

## The Dilemma of Gemma Wilson

The antiquated library. It once flourished, once felt modern, new, exciting, but such as everything good and pure about this world, it must end. Here, the gold remained as its glossy exterior was stripped away as time went by. The gilded memory of it slowly faded from the minds of its users as they gradually moved away. The life and exuberance it held were felt in the many eccentricities that could not be changed or altered. It sat, brooding on what glorious life it had, and if that would ever return.

But, for now, it was in the midst of a steady decline of disuse, and stayed that way for the rest of their time.

Only a few miles south, Gemma Wilson sat in her little car, contemplating the next part of her route while pulled over to the side of a road that no one meant to pass down. She reached down into her blue jacket pocket and pulled out a small iPhone. Pressing the home button, she groaned in frustration- it was dead at long last. She threw it gently into the empty leather passenger seat and searched for a map. After digging around for a few minutes, she jubilantly lifted a worn and slightly torn map with which she regarded as her freedom. Yes, the grubby, old-fashioned piece of paper seemed to her a joy for which nothing more could compare to its glory.

The map was spread out, and she traced it delicately with her index finger. Tapping quickly, she found the road she was on. Muttering softly the names of towns ahead, she stopped abruptly. She realized swiftly that the nearest listed towns were at least 50 miles away, and the gas meter in her car was lingering just above empty.

She leaned back angrily in her seat and turned to look out the window. Snow was beginning to fall. Closing her eyes, she took three deep breaths and looked again. Still falling, but now the snow seemed to be closer to what one could describe as “a torrent.”

“That’s- well, that’s just *great*, isn’t it?” she said with a tone drenched in sarcasm and irritation. She slapped the dashboard with her right hand and all her might. Finished with simply sitting around, she took her small bag and left her car in the tumbling snow.

Gemma sauntered briskly through the onslaught of the white, but the ground was still rather dry as she approached the forest ahead.

Trees stood at attention, stately and they made the air crisp and fine to breathe. Tall and decorated with masses and masses of leaves, eschewing the artificial in all respects. Gemma made her way through, and was now tumbling through the snowdrifts piling between the brush and tree trunks. Close to tears, she had now been walking for three hours with mounting aggravation. She hadn’t the faintest clue of what she really was looking for, but some undefinable instinct told her to keep walking. She shivered from the deep chill that now lingered in the depths of her bones.

A town, perhaps? Village, people, a lone cottage? The possibility of any sort of warmth in the depth of the woods at first brought hope and the vague liftings of a smile, but now the thought of trudging on any longer brought a vile repulsion. Still, she went on. At some point, it even occurred to her that she would have to walk all the way back to her car, which had been on her back burners a while, but now it bothered her. She grew indecisive, wanting to turn back, but knowing it would be all for nothing then.

Eventually the snow relented, slowing to a light flurry. To her utter delight, she spotted smoke rising into the fading snow in the near distance. Gemma began to run, tripping here and there, but far too excited to walk the rest of the way. She saw wood, not of the plethora of trees, but of a sturdy structure not far ahead. Eagerness got the best of her, and she cried out with joy. She cleared the last ten yards between her and what appeared to be a house faster than anyone could expect of such a person.

The building was funny. Built in a peculiar manner. It was comprised of three stories, but each level was uneven and didn't fit together properly on top of each other. It somehow managed to look strong and proud at one moment, and terribly unsafe the next. Gemma suddenly found herself at the red door. Its paint was chipped, but it still held a bold stature in contrast to the rest of the building, a dull brown.

She rapped on the door, and paused abruptly as she heard the clatter of a pair of footsteps coming nearer and nearer. Gemma suddenly felt a twinge of anxiety, alone in the dark-well, not so alone now. The sky was painted a deep navy, the stars pinned intricately through the night. The door creaked open. She sucked in a breath.

The door revealed a tall, lanky woman of about thirty. She wore a long brown coat, riddled with colorful patches and buttons. Her thick brown hair was intricately braided in two plaits down her back. Her face was rather ordinary, but from first glance you could see she was anything but.

"Hello? Oh come in- come in out of that wretched cold. Here, here!" exclaimed the woman.

"Thank you, I've been walking for hours just trying to find another soul. Thank goodness!" Gemma replied, her voice relieved.

"It's no problem at all, oh- I haven't even introduced myself it seems. My name is Adley Moriston, and I run this place. Well, we all do," she explained, smiling.

"I'm Gemma Wilson, and my car broke down miles down that way," she gestured, "and pardon, but did you say 'we'?"

"Of course, why, you think I'd do this all alone?"

"No, no, but I hardly know what 'it' is yet."

"You ought to take off your coat and I'll show it to you!"

“Alright, thank you for your hospitality.”

Gemma shrugged off her blue coat and hung it beside the door on a rack carved with various patterns of animals.

“Come on now, I’ll show you around,” Adley suggested. She held out her long arm to Gemma. Put off by this formal offerance, Gemma hesitated. She slowly lifted her own arm and placed it atop Adley’s. She began to look more closely at the room she was in. Filled with books.

The books were dusty, slightly moldy, but they filled every nook and cranny of the room. Bookshelves spread over every bare inch of floral wallpaper, looking almost as if they’d collapse if you were to sneeze.

“But, miss, what exactly is it?” Gemma inquired.

“A library, what else?”

“A library!” Gemma cried, “who can even use it?!”

“Patience.”

They began to walk slowly until reaching a corner lined with old photos. One was a small man holding a giant dog, another a car from the 1930s sitting in a patch of redwood trees, surrounded by its exhaust swirling through the light.

“Really, how long have you been here?” Gemma asked.

“Since about 19shmtshm,” Adley mumbled gibberish, and Gemma didn’t question it. Instead she took her hand off of Adley’s arm and made a full turn around the photo-lined hallway. She walked on to the end of the hall and made a right. A gasp quickly emanated from her, and Adley rounded the bend.

“Oh, it’s only Alexandra cleaning out our stock,” explained Adley with a tone filled with amusement. Alexandra appeared to be an old woman of 80 or 90 sitting in a full, floor-length dress that seemed to be of the nineteenth century, which was endlessly comical to Gemma.

“Cleaning the stock? Oh, you mean like dusting the books or something or other?”  
laughed Gemma.

“No!” Alexandra croaked, fatally serious. “I take out all the things people have left in them, of course. Bookmarks, photographs- where do you think we get them? house keys, yarn, oh and once even a dead mouse!”

Gemma quickly sat down amidst the heaps of books.

“Besides that mouse, of course, that’s marvelous,” Gemma exclaimed, her voice delighted.

“Get off that floor, dear, there’s an awful lot of spit that builds up right there,” Adley mentioned flatly.

Gemma leaped up off the ground as if she’d seen that feared mouse.

“What? What on- spit?” Gemma sputtered.

“Just having a bit of fun, but do be careful, that one does spit,” Adley explained, looking past Gemma and giving Alexandra a pointed look.

“Come, dear, let’s go on,” Adley pulled Gemma, and they both hopped over the books and continued down the hall. A staircase loomed, and they climbed it steadily. As Gemma walked, she missed a step and nearly tripped on the broken hardwood she trod on, but recovered and reached the top.

“What’ll we find here?” Gemma asked, failing in any attempts at masking her whole-hearted curiosity enveloping her mind.

“Oh, just little things here and there,” Adley said, leading her into the first door to their right. Opening the door revealed a room filled to the brim with quails. Nothing else. Just thousands of them, and quickly Gemma shut the door.

Another door revealed another room filled with dusty tomes, stacked in staggering piles. One slight of a girl stood looking out a window, and she watched the snow continue to fall. The off-putting part to Gemma was that another identical girl stood about five feet back from the first. The second girl simply stared at the back of the first one's head, not speaking.

"Hello?" Gemma spoke hesitantly.

"Hello?" the first one repeated.

"Yes, wh-" Gemma was cut off by

"Hello?" the second one continued.

"Yes, wh-" the first one said.

"Yes, wh-" the second repeated.

"Done with this," Gemma said, quickly walking out the door and making her way to the end of the hallway. A door larger than all the others stood there, painted a vivid purple.

"Don't tell me here there's a domesticated bear or some nonsense like that," Gemma said to Adley.

"Of course not, Tim left a few months back!" Adley replied in a serious tone.

Gemma pulled the door open and her mouth was agape. The entire room, the floor, the walls, the ceiling, they were all made of glass. The snow was the most beautiful and tragical and glorious thing at that moment. The thing that had gotten her there, kept her there, now seemed, seemed *right*.

The only thing in the room remained a thick book in the exact center. Gemma's curiosity having gotten the better of her time and time again that day, strode rapidly to it while Adley leaned against the doorframe with a knowing grin on her face.

Gemma leant over and picked up the book. There was no name embossed on it. She quickly flipped through it, but shockingly enough every single page was blank.

“Say, why are all the-” Gemma gasped suddenly. Then she didn’t, for there was no Gemma to speak of. The book clattered to the floor, looking up at the snow, open at the middle. Now, it was filled with words. Gemma’s blood had become ink, her soul wit, her heart feeling, stuck in the pages.

Adley crossed the room, picked up the book, and smiled. She practically skipped downstairs to the hallway.

“Got it again?” Alexandra asked.

“Of course, their curiosity is far too much to bear!”

They both laughed at the folly of the humans.

“It’ll be a great new addition though, she seemed a nice one.”

And with that, Adley found an empty place on one of the cavernous shelves and placed the leather-bound book into it just like the many others before it. And there Gemma remained for ever and ever, and her final mark was the green spine that read in gold lettering, *The Dilemma of Gemma Wilson*.