

## Cherry-wood

Her bare feet stuck to the wooden steps just slightly as she picked up one foot after another, making her way down the stairs. Her steps morphed into 15 heart beats. As she neared the base of the stairs, Tom's music became louder, seeping under his study's hefty cherry-wood doors.

That's how Tom was. Squirrel away in his study, grab his favorite Stravinsky LP, and sit on the couch with a glass of scotch or hot coffee. Miranda detested his favorite record, and hated that she could hear it anywhere in the house.

That was Tom's way of trying to reach out. The only thing he could say to her could not be said at all. Suite from *Pulcinella* was the only thing that could draw Miranda back into an interface with him after a fight or a squabble.

But Miranda wasn't headed into the room to tell him off or to apologise for the ridiculous fight earlier that afternoon; she intended to demand Tom to beg for her forgiveness. It wouldn't be easier, and Miranda knew she would have to stay strong, for he often tricked her into believing it was all her fault to begin with. She often figured this out days later whilst chatting with the cat over a light cup of afternoon tea.

From within the study, Miranda hear Tom's LP stop playing. *Thank God*, she thought, nearing the door. She listened intently, expecting to hear him flip the disk or start it over, but there was no indication Tom had moved from his sure seat on the leather couch.

"Miranda," he told her once, weeks after they married, as they stood outside hi parent's house for dinner, "I don't think you understand me very well, but I'll tell you something: you understand me more than anyone else, and after dinner tonight, I hope you see why." He laughed and knocked on the door. She kissed him on the jaw.

"Darling, no one can begin to understand you." And as soon as the door opened, Miranda began to gain insight into Tom's mysterious personality.

For the month following the dinner, she bent to his every whim, and laughed at each of his insipid attempts at humour. She had not intended to, but she fell into this pattern, this character, and couldn't climb out. For the past four years, Miranda had allowed herself to do things she didn't want and to say things she didn't mean. But she was through. She was climbing out of the hole, the shell she made for herself, and she was going to do it deliberately and with pride.

But when Tom didn't answer the knocks at the study doors, Miranda began to lose hope. She called for him several times, and said, for the first time, things she had always meant to say. But he would not acknowledge anything she said.

As she turned away from the door, strength drained and all words sucked from her body, the cat

scratched at the door. Seeing the cat reminded Miranda of everything she confided in the creature, and reminded her that she didn't have to respect Tom's boundaries anymore; she was demolishing all restrictions he put on her. Hand she reached for the handle and entered his study.

The dead echo of the LP synthesised with the stale scent of the cavernous study. She huffed and puffed and made her way to the couch.

"God damn it, Tom, I'm speaking to you! Turn around, stand up, and face me as an equal!" When he, again, refused to recognise one demand, she became furious walked over to his slumped body on the couch.

At first, she thought he was drunk and sleeping it off again. But surely her explosive monologues would have woken him.

"Tom?" she whispered, kneeling to touch his cheek. The cat jumped up onto the back of the couch and meowed. He was stone-cold.

"Tom?!" She cried, slapping his pale cheek. She tripped over the side table on her way to the desk, where Tom kept his phone, knocking over the empty bottle of sleeping pills.

As she reached for the phone, she noticed the letter, addressed to her in black in, laying in the middle of his desk. She hung up the phone and sat in the desk chair.

The paper was stiff and crumbly, rough to the touch. Tears filled her eyes, streamed down her pallid cheeks, and filled her lips with salty sweetness.

*Miranda*, she began to read to herself.

*I have waited too long to say this. Have done to many things I did solely because I thought you wanted me to do. And said far too many things I did not mean to say. Today's fight tiff launched me- us into this situation. I wish I could have found a better way out. But by God, woman, I swear you make me do things I should never do. I'm not quite sure why, but, hopefully, as you read this, you can begin to decipher our strange marriage. Good-bye, my love, for I truly did love you.*

*Yours,  
Tom*