone and moved off to the side. Turning his back to Zelda, Tom held the phone to his ear.

Zelda's eyes grew poisonous as she zeroed in on his back, the fullness of her emotions seeping through her expression. Clutching the tea cup in both hands, she strained herself to listen, the muffled voices scarcely audible.

“I can't, you know how I wish I could.” He paused, listening to the response from the other end. “We will see each other soon, I promise.” Another pause. “I love you too.”

Tom, speaking faintly with deep affection placed the phone down, transferring the device from his hands to the butler's. He quietly sent the man away and lingered before turning to face Zelda.

With a savage smash the teacup shattered onto the wall, mere inches from Tom's nose.

“You disgusting bastard!” Zelda stood up, picked up the saucer and launched it in his direction, her shaky state affecting her aim. “You thought I wouldn't find out?!”

She spat her words, the tears freely overflowing her petite figure.

Her hands twitched in every direction, her words viciously lashed out.

“You've made me the laughing stock of the whole town! Everyone secretly laughing at poor Mrs. Small who doesn't have a damn clue. WELL I DO! I DO HAVE A DAMN CLUE! You think I wouldn't notice the quick glances in my direction or the abrupt end to conversations when I enter a room? It's humiliating! Have a little self control!”

Tom began to approach her, like a tiger stalking his prey.

“Self control? You're asking me to have self control?” He looked as if he was digesting the word. “I suppose the newest thing is to sit by and watch as your wife screws every damn fool in town?! I suppose I'm to just sit here and watch you run around with another man every hour? Is that what you want?”

Tom genuinely seemed to want an answer, almost begging for one but Zelda retaliated.

“What I want? It's never what I-”

He began to laugh a sarcastic, harsh laugh before Zelda had even finished.

“Just like that! You always interrupt me! Let me finish a full sentence for Pete's sake! When I wanted to go to Chicago, where did we go? New York. When I wanted to stay home on our anniversary, what did we do? We went to Betty and Al's party. And when I, I wanted a baby and you didn't, what did we do? WE DIDN'T HAVE A BABY! All you ever do is disagree with me! It's exhausting arguing over every little thing! Maybe we'd have been better off if you listened to a single word that came out of my mouth!”

While Zelda spoke, Tom took more steps towards her, so close now that they're noses almost touched.

“How dare you!”

Tom charged at Zelda, a craziness plaguing his eyes. Crushing her against the wall with a thud, Tom stood with his arms over her head, trapping her under him.

“STOP IT!”

Zelda screeched.

Pushing her harder against the wall Tom spat.

“You think I started this? You think I was the one to ruin this marriage, hm?”

A sinister smile crept into his eyes.

“You toxic, little tramp!”

Her face bunched with rage.

“STOP!”

Thrusting herself forward in hefty movements, Zelda leaned forward, her arms on Tom's chest and pushed with every ounce of her strength. He growled.

“You've been screwing me over since day one!”

Propelled by Zelda's momentum Tom violently fell over a chair and looked up at the woman he thought he had once known. The curtains whipped fiercely around them, engulfing them in a white haze of fabric.

“You never loved me!”

The sobs shook her body, the sequins twirling in the light.

“You never did. You married me for my money and you know it,” Zelda's eyes shot daggers as she began to buckle.

“...I did love you...I loved you very much...”

Standing up, Tom dusted off his pants, looking sheepishly at the china scattered floor. He continued. “...We were very happy...Belonging to each other...The cover of the society pages...The envious glances we got in town...'The height of civilized society' people used to call us.” The full impact of his words and his memories seized a toxin in him. Grabbing the collar of Zelda's dress, Tom screamed, “Then I leave town for a second and you're off screwing Robert Smith.”

Regaining her fire, she yelled right back, pushing him off her.

“You left me first. The second my picture was replaced with Betty's in the society pages.”

“What was I supposed to do, Zelda?! Wait for you to be home for once in your stupid life! ”

“You weren't supposed to be a bastard!”

Launching more tea cups like a mad woman, she boldly flung them at her husband, crashing onto his back like lightning.

“You ugly, stupid woman,” Tom snapped. “I'm so sick of this. You have nothing without me! How do you think it made me look, my wife of two days in the papers with a man who wasn't her husband. I had a reputation before I met you! The talk of Wall Street- making thousands everyday! I had power before you-people would cower at my presence! But YOU RUINED IT!”

Like a child having a tantrum, Zelda jumped up and down, flailing her arms and her hair lashing behind her, black smears running down her face.

“You ask too much, Tom! I loved you, why wasn't that enough!”

Not giving Tom a break to answer, she continued.

“I was never enough! Constantly rejected by a man with no real hair on that god-damned head of yours! You think those women love you? They don't even like you. A pathetic joke in a nice suit! All those tycoons are only doing business with you because I slept with everyone of them to save what's left of your measly career! You think everyone wants to be you, but they feel sorry for you. They're all just waiting for you to keel over and die so they can take your place.”

Tom had gone silent. His face turned white and he began to shake-first his legs, then torso and shoulders. His fists were crushing in his palm and in one movement he swung into his wife, an evil grin wrapping around him like a ribbon. Zelda flung into the chair and collapsed onto the ground, a concluding grunt bellowing out of her.

Tom's breaths were heaving out of his chest. Sweat ran from his nose as he stood over his wife's unconscious body trying to catch his breath.

“Sir, what-”

“Out.”

Tom pointed to the door where the butler had come in from.

“But, sir-”

He crouched as he turned his head to scream, “OUT!”

The butler bustled out into the hall, the sound of scared employees following behind him.

Slowly relaxing, Tom looked around the room. Besides a few smashed shards of china and wood, the room was relatively the same as it had been the night before. With a dull, tired expression, he sighed. Straightening his posture, Tom adjusted his collar and patted down his loose hairs. In one swift motion he removed the chair remnants, calmly scooped up his wife into his arms and began walking up the golden staircase.

A weary Tom ascended into the main hallway to the majestic door at the end of the hall. A nameless butler looked unflustered as he turned the diamond knob and Tom, indifferently, walked in, the lights still on from that morning. He delicately put one hand on Zelda's dishevelled curls and one on her back as he tenderly placed her on her side of the bed.

Changing into his green silk pyjamas he meticulously hung his tuxedo in the vast closet and climbed into the massive bed. Tucking both Zelda and himself under their duvet he turned off the lights, kissed his wife's forehead and closed his eyes.

Word Count: 1786