

The Third-Floor Bedroom

By Grady Cate

The solemn silence and discomfort of the empty mall lot was unsettling enough. Usually on a cold wednesday evening such as today, people would find themselves shopping here, browsing the shelves of every store that fits within the borders of four story property. But oddly, there was no one. Quiet, absent voices filled the void of empty stores, lacking the proper workers to make the mall function normally. Not a single abled body had shown up to do the work, with very few people, three to be exact, walking amongst the closed stores. Not a sound to be heard except for the clicking of red bottom heels from Cecilia Venson, who roamed the open corridors that surrounded her, searching for a new perfume to go along with her new outfit she had just bought minutes ago. Her long, undeviating black hair swayed behind her as she stepped, holding a white paper bag to go along with white dress. Her pale skin and thick eyebrows made her look intimidating, which was true to her personality. She was denied at the altar by her one love, a man whom she would be more than willing to give her life for. Although they were affectionate towards each other, with him spoiling her to the limit with gifts, the man was not ready, for Cecilia was so eager to get married that she was unwilling to recognize anything else in their relationship. From then on, Cecilia hadn't seen him, disregarding the messages and calls he had constantly sent to her. It was not long after though, he would be killed in a horrid auto accident. For days, Cecilia found herself crying, concealing herself from those around her and all of her nearest family. She blamed herself, contemplating why she hadn't just responded. Now she walks and shops by herself, acting cold to those around her. She buys herself the most expensive articles of clothing and accessories, spoiling herself to the fullest degree. As she walked, her phone began to buzz, catching her attention since nobody calls anymore. A string of ten digits appeared across the top of the screen, but nobody she had known, so she put the phone back to ring out. Her heels seemed to violently hit the ground, echoing amongst the nearly empty mall.

Behind her stomped a man in a tuxedo, his grin extensive across his scarred, severed face as he strutted behind her quietly.

Cecilia found herself in front of the Ultra, staring down the singular employee who stood inside as she sauntered into the store. The employee, a tall blonde lady with a grey outfit stood in the doorway, giving a discomfit smile as she walked through the door. She firmly grabbed Cecilia on the shoulder before asking if she needed assistance. As they discussed the perfume and her needs, the lady began to walk her towards the few selections in which they had, continuing to smile as they sat down. Soon after, the nicely dressed man walked in, before turning his head and staring at the two from across the store. He stood motionless, with his head slightly cocked to the right, still holding an excited yet uneasy grin, as if chewing on something of bittersweet taste. The two ladies engaged in small talk, unaware of the man who had just entered. They talked for what seemed to be hours, but only of a single subject, one so intense that it caught both of their attention long enough to host an entire conversation while browsing expensive scents.

“Did you hear?”

“Hear what?” Cecilia looked up. The employees smile made her feel uncomfortable, forcing her eyes back down to her nails in which she had been picking at.

“The story of the lady and her labradoodle? It has been ravaging the news stations,”

“Elaborate,” She looked up, realizing the lady had looked away into her own separate world, attempting to recall the events.

“An old lady tried to feed her service dog, yet the dog was so dishonored to be her pet that it refused to eat from the bowls in which were set out, for they were not his favorite color. After enough times of the dog dismissing her, the owner had had enough, and grabbed the pup, forcing him to eat. When the dog still fought, she had noticed the window was open, and threw the dog out from the third story. It didn’t take long for her to realize what she had done. Soon after, she went to open the door to pick it up, but she had fallen to a stroke, dying in her home.”

“It all began when someone left the window open. Do not bite the hand that feeds you, huh?” Cecilia said, trying to break the awkward silence as she had noticed the store had no music to soothe any customers.

The conversation came to a sudden pause when her phone began to buzz again. She reached for it. Another unknown caller. They both peered down at the phone, before Cecilia awkwardly let out a chuckle and put the phone back inside her bag. They continued to chat, not realizing the scarred faced man who had been quietly walking behind them. The employee and Cecilia agreed on a color, walked to the front, and began to cash out. As Cecilia made her way out, so too, did the man, continuing to follow her out to the backlot of the mall.

The drive home for Cecilia was all but peaceful, finding herself stuck in nightmare of traffic, which made a thirty minute drive more like two hours. It was times like these where she would break down crying in a fit, showing that even the most simple of overwhelming events still triggered her trauma left from the death of her only love. Few hours had passed before she met the parking lot of her apartment complex, stepping out into the vacant lot. She stepped out of the car, walking through the lobby, not even acknowledging the receptionist. As she stepped into the elevator to take her to her room, she realized something off beat. Looking around, Cecilia took a deep breath, before a subtle ding went off, and she was at her hallway. The door of her room was slightly cracked wide, making her question what misfortune was to bedevil her today. She walked inside, shaking as her hands reached to push open the door. A buzz came on her phone, another caller. The same ten digits that had shown up twice before throughout the day. She ignored it, slowly proceeding inside. There he sat on her couch, smiling his fraught grin, fixated on his tie as he watched her waltz in with fear. He sat and shook a tiny orange bottle.

“You’re didn’t take your Geodon, love,” He said in a familiar tone, lifting his other hand to reveal a phone.

“I have been calling all day.”

She recognized the face that sat in front of her, a man so familiar had he not been cut across the lips, neck, cheeks, and eyes. It was the man in which she had once known. A man who denied her love before saying his vows to her at their wedding. The man who had caused her an amount of excruciating pain that was once unprecedented to her. The man whom she thought had been murdered in a car accident.

“No wonder you have been seeing things. The imaginary. The fake that surrounds you. The schizophrenia. It plagues your mind,” He said, smiling as he dropped the pills in an attempt to open his hands to hug her.

“But I am home now love, here to hold you in my arms.”

She examined, noticing the cuts and bruises that surrounded his tan face. So many slashes amongst his skin that you would think his head had been stitched together. Reality became artificial for Cecilia, with the dove patterned wallpaper of her apartment suddenly coming alive. The doves began to soar, filling the room in a swarm as the hallucinations got more and more intense. Her fiancé came closer, looking to hold her once again, his arms out wide, with a worried expression across his face as Cecilia backed up towards the window of her third floor apartment. With steadfast speed, she grabbed him, pulling them both out the window, as they plummeted toward the cement. They began to free fall for a moment, before a sudden stop knocked her out.

The news of the incident was tragic as the Ulta employee sat down to watch it. She had been getting ready for bed, reading a book as the news played quietly in the background. On busy days, she'd find herself curled up in a ball, reading throughout the night to calm herself from all the hard work done at the mall. She sat, tuning in as she read along to her book.

“A lady fell from a three story window, with witnesses saying she was attempting to swat a fly or fend off from an imaginary attacker of some sort, hitting the edge of the window before falling from it. Neighbors comment that she was a schizophrenic, constantly having manic episodes from refusing to take her medicine. Although a long drop, the doctors said she will survive with some minor injuries.”

She looked up for a moment, before cocking her head to attempt to remember any instances of knowing her. Shrugging her shoulders, she looked back down at the pages, smiling her uncomfortable smile.