

TENDER

by

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List of Characters

F. Scott Fitzgerald - a man in his late-twenties

Zelda Fitzgerald - a woman in her mid to late-twenties; a fading beauty

Ernest Hemingway - a ruggedly handsome man in his mid-twenties

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ACT ONE

TIME: 1926 - NIGHT

PLACE: PARIS APARTMENT

Music is heard as the lights fade up to SCOTT FITZGERALD, a handsome man in his late twenties, writing at his desk. The cries of young child, three to four years old, not wanting to go to bed, are heard.

SCOTTIE (O.S.)

Please, mommie, please. Five more minutes?

ZELDA (O.S.)

I've told you "no" already. Now stay in your bed and go to sleep...or I'll tie you up. Did you hear me?

(ZELDA FITZGERALD, a fading beauty in her mid-twenties walks in.)

ZELDA

Finally. I didn't think I'd ever get her into bed. All she wanted to do was to stay up and play. And I told her, "No. She needed to go to bed." But she wouldn't listen to me. I swear that child is goin' to be trouble when she grows up.

(Laughs to herself)

Sounds like someone I used to know...someone I used to be. Are you listenin' to me? Scott? Scott!

SCOTT

(Without looking up and continuing to work)
Yes? Did you say something?

ZELDA

I'm talkin' to you.

SCOTT

You were? Was it anything important?

ZELDA

Of course, it was. It was about our daughter.

SCOTT

(Looks up)
What about her?

ZELDA

Well...she...Oh, nothin'. It's not that important.

SCOTT

(To himself)
It never is.

ZELDA

Excuse me?

SCOTT

I said that was very nice.

ZELDA

Oh. What are you workin' on?

SCOTT

A story for the Post.

ZELDA

What's this one about?

SCOTT

A love affair gone sour.

ZELDA

Sounds familiar.

SCOTT

You write what you know.

ZELDA

So I've been told. Who is this story based on...or should I guess?

SCOTT

(Hands her his glass)
Pour me a drink.

ZELDA

You didn't answer my question.

SCOTT

Do you really want to know?

(Zelda looks at him for a moment and then takes his glass.)

ZELDA

No...not really. I suppose a nightcap wouldn't hurt anyone. Though I must admit I've been under the weather all day from last night's activities.

SCOTT

You mean hung over, don't you?

(She pours a drink and hands it to him.)

ZELDA

You're such a wordsmith.

SCOTT

Thank you.

ZELDA

And for your information...you're the one who's always passin' out at parties...just when things are gettin' interestin' and...usually after you've made an ass of yourself.

SCOTT

I do not.

ZELDA

What about the night before last? At Gerald and Sara's?

SCOTT

I don't remember.

ZELDA

You never do. I always have to make the apologies afterwards...apologies which everyone has heard more than once.

SCOTT

Well, it gives you something to do in the daytime.

ZELDA

Thank you...but I have other things to occupy my time besides bein' your personal secretary.

SCOTT

You do, huh?

ZELDA

Yes.

SCOTT

Like what?

ZELDA

Well...like...like my dancin.'

SCOTT

Oh, I forgot. What about being a wife and mother?

ZELDA

That, too.

SCOTT

Do you know something?

ZELDA
What?

SCOTT
We do make a wonderful couple.

ZELDA
Do we?

SCOTT
Why, yes. We're on everyone's list.

ZELDA
Or used to be.

(Zelda finishes her drink and walks to
make herself another one.)

SCOTT
I wouldn't drink too much if I were you.

ZELDA
Well, you're not me.

SCOTT
Hem's coming over.

ZELDA
He's what? At this hour? I look a mess.

SCOTT
He's coming over to see me...not you.

ZELDA
Why am I not surprised?

SCOTT
I don't know.

ZELDA
Why didn't you tell me?

SCOTT
It slipped my mind.

ZELDA
Gin can do that to you.

SCOTT
You should know. He asked if he could stop over
later this evening.

ZELDA
And you said, yes...right? To what do we owe the
honor of his presence?

SCOTT

He wants to go over my notes on his book.

ZELDA

On his book?! The one you're rewritin'.

SCOTT

I'm just helping him.

ZELDA

Are you? And what about your new book...the romantic one?

(Scott stands up from his desk,
perturbed with Zelda.)

SCOTT

How can there be any notes when it's not finished?

ZELDA

You've been workin' on it for two years...ever since Gatsby.

SCOTT

I've been writing stories...mindless stories to keep us in the comforts we're accustomed to. Any complaints?

ZELDA

No. I just wanted to know.

SCOTT

I thought you wouldn't mind.

ZELDA

Does it matter?

SCOTT

It did...once.

ZELDA

Not anymore?

SCOTT

What do you think?

ZELDA

I was only askin'.

SCOTT

And?

ZELDA

I don't want to think about it.

(In the midst of another screaming match, Zelda hurls herself onto the chase lounge and starts to weep. Scott watches her for a moment and then walks over and tries to reconcile her.)

SCOTT

How did it go? Oh, yes.
(Recites from memory)
In the fall of 1916.
In the cool of the afternoon
I met Caroline under a white moon...

ZELDA

What are you talkin' about? Who's Caroline?

SCOTT

(Remembering)
There was an orchestra - Bingo-Bango
Playing for us to dance the tango
And the people all clapped as we arose
For your sweet face and my new clothes.
(To himself)
Life was like that, after all, filled with young,
lovely people doing young, lovely things.

ZELDA

You're gettin' drunk again. I can tell.

SCOTT

Don't you remember that summer?

ZELDA

When?

SCOTT

You know...the summer of eighteen when we first met.

ZELDA

(Stands up.)
Vaguely.

SCOTT

I was commissioned as a first lieutenant and was transferred to Camp Sheridan in Montgomery.

ZELDA

How could I forget?

SCOTT

(As he pours himself another drink)
You..with your complete, fine and full-hearted selfishness and child-mindedness.

ZELDA

Oh, how you can compliment a girl! You're such a --

SCOTT

Sentimental fool?

ZELDA

No, I was thinkin' of something else.

SCOTT

Don't you remember when we first met? It was on a hot, July night at the county club. You were standing there, surrounded by droves of young men.

ZELDA

There were always young men around me. Handsome and young and strong...and willin' to do anything for me.

SCOTT

I'll never forget seeing you for the first time. You were the most beautiful girl I'd ever seen...though according to local gossips, you weren't very respectable.

(The lights change to reflect a different time - 1918. A large social gathering is heard in the background. Holding court, a young Zelda girlishly teases the unseen men who surround her.)

ZELDA

Respectable?! I don't want to be respectable because respectable girls aren't attractive. What's the big thing about bein' respectable anyway? Boys like to dance with the girls they can kiss and men will marry the girls they could kiss before they had asked their fathers. Perceivin' these things, I'm awakin' up from this lethargy of sub-debism, and I'm goin' to bob my hair. What do you think about that? I'm goin' to put on my choicest pair of earrings and a great deal of audacity and rouge and then I'm goin' into battle.

(Scott walks over to her, pretending to be one of her suitors.)

SCOTT

Battle?! But fighting isn't lady-like.

ZELDA

(Looks through the crowd and sees him)
Who said anything about bein' a lady?

SCOTT

You're just joshing with me, aren't you

ZELDA

Joshin'?! I thought it was more like flirtin'.

SCOTT

Has anyone ever told you flirting will get you into trouble?

ZELDA

My daddy has.

SCOTT

Then why do you do it?

ZELDA

You only live once. I flirt because it's fun to flirt. And you know what else?

SCOTT

What?

ZELDA

I wear a one-piece bathing suit because I have a good figure and I cover my face with powder and paint because I don't need it. I refuse to be bored chiefly because I'm not borin'. The things I do are the things I always wanted to do.

SCOTT

Aren't you afraid of what people will say about you?

ZELDA

Afraid of what?! There are some mothers who disapprove of their sons takin' me to dances, to teas, to swim, and most of all...to heart. I don't care. Let them be that way if they don't have anything better to do.

SCOTT

What about the other girls?

ZELDA

What about them?

SCOTT

That they gossip?

ZELDA

They're just jealous, that's all. So prim, so proper...so borin'. They're just a bunch of ninnies. I'll admit I do have mostly masculine friends, but youth does not need friends -- it only needs crowds.

SCOTT

You can only be young for so long.

ZELDA

Says who? I'll be young as long as I want to be.

SCOTT

And then? What happens then?

ZELDA

I don't know. I haven't thought that far ahead. All I want is the right to be something else...a transient, poignant figure who will be dead tomorrow. The majority of women go through life with a death-bed air either of snatchin' the last-moment or with martyr-like resignation. They don't die tomorrow or the next day. They have to live on to any one of many bitter ends...I don't want that type of endin' and I won't have it. I won't.

(Dance music is heard in the background. She walks over to him.)

ZELDA

(continuing)

I love this song. Want to dance with me?

SCOTT

Normally, it is the man who does the asking.

ZELDA

(Extends her hand to him)

Well, I'm Zelda Sayre and I refuse to be the norm. It's too borin' and predictable.

SCOTT

Is that so?

(Takes her hand)

I'm Scott Fitzgerald.

ZELDA

Do you want to just stand there and talk...or dance with me?

SCOTT

What do you want to do?

ZELDA

(Breaks off and walks away)

There are others who will gladly.

SCOTT

(Grabs her hand)

So I've been told.

(Zelda leads Scott to the dance floor where they start to dance.)

ZELDA

My...there's something different about you.

SCOTT
Like what?

ZELDA
Like how you move.

SCOTT
How am I supposed to move?

ZELDA
I don't know. You're not like any man that I've danced with.

SCOTT
How's that?

ZELDA
It seems there's some heavenly support beneath your shoulder blades, liftin' your feet from the ground in ecstatic suspension.

SCOTT
Ecstatic suspension?!

ZELDA
Yes. It's as if you secretly enjoy the ability to fly but you walk instead as a compromise to convention.

SCOTT
I don't like to compromise.

ZELDA
Who does?

(The dance music ends.)

ZELDA
(continuing)
Well..

SCOTT
Well...then.

ZELDA
Why does the music always end so soon?

(The lights change to reflect a different time - 1926. Fitzgerald's apartment, Paris, France.)

SCOTT
So much has happened since that night...that dance.

ZELDA
There have been so many dances. I don't remember.

SCOTT

Funny, from that moment on, you made me want to do things for you. I knew it was wrong, but I wanted you...you, this warm creature of silk and life who crept so close to me.

ZELDA

And you don't want me any more?

SCOTT

Would I be here if I didn't?

ZELDA

Then kiss me.

SCOTT

(Tries to move away)
No...I don't think this is a good time. Hem's coming over.

ZELDA

Why do you always resist me?

SCOTT

I don't. I just don't think --

ZELDA

You do. You're always makin' excuses.

SCOTT

I told you already.

ZELDA

Do you love me?

SCOTT

Love?! Love is a big word like "life"...."death."

ZELDA

You didn't answer my question.

SCOTT

I thought I was explicit with my words.

ZELDA

Words. Always words. Without action, they've no meanin'.

(Tries to embrace Scott)

I'm lonely without you. I need you.

SCOTT

(Breaks away from her)

No...not now. He'll be here shortly.

ZELDA

He's always comin' over. He's always here. Why can't we have one evening without him? Doesn't he have a home?

SCOTT

I told you he's coming over to review my notes on his novel.

ZELDA

You spend more time promotin' and rewritin' his work than you do your own.

SCOTT

I don't either.

ZELDA

You do.

SCOTT

What do you have against him?

ZELDA

Because he wants you.

SCOTT

What do you mean?

ZELDA

He's wants your talent...your name...your influence...your soul.

SCOTT

You're being crazy.

ZELDA

I'm not either. I've heard stories.

SCOTT

Stories? About whom?

ZELDA

About him...and others. Of course, I don't believe a word of them. He's always so charmin' around me...such a gentleman.

SCOTT

What have you heard?

ZELDA

I...I don't remember the details...I told you already I didn't believe a word...and I still don't. Why are you gettin' so upset? They're just stories.

(She pours herself another drink.)

SCOTT

I wish you wouldn't drink so much. It's not becoming.

ZELDA

Says who? Emily Post? You've never complained before.

SCOTT

It's never been a problem before.

ZELDA

You...you of all people tellin' me not to drink so much?

SCOTT

I'm a writer. It goes with the territory.

ZELDA

Oh really. Is that how it goes? Remember, Gofo...drinkin's like animal combat to me. In drinkin' bouts, any man left standin' can claim the harem, even if there's only a harem of one...and that's me.

SCOTT

As if I didn't know already. You forget that I've had a front row seat at your escapades.

ZELDA

Oh, how you always remind me. Look, Gofo...I can drink you under any table any time you want and you know it...so don't worry about me.

(Scott walks over and pours himself a drink.)

SCOTT

Who said anything about being worried. I really don't care...not any more.

ZELDA

I should have left you years ago.

SCOTT

You've tried already...or don't you remember the story?

ZELDA

How can I forget? You keep bringin' it up every chance you get...every person you run into...every party you attend. You know, there are other stories to tell. Why do you keep bringin' it up?

SCOTT

So you don't forget.

ZELDA

Others can play this game, too. I know some stories...and I'll tell them if I have to.

SCOTT

No one would believe you.

ZELDA

So?! That's the beauty of it. You don't know what's true and what's not.

(A knock on door.)

SCOTT

He's here. Would you mind answering the door?

ZELDA

No. Answer it yourself. You invited him, not me.

SCOTT

Where's your Southern hospitality?

ZELDA

Where's your Princeton manners?

(He moves toward the door.)

SCOTT

All right.

(He opens the door.)

SCOTT

(continuing)

Hem, come on in. We were hoping it was you, weren't we?

ZELDA

Oh yes, of course.

(ERNEST HEMINGWAY comes in.)

ERNEST

I hope I'm not disturbing you.

ZELDA

We're already disturbed...or haven't you noticed?
Can I take your coat?