

Gentle raindrops fell from the evening sky, dotting the windows with beads of water running down the glass. The sun, barely visible over the horizon, shone through the clouds. Its fading rays illuminated a woman writing at her intricately carved desk, her light brown locks falling out of her neat bun and into her face. Her pen traced ink letters onto the leather-bound journal:

*4 May 1857*

*I am miserable. Is my life worth living if I am not happy? Every day is a struggle to complete my tasks. I cannot leave my bed in the mornings, and I cannot sleep at night. It has been almost a fortnight since the doctor announced my development of melancholy, yet I have not gotten the chance to tell my husband. Wilbur is working away from home; I understand that he must work all day to support us, but he spends the rest of his hours sleeping or “working” (or so he tells me). I fear that he may be avoiding me. I’m unsure how much longer I can live this life of strife and sorrow.*

Just as she finished these last words, the bottle of ink ran out. Flustered, she threw it into the trash bin, then sighed and rubbed her temples. She had made her decision. This evening, she was going to confront her husband about his troublesome behavior.

Stomping out of the room, her crinoline-supported skirts knocked over a porcelain vase of now-scattered daisies across the walnut floors. The woman’s cornflower blue eyes watered; the universe seemed to be against her. As she collected the flowers, she noticed that some of them had wilted since she last watered them. When did she last water them? She couldn’t remember. Still, she tossed them back into the unbroken vase.

“Wil likely won’t be back until later this evening,” the woman thought aloud.

Until then, she would have to fill her time. Luckily for her, an entire list of tasks for the evening waited on her intricate walnut kitchen table, its carved floral surface matching the floors. Hours ticked by on the large grandfather clock in their parlor, each golden hand driving her mad. Every second left a new doubt in her head.

*What if talking to him only drives him further away?*

*He’s lying to me. He never loved me.*

*What if he just laughs at me?*

Her thoughts were racing faster than derby horses. Each hoof pounding the ground made her increasingly nervous. As she stirred a mixed bowl of ingredients, she could hear the horses

growing louder. The noise was inescapable. However, they came to a halt when a different noise entered her ears: the sound of the front door opening.

“Tina? Where are you? I have fantastic news!”

She stayed silent.

“Christine?”

“Yes?” The woman, Christine, choked out.

“Where are you?” Wilbur called out into the near-empty house.

The lack of life in the house made Wilbur’s voice echo through the empty stairwells. After all, the pair had no children. At least, not anymore. Their first daughter had died during childbirth. Their second daughter had died just months ago at seven years old from tuberculosis. The lifeless home had collected spiderwebs in the nursery, Christine not daring to enter the room for fear of lingering spirits.

“I’m,” Christine paused to swallow the bile rising in her throat, “in the kitchen.”

With every passing breath, she was growing more uncertain that she could carry through with her plan. Unfortunately, it was impossible to avoid. Especially since Wilbur noticed her unease.

“Tina? Are you feeling okay?” Wil questioned his wife as he rounded the corner.

Christine froze. Her hands shook so aggressively, she nearly dropped her bowl as she placed it onto their small wooden kitchen island. Her throat tightened, so when she opened her mouth, there was silence.

Wilbur gazed into her eyes with concern, her own darting away from his amber eyes. Did she have to do this? Taking a deep breath, she tried once more.

“Wil,” Unable to hold still, she rubbed her hands together, “Do you love me?”

Wilbur, unsure how to answer, stuttered in response, “Of course I do! What kind of husband would I be if I didn’t?”

He punctuated his reply with an awkward laugh, the sound reverberating throughout the hushed room. Less than a minute later, Christine opened a drawer and sifted through the letters and other trinkets that had been tossed into the previously-purposeless space. She held up a letter and a matching red seal, two cursive initials stamped into the wax.

Christine's voice darkened, "Then what is this? And who is H. L.?"

Wilbur could only stare ahead, his eyes widening as he frantically reached out for the paper. However, it was too late, Christine had already begun reading it aloud.

"My dearest, Wilbur, whenever you enter my mind, my heart explodes into song, each sight of you playing sweet music on my heartstrings. Every minute without you is a minute not worth living, yet we are separated by impossible barriers. I understand that we will never wed, but I need you in my life. I cannot live without you. Every corner of my heart loves everything about you. Your voice makes my chest light and my head dizzy. I—"

"God! Stop, Christine! I understand! There's no need to continue." Wilbur snatched the letter from Christine and pocketed it.

"What was that letter, Wilbur?" She spat his name like it was venomous.

Wilbur unconsciously backed away, his hand reaching for the backdoor's knob.

"It was nothing like you think it was!"

"Oh, don't sell me a dog! I'm sure that H. L. would say the exact same thing! In fact, I'm sure you've been disappearing off to your secret love every night you tell me you're going off to work." Christine snarled, "You never loved me! Never, I say! I may as well be dead. God knows I have the strength to do it!"

It was now dark outside, the only light illuminating their faces being the faint oil lamp on the kitchen table. Wilbur hoped the neighbors were already asleep. If they heard this quarrel, who knows what they might say?

"Tina, what do you mean?"

"What do I mean? Oh, yes! I forgot!" Christine cackled at Wilbur's question, "You weren't there when the doctor came by a couple of weeks ago to diagnose me!"

Wilbur reached forward to grab his wife's forearm. He did not know the doctor had come, let alone that he had given Christine a diagnosis.

“Diagnose you? Christine, what haven't you told me?”

Christine shoved Wilbur off of her, “If you were around more often, perhaps you would have noticed! I have melancholy, you ratbag!”

Melancholy. Wilbur's stomach dropped. He knew it far too well, and he knew there was no true cure. His sister, Violet, had suffered from the same for years. He missed Violet.

Christine took advantage of Wilbur's shocked state and ran from the kitchen. Within moments, he was chasing after her, but in his haste, a small leather pocket journal slipped from his pocket. He didn't notice. Wilbur's few moments of hesitation provided Christine with the time to run into their bed chambers.

Wilbur slammed his fists against the locked door as he screamed out for his wife, “Christine! Christine! Let me in! I'm begging you!”

Inside, Christine ripped the white silk curtains from their large bedroom window. The harsh movement pulled the curtain rod from the walls and smashed the vase of daisies on the ground. Christine could feel the water from the vase seeping into the hem of her dressing gown as she kneeled on the ground. The curtains were tied and looped around each other before the final knot was tightened.

Christine dragged the chair from her desk to beneath their chandelier. Standing on her toes, she was barely able to reach it but succeeded in tying her silk fate to the fixture. Undoing what remained of her bun, she slipped her neck through the loop.

Close to the finish line, Christine could hear the racehorses' hooves beating against the ground harder than ever before. The cacophony pushed her over the edge.

*You now know the honest reality of your marriage!*

*Do it while you still have the chance!*

*He will never miss you!*

*Do it!*

*Do it!*

*Do it!*

She did it.

The chair lay on the other side of the room. There was no going back. Still, Christine pried at the silk suspending her and screamed, the noose only getting tighter as she pulled at it. She didn't want to die.

By the time Wilbur broke through the door, Christine was motionless. He shrieked at the sight of her and rushed to her side to begin to untie her from where she swung. Once she fell to the floor, Wilbur was by her side. He was there for her.

"Christine! Please, Tina!" Wilbur tucked her head into his chest as he wailed, "How can I live without you?"

Wilbur tried everything he knew. He tried to shake her alive. He tried to breathe for her. He tried to get her heart going again. Anything to bring her back.

Wilbur sobbed hysterically next to his wife's corpse. Not even an hour later, the doctor forced his way through the door. He had been tipped off by the neighbors who had woken from the commotion. Wilbur couldn't care less. He just wanted Christine back.

Wilbur held Christine's cold hand as the doctor checked her pulse. Eventually, the doctor confirmed Wilbur's worst nightmare:

Christine was gone.

That night, Wilbur cried himself to sleep.

The investigators arrived the next morning to put out an official report. During their search, they found a small leather pocket journal with the initials W. S. pressed into the cover. Upon opening the pages, they began to read:

*4 May 1857*

*I cannot wait to go home tonight! I have been taking on extra court cases for the past month, and I have saved enough funds for Tina and me to adopt a child from one of the nearby orphanages and fix up the house. I know how much the deaths of our daughters*

*affected her, and I think this will help her. I haven't had much time at home, but I hope this makes up for it. All I want is for Tina to be happy. This means there is no time for any other obligation or activities. In other news, Helen Livingston sent me a flirtatious letter. That church bell never knows when to leave others alone. I sent a letter in reply, but I don't know when she will receive it. Hopefully, she'll get my message through her thick skull and leave Christine and me alone. I wouldn't be able to live without Christine. She's the sole cause of my happiness. Now that I've gotten the money for anything Tina needs or desires, we can finally be happy.*

The next few months were unusually stormy, which Wilbur thought was befitting. Now, he stood in front of a marble tomb, the smooth surface reflecting the pale moonlight and accentuating the engraved name of his only love. Carefully, he lumbered towards the grave and lowered a bouquet onto the dirt. They were daisies, Christine's favorite.

A howl escaped Wilbur's throat as he fell to his knees. He wept for the woman who brought joy into his life. His tears fell like raindrops as he realized one simple truth:

He would never be happy again.