

Afterward
by
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based on a story by
Edith Wharton

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EXT. HOUSE -- DAY

On a gray summer afternoon, a man's voice echoes from inside the large, somber house in the country.

ALAN (O.S.)
(laughing)
Oh, there IS a ghost, of course,
but you won't know it.

INT. HOUSE -- DAY -- CONTINUOUS

ALAN, a 40-year-old real estate salesman, is showing the vacant country house to MARY and NED BOYNE, a handsome couple in their mid-30s.

NED
Won't know it? What's the point of
having a ghost if you don't know
you have one?

ALAN
I don't know. But that's the story.

NED
That there's a ghost, but that
nobody knows there's a ghost?

ALAN
Well -- not 'til afterward, at any
rate.

NED
Afterward?

ALAN
Not 'til long, long afterward.

Mary speaks up, as if from some cavernous depth of divination.

MARY
Suddenly -- suddenly, long
afterward, you say to yourself,
"THAT was the ghost."

She is oddly startled at the sepulchral sound of her voice as it falls on the banter of the other two, and she sees the same surprise in Alan's face.

(CONTINUED)

ALAN

I suppose so. You just have to wait.

NED

Oh, forget waiting! Life's too short for a ghost who can only be enjoyed in retrospect.

MARY

If there's a ghost, why hasn't its name been handed down in the family? How has it managed to keep its secret identity?

ALAN

(shaking his head)

Don't ask me. But it has. Anyway, this town's full of ghosts--

NED

Yes, but that won't do. I don't want to have to drive 10 miles to see somebody else's ghost. I want one of my own on the premises. Is there a ghost in this house or not?

Alan looks uncomfortable.

INT. HOUSE -- MONTAGE -- MOVING IN -- DAY

Mary and Ned are involved in the happy confusion of cleaning, unpacking boxes, and arranging furniture.

INT. ROOM UPSTAIRS -- DAY

On a warm afternoon in October, Mary is polishing some woodwork when she presses a panel that opens at her touch. The open panel reveals a flight of corkscrew stairs.

MARY

What on earth...?

She drops her polishing rag. With a shrug, she enters the darkness and starts up the stairs.

INT. STAIRWELL -- DAY -- CONTINUOUS

The dark flight leads to a door at the top. Mary tries the doorknob. The door opens.

EXT. ROOF -- DAY -- CONTINUOUS

The stairs have led Mary to an unsuspected flat ledge of the roof -- the roof which, from below, seems to slope abruptly on all sides.

Mary is delighted. She turns and runs back down the stairs.

MARY

Ned!

INT. LIBRARY -- DAY

Mary rushes in, snatching Ned from his paperwork.

NED

What are you doing?

MARY

Come with me -- you have to see this.

She pulls Ned away from his desk.

EXT. ROOF -- DAY

Standing on the narrow ledge, Ned puts his arm around Mary's waist as their gaze flows over the landscape.

EXT. LANDSCAPE -- NED AND MARY'S P.O.V. -- CONTINUOUS

The two look over the long horizon line of hills, hedges, a pond, and trees on the lawn. The view from this hidden spot is beautiful.

BACK TO NED AND MARY -- CONTINUOUS

MARY

And now the other way.

Closely pressed to Ned, Mary gently turns him around. The two absorb the view like a long, satisfying drink.

Just then, while they are gazing and holding each other, Mary feels Ned's arm stiffen, and she turns to look at him. She sees a shadow of anxiety, of perplexity, fall across Ned's face, and she follows his glance.

EXT. YARD -- MARY'S P.O.V. -- CONTINUOUS

Mary sees the figure of a youngish, slightly built MAN wearing a ball cap. The man is wandering down the lane with the tentative gait of a stranger trying to find his way.

BACK TO NED AND MARY -- CONTINUOUS

Suddenly Ned pushes Mary to the side and speaks sharply.

NED

Wait here.

He dashes down the twisting stairs without pausing to give Mary another word. After a moment, Mary cautiously follows Ned down the corkscrew stairs.

INT. MAIN STAIRCASE -- DAY -- CONTINUOUS

When Mary reaches the landing, she pauses, leaning over the banister and straining her ears. She lingers there until, somewhere below, she hears the CLOSING OF A DOOR. Then Mary goes down the steps until she reaches the front hall.

INT. FRONT HALL -- DAY -- CONTINUOUS

The front door is closed and the hall is empty. The library door is open. After listening in vain for any sound of voices within, Mary finally crosses the library threshold.

INT. LIBRARY -- DAY -- CONTINUOUS

Mary finds Ned alone, vaguely shuffling papers on his desk. He looks up, as if surprised at Mary's entrance. The shadow of anxiety has passed from Ned's face, leaving it bright and clear.

MARY

What was it? Who was that?

NED

Who?

(CONTINUED)

MARY

The man we saw coming toward the house.

Ned seems honestly to have to stop and think.

NED

The man? Oh, I thought I saw Mr. Peters -- I dashed after him to say a word about the pool drain, but he disappeared before I could get down.

MARY

Disappeared? He seemed to be walking slowly when we saw him.

NED

(shrugs)

I thought so too, but he must have gotten up steam before I made it down.

(brief pause)

What do you say we try that little Chinese restaurant tonight? I hear it's run by an Italian family.

MARY

(with a small laugh)

Sounds great.

INT. LIBRARY -- NIGHT

Mary has fallen asleep reading on the sofa. The book slowly slides from her hands and hits the floor with a CRACK. Mary awakens suddenly. She rises from the sofa and stands among the shadows of the hearth.

Suddenly Mary seems to feel a chill, and pulls her sweater closer. She glances around, down the long, dim library. Shadows hang in layers from the low ceiling, the walls of books, the smoke-blurred hearth. Mary moves toward the glass door.

The outer world still holds a faint light.

EXT. THE DOOR -- MARY'S P.O.V. -- NIGHT -- CONTINUOUS

As Mary peers out across the court, a figure shapes itself in the tapering perspective. At first it looks like a mere blot of deeper gray moving toward her in the grayness.

BACK TO MARY -- CONTINUOUS

Mary's heart seems to leap.

EXT. THE DOOR -- MARY'S P.O.V. -- CONTINUOUS

A moment later, the ambiguous figure, gaining substance and character, shows itself to Mary as her husband.

INT. LIBRARY -- CONTINUOUS

Ned opens the glass door and enters the dark library.

NED

Did you have a nice nap?

MARY

I...didn't mean to have a nap at all. I was reading, and the next thing I knew, I was waking up in this dark room.

(turning on a lamp)

Why did you let me sleep?

NED

You've been working so hard, I didn't have the heart to wake you. I'm glad you finally asked Trina to help with things.

MARY

Yes, she's been a lot of help to me. What were you doing outside in the dark?

NED

Oh, the heater in the pool isn't working.

MARY

The heater too?

NED

If ANYTHING on this property worked right, I'd think something was

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

NED (cont'd)
wrong. Peters is supposed to come
around again tomorrow. I'm sure
he'll get it fixed.

MARY
(after a pause)
You know, I know it's crazy, but I
never remember --

NED
Remember what?

They move closer together.

MARY
-- that when you see our ghost, you
don't realize it.

Ned's hand is on Mary's sleeve, and he keeps it there.

NED
Do you think you've seen it?

MARY
I was so eager to see it, I
actually thought YOU were it!

NED
Me -- just now?

His arm drops away, and he turns from Mary with a faint
laugh.

NED (CONT'D)
Really, sweetheart, you'd better
give it up if that's the best you
can do.

MARY
Yes, I give it up -- I give it up.
(turning on him abruptly)
Have you?

Ned looks startled. Before he can answer, TRINA, 45, Mary's
friend, enters the room carrying some letters.

TRINA
Hi, guys. I stopped at the post
office earlier when I was running
around. Here's the mail.

She hands it to Ned.

NED
Thanks, Trina.

TRINA
I'll warm up the coffee and bring
it 'round in a minute.

MARY
Thanks, hon.

When Trina leaves the room, Mary asks Ned the question again.

MARY (CONT'D)
Have you?

NED
(absently)
Have I what?

The nearby lamp light brings out a sharp stamp of worry between Ned's brows as he turns over the letters.

MARY
Given up trying to see the ghost?

Her heart seems to beat a little faster at the experiment she is making. Ned, laying the mail aside, moves away into the shadow of the hearth.

NED
I never tried.

He tears open the wrapper of a newspaper. Mary persists, as she moves to a chair beside the fireplace.

MARY
Well, the exasperating thing is
that there's no use trying, since
you can't be sure you've seen it
'til long afterward.

Ned is unfolding the newspaper as if he has hardly heard Mary, but after a pause during which the paper RUSTLES LOUDLY in his hands, Ned lifts his head and speaks abruptly.

NED
Do you have any idea how long
afterward?

Mary has sunk into a chair. From her seat she looks up startled at Ned's profile, which is darkly projected against the light.

(CONTINUED)

MARY

No. None. Have you?

Ned crumples the newspaper and speaks with a faint tinge of impatience.

NED

Lord, no! I only meant, is there any legend, any tradition, as to that?

MARY

Not that I know of. What makes you ask?

But any answer from Ned is stopped by the reappearance of Trina with coffee.

TRINA

Here you go.

MARY

Thanks, Trina.

TRINA

Sure.

MARY

Did you have a chance to stop at the wallpaper store?

TRINA

Yes, I picked up 12 rolls, but the rest is still on order.

MARY

Okay, great.

Ned seats himself near a lamp and is absorbed in the perusal of his letters.

TRINA

Did you need anything else tonight?

MARY

No, I think we're good. Thanks for all your help today, Trina.

TRINA

No problem, it's been fun. I guess I'll be heading home, then.

(CONTINUED)

MARY

Okay, drive carefully.

NED

See you tomorrow, Trina. Thanks again.

TRINA

Mm hmm, good night.

She leaves. When Mary looks up from her coffee, she is struck by the change in Ned's face. The lines of painful tension have vanished, and only a small trace of fatigue lingers.

Ned glances up, as if drawn by Mary's gaze, and meets her eyes with a smile.

NED

I've been dying for that coffee.
Mm, here's a letter for you.

Mary takes the letter Ned holds out in exchange for the cup of coffee. Mary breaks open the envelope as she sits down in a chair near Ned.

After reading for a few moments, Mary's next conscious motion is that of starting to her feet, the letter falling to the floor as she rises, while she holds out a long newspaper clipping.

MARY

Oh, Ned -- what's this? What does it mean?

Ned has risen at almost the same instant, as if hearing Mary's cry before she utters it.

NED

What's going on? What's wrong?

He moves toward Mary. The shadow of apprehension is on his face again. Mary's hand shakes perceptibly as she hands Ned the newspaper clipping.

MARY

This article -- from the Sentinel -- a man named Elwell has brought suit against you -- there was something wrong with the Blue Star Mine stock. I don't understand it...

To her astonishment, Mary sees that her words have the almost immediate effect of dissipating the strained watchfulness of Ned's look.

NED

Oh, that!

He glances down at the printed clipping, then folds it as if it is something harmless and familiar.

NED (CONT'D)

What's the matter with you this evening, Mary? I thought you'd gotten some bad news or something.

Mary stands before Ned with her undefinable terror subsiding slowly under the reassuring touch of Ned's composure.

MARY

You knew about this, then -- it's all right?

NED

Certainly I knew about it, and it's all right.

MARY

But what IS it? I don't understand. What is this man accusing you of?

NED

Oh, pretty nearly every crime in the book.

He tosses the clipping down and throws himself comfortably into the armchair near the fire.

NED (CONT'D)

Do you really want to hear the story? It's not particularly interesting -- just a squabble over interests in the Blue Star.

MARY

But who is this Elwell? I don't know the name.

NED

Oh, he's a guy I put into it -- gave him a helping hand. I told you all about him at the time.

(CONTINUED)

MARY

I...I must have forgotten. But if you helped him, why is he doing this in return?

NED

Oh, probably some shyster lawyer got hold of him and talked him into it. It's all pretty technical and complicated. I thought it would bore you.

Mary glances again at Ned and is reassured by the composure of Ned's face, yet she seems to need more definite grounds for reassurance.

MARY

But doesn't this lawsuit worry you? Why haven't you ever spoken to me about it?

NED

I didn't speak of it at first because it DID worry me -- annoyed me, anyway. But it's all ancient history now.

Mary seems to feel a quick thrill of relief.

MARY

You mean it's over? He's lost his case?

There is a just-perceptible delay in Ned's reply.

NED

The suit's been withdrawn -- that's all.

But Mary persists, as if to keep from being too easily put off.

MARY

Withdrawn because he saw he had no chance?

NED

Oh, he had no chance.

Mary is still struggling with a dim perplexity.

(CONTINUED)

MARY

How long ago was it withdrawn?

Ned pauses, with a slight return of his former uncertainty.

NED

I've gotten the news just now, but
I've been expecting it.

MARY

Just now -- in one of your letters?

NED

Yes. In one of my letters.

Ned rises and strolls across the room, placing himself on the sofa at Mary's side. He puts an arm around her. Ned's hand seeks Mary's and clasps it. Turning slowly, drawn by the warmth of Ned's cheek, Mary meets the smiling clearness of his eyes.

MARY

It's all right -- everything's all
right?

NED

I give you my word, it was never
more right.

He laughs a little at Mary, holding her close.

INT. HALL OUTSIDE THE LIBRARY -- DAY

Mary, dressed for yard work, approaches the library door. As she passes, she cannot resist peeking in at Ned.

INT. LIBRARY -- MARY'S P.O.V. -- CONTINUOUS

Ned is at his desk, his face bent above his papers. He looks untroubled, naturally and unconsciously in possession of himself.

BACK TO MARY -- CONTINUOUS

Satisfied, Mary continues on her way out the door.

EXT. HOUSE -- DAY -- CONTINUOUS

The bright autumn morning still holds a touch of summer. Mary comes out of the house and walks toward the garden.

EXT. GARDEN -- DAY

Some time later, Mary is on hands and knees, working in a flower garden near the front of the house. She hears STEPS behind her, and turns around to face them.

The sunlight is in Mary's eyes, but she can make out the figure of a youngish, slightly built man wearing a ball cap. The newcomer, on seeing Mary, lifts his cap, and pauses with the air of a gentleman wanting to have it immediately known that his intrusion is involuntary. The young man makes no utterance of any sort.

After a moment, Mary speaks, in a tone responding to the courteous deprecation of the man's attitude.

MARY

Is there someone you wanted to see?

MAN

I came to see Mr. Boyne.

Mary looks at the visitor more closely.

The brim of the young man's ball cap casts a shadow on his face, which, obscured, wears a look of seriousness, as of a person arriving on business.

She speaks to the visitor.

MARY

Do you have an appointment with Mr. Boyne?

The young man hesitates, as if unprepared for the question.

MAN

I -- think he expects me.

It is Mary's turn to hesitate.

MARY

Well... this is his time for work -- he never sees anyone in the morning.

(CONTINUED)

The visitor looks at Mary a moment without answering, then as if accepting her decision, he begins to move away. As he turns, Mary sees the man pause and glance up at the peaceful house. Something in the man's air suggests weariness and disappointment.

Mary's face reveals a sense of regret, and she calls after the man.

MARY (CONT'D)

May I ask -- did you have to come far?

The man gives her a grave look.

MAN

Yes -- I have come a long way.

Mary pauses another moment, thinking. Finally she speaks.

MARY

Then, if you'll go on in, I'm sure Mr. Boyne will see you. You'll find him in the library.

MAN

(touching the brim of his cap)
Thank you.

He walks toward the house. Mary's attention is drawn back to her work in the flower bed.

EXT. HOUSE -- DAY

Later that afternoon, Mary hurries into the house.

INT. HALL -- DAY -- CONTINUOUS

The hall, when Mary enters, is so silent that she nearly tiptoes past the closed door of the library. She walks toward the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN -- DAY -- CONTINUOUS

Trina is busily preparing lunch.

MARY

Hey, Trina.

(CONTINUED)

TRINA

Hi, Mary. Will you be ready for
lunch soon?

MARY

Yes, thanks, I'm starving. I got
carried away with the yard work and
I completely lost track of time.

She takes a soft drink out of the refrigerator, then leaves
the kitchen.

INT. HALL -- DAY -- CONTINUOUS

Mary crosses the hall and goes to the library door. She
wavers, not wanting to disturb Ned. Finally she opens the
door and enters the library.

INT. LIBRARY -- DAY -- CONTINUOUS

Ned is not at his desk. Mary glances around, expecting to
discover him at the bookshelves somewhere down the length of
the room.

MARY

Ned?

But her call brings no response, and it becomes clear that
Ned is not in the library. Mary walks to Ned's desk, and for
a moment she studies the confusion of papers on its surface.
Trina comes to the doorway.

TRINA

Lunch is ready, Mary.

MARY

Oh, thanks. Ned must be upstairs.
I'll go tell him.

Trina appears to hesitate.

TRINA

Um...Ned isn't upstairs.

MARY

He's not?

She glances at the clock. It is nearly 1.

(CONTINUED)

MARY (CONT'D)
Where is he, then?

TRINA
He went out.

Mary turns and starts to leave the library.

MARY
Oh, he must have gone outside to
look for me --

INT. HALL -- DAY -- CONTINUOUS

Mary crosses the hall to a glass door opening directly on
the gardens, but Trina stops her.

TRINA
No, he didn't go that way.

Mary turns back.

MARY
Where DID he go?

TRINA
He went out the front door, up the
drive.

MARY
Up the drive? At this time of day?

She walks to the front door, opens it, and glances across
the court, but its perspective is empty.

MARY (CONT'D)
Did he say where he was going?

TRINA
No, he left with the other man.

MARY
Other man?
(wheeling around to face
Trina)
What other man?

TRINA
The young man who came to see him.

(CONTINUED)

MARY

(impatient)

When did a young man come to see him? Please tell me everything, Trina.

TRINA

Well, he came about 10 o'clock, and Ned went with him without leaving any message.

MARY

What was the man's name?

TRINA

I don't know, he wrote it on a slip of paper that he folded and handed to me, and he told me to deliver it right away to Mr. Boyne.

MARY

That's odd.

(pauses, thinking)

Well, Ned must have walked him back to the station. I have to go to the post office after lunch. I'll probably run into him on the way. Thanks, Trina.

This conclusion seems to relieve Mary somewhat.

EXT. ROAD IN FRONT OF THE HOUSE -- DAY

As Mary walks home, early twilight is setting in.

INT. HOUSE -- DAY

Moments later, Mary seems so sure of Ned's having reached the house before her that, when she enters, she goes straight to the library.

INT. LIBRARY -- DAY -- CONTINUOUS

Mary enters.

MARY

Ned?

(CONTINUED)

But the library is still empty. Mary wanders to Ned's desk and immediately notices that the confusion of papers on the desk is precisely as it was when she had gone in to call Ned to lunch.

She begins looking through the mess of papers. The first one that catches her eye is an unfinished letter with a pen lying across it, as though dropped there suddenly.

THE LETTER -- MARY'S P.O.V.

The letter reads:

"Dear Mr. Parvis,

I have just received your letter announcing Elwell's death, and while I suppose there is now no further risk of trouble, it might be safer "

The words end there.

BACK TO MARY -- CONTINUOUS

Mary tosses the sheet aside and continues her search, but no folded paper is discovered among the letters and pages. Mary's face reveals that she is seized by a vague dread. She stands alone in the long, silent, shadowy room.

Her eyes strain through the shadows. Suddenly Mary calls out desperately, her voice trembling.

MARY

Trina!

The summons immediately brings in Trina with a look of concern. Mary breathes again at this sobering reappearance of the usual. She speaks to justify her call.

MARY (CONT'D)

Hey, Trina, do you know if Mr. Peters got the pool taken care of, or did you already tell Ned about it?

TRINA

Mr. Peters did get the pool fixed, but Ned isn't here.

MARY

Not here? You mean he's come back and gone out again?

(CONTINUED)

TRINA

No, Mary. He's never been back.

The dread stirs in Mary again, and this time, it has her by the throat.

MARY

Not since he went out with -- the visitor?

TRINA

Not since then.

MARY

(sharply)

But who WAS the man?

TRINA

I couldn't tell you.

MARY

(annoyed)

What did he say?

TRINA

Well, that's easy enough, because he said so little...

CUT TO:

INT. FRONT DOOR -- FLASHBACK -- DAY

The man in the ball cap is standing at the door as Trina opens it.

As Trina describes what happened, the man's lips move in a request, then he begins writing on a small piece of paper.

TRINA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

...he just asked for Mr. Boyne, and then he scribbled something on a piece of paper and asked that I carry it in right away.

FLASHBACK ENDS.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. LIBRARY -- NIGHT

Mary continues questioning Trina.

MARY

Then you don't know what he wrote?
You're not sure even if it WAS his
name?

TRINA

I'm not sure, but I supposed it
was, since he wrote it in answer
when I asked who I should say was
calling.

MARY

And when you carried the note in to
Ned, what did he say?

CUT TO:

INT. LIBRARY -- FLASHBACK -- DAY

Trina is handing Ned the folded slip of paper.

TRINA (V.O.)

I don't think Ned said anything,
but I can't be sure, because just
as I handed him the paper and he
was opening it --

Trina sees the visitor behind her.

TRINA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

-- I noticed that the man had
followed me into the library --

She turns to leave.

TRINA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

-- so I walked out and left the two
of them alone.

FLASHBACK ENDS.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. LIBRARY -- NIGHT

Mary continues with Trina.

MARY

But then, if you left them here in
the library, how do you know when
they went out of the house?

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY -- FLASHBACK -- DAY

Trina has left the library and is walking toward the
kitchen.

TRINA (V.O.)

Before I could cross the hall to
get to the kitchen, I heard the two
of them behind me --

She turns and watches the men leave.

TRINA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

-- and I saw them go out the front
door together.

FLASHBACK ENDS.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. LIBRARY -- NIGHT

Mary continues with Trina.

MARY

Then, if you saw the visitor twice,
you must be able to tell me what he
looks like.

TRINA

His cap, Mary, is really all I
remember --

MARY

His cap?

In the same instant, Mary has a flash of memory from earlier
in the day.

CUT TO:

EXT. GARDEN -- FLASHBACK -- DAY

Mary's mind leaps back to an image left in it that morning, of the stranger in the ball cap.

FLASHBACK ENDS.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. LIBRARY -- NIGHT

With white-lipped intensity, Mary presses Trina.

MARY

His baseball cap, you mean? And his
face was pale -- youngish? But who
WAS he, and why did Ned go with
him?

Neither woman knows the answers to these questions.

EXT. LARGE POND -- NIGHT

POLICEMEN sweep flashlight beams across the body of water.

INT. POST OFFICE -- DAY

A POSTAL EMPLOYEE is hanging Ned Boyne's photograph with the caption "MISSING" on a bulletin board.

EXT. STREET IN TOWN -- DAY

Mary, with anguished eyes, tacks one of the "MISSING" flyers onto a post.

SLOW DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SAME STREET -- DAY

On the same post, the flyer is weathered, faded and dirty.

SUBTITLE: THREE MONTHS LATER

MARY (O.S.)

I will never know what became of
Ned -- no one will ever know.
Except the house. The house knows--

INT. LIBRARY -- DAY

Mary is sitting in the library with MR. PARVIS, a small bald man with gold-rimmed eyeglasses. Mary is glancing around the room.

MARY (CONT'D)

-- this library knows. Because it was here that the last scene was played, here that the stranger came and spoke the words that caused Ned to rise and follow him. The floor I walk on felt his steps, the books on the shelves saw his face.

(a pause)

I'm sorry. I know your time is important. So let's get on with it.

Mr. Parvis is civil, but without vain preamble, in the manner of a man keeping an eye on the clock.

PARVIS

Thank you, Mrs. Boyne. I didn't wish to leave without asking you, if I could...what you plan to do about Robert Elwell's family.

The words seem to touch some obscure dread in Mary.

MARY

What -- what do you mean?

She notices at once that Mr. Parvis seems surprised at her ignorance of the subject.

MARY (CONT'D)

I don't know anything -- you have to tell me.

PARVIS

Where should I start?

Mary shrugs, at a complete loss.

PARVIS (CONT'D)

All right, in a nutshell -- Mr. Boyne made his money in the speculation -- some would say "brilliant" speculation -- of the Blue Star stock...at the cost of someone...less alert.

At the words, Mary lifts her head with a start, and looks intently at the speaker.

(CONTINUED)

MARY

What?

Parvis throws a sobering glance through his glasses.

PARVIS

The... "victim" of Mr. Boyne's ingenuity was young Robert Elwell. Bob Elwell wasn't smart enough, that's all -- if he had been, he might have turned around and served Mr. Boyne the same way. It's the kind of thing that happens every day in business. I guess it's what they call the "survival of the fittest."

He looks pleased with the aptness of his analogy. Mary seems to feel a physical shrinking from the next question. It is as though the words on her lips have a taste that nauseates her.

MARY

So then -- you accuse Ned of doing something...dishonest?

Mr. Parvis surveys the question dispassionately.

PARVIS

Oh, no, I don't. I don't say it WAS honest, and I don't say it WASN'T honest. It was business.

Mary sits staring at Parvis with a look of terror.

MARY

But Elwell's attorneys apparently did not take your view, since I suppose the lawsuit was withdrawn by their advice.

PARVIS

Oh, yes, they knew he didn't have a leg to stand on, technically. It was when they advised him to withdraw the suit that he got desperate. You see, he'd borrowed most of the money he lost in the Blue Star, and he was up a tree. That's why, when they told him he'd lost everything, he shot himself.

Mary is so startled at the news that she jumps. The horror seems to sweep over her in a great wave.

(CONTINUED)

MARY

He shot himself? He killed himself
because of THAT?

PARVIS

(unemotionally)

Well, he didn't kill himself,
exactly. He dragged on two months
before he died.

MARY

You mean...he tried to kill
himself, and failed? And tried
again?

PARVIS

(grimly)

Oh, he didn't have to try again.

Mary and Parvis sit opposite each other in silence, Parvis swinging his eyeglasses thoughtfully around his finger, Mary, motionless, her arms stretched along her knees in an attitude of rigid tension. She begins at length, hardly able to force her voice above a whisper.

MARY

But if you knew all this, how is it
that when I wrote you at the time
of Ned's disappearance, you said
you didn't understand his letter?

Parvis receives this without perceptible discomfort.

PARVIS

Well, I didn't understand it --
strictly speaking. And it wasn't
the time to talk about it, if I
had. The Elwell business was
settled when the suit was
withdrawn. Nothing I could have
told you would have helped you find
Mr. Boyne.

MARY

Then why are you telling me now?

PARVIS

Well, to begin, I supposed you knew
more than you appear to -- I mean
about the circumstances of Elwell's
death. And then people are talking
about it now. The whole matter's
been raked up again. And I thought,
if you didn't know, you ought to.

(CONTINUED)

Mary remains silent.

PARVIS (CONT'D)

You see, it's only come out lately what a bad state Elwell's affairs were in. His wife's a proud woman, and she fought on as long as she could, going out to work, and working at home too, when she got too sick -- something with her heart, I believe. But she had her bedridden mother to look after, and her children, and she broke down under it, and finally had to ask for help. That attracted attention to the case, and the papers took it up, and a collection was started.

(fumbling in a folder)

Here...here's an account of the whole thing from the *Sentinel* -- a little sensational, of course. But I guess you'd better look it over.

He holds out a newspaper to Mary, who unfolds it slowly. As she opens the paper, her eyes shrink from the glaring headline, which reads:

"WIDOW OF NED BOYNE'S VICTIM FORCED TO APPEAL FOR AID"

Below the text, two photographs are inserted. The first is Ned's, the same picture used on the "Missing" flyer. Mary closes her eyes in pain.

PARVIS (CONT'D)

I thought if you felt inclined to make a donation for the Elwell family...it would look very good for you in the papers.

Mary opens her eyes with an effort, and they fall on the other photograph in the paper. The other picture is that of a youngish man, slightly built, with features somewhat blurred by the shadow of the projecting brim of a baseball cap.

Mary frowns. Confused, she stares at the photo, then speaks, her heart in her throat.

MARY

This is the man -- the man who came for Ned.

(CONTINUED)

She hears Parvis start to his feet. Mary has slid backward into the corner of the sofa, and Parvis is bending above her in alarm. With an intense effort, Mary straightens herself. She calls out in a voice that sounds like a scream.

MARY (CONT'D)

This is the man! I would know him anywhere!

PARVIS

Mrs. Boyne, you're not well. Shall I call somebody? Would you like a glass of water?

MARY

No, no, no!

She moves toward Parvis, her hand frantically clenching the newspaper.

MARY (CONT'D)

I'm telling you, it's the man! I KNOW him! He spoke to me in the garden!

Parvis takes the paper from her, directing his glasses at the photo.

PARVIS

It can't be, Mrs. Boyne. That's Robert Elwell.

MARY

Robert Elwell?
(with a white stare into space)
Then it was Robert Elwell who came for Ned.

PARVIS

Came for Mr. Boyne?

He bends over, laying a fraternal hand on Mary, as if to coax her gently back into her seat.

PARVIS (CONT'D)

But Bob Elwell was dead. Don't you remember?

Mary sits with her eyes fixed on the photo. Parvis continues, with an odd shake in his unemotional voice.

(CONTINUED)

PARVIS (CONT'D)

Don't you remember Mr. Boyne's unfinished letter to me -- the one you found on his desk that day? It was written just after he'd heard of Elwell's death. Surely you remember that.

Yes, she remembers, with profound horror.

MARY

Elwell died the day before Ned's disappearance, and this is Elwell's picture, and it's a picture of the man who spoke to me in the garden.

She lifts her head and looks slowly around the library.

MARY (CONT'D)

This was the man who spoke to me.

She looks again at Mr. Parvis.

MARY (CONT'D)

You think I'm crazy, but I'm not crazy.

Suddenly there flashes upon her a way of justifying her strange statements. She sits quiet, controlling the quiver of her lips, and waiting until she can trust her voice to keep its level, then she looks straight at Parvis.

MARY (CONT'D)

Will you answer me one question, please? When was it that Robert Elwell tried to kill himself?

PARVIS

When -- when?

MARY

Yes, the date. Please try to remember.

She sees that Parvis is growing still more afraid of her.

MARY (CONT'D)

I have a reason.

PARVIS

Yes, yes. Only I can't remember. About two months before, I would say.

(CONTINUED)

MARY
(gently insisting)
I want the date.

Parvis picks up the newspaper.

PARVIS
We might see it here.

He runs his eyes down the page.

PARVIS (CONT'D)
Here it is. Last October -- the --

Mary grabs the words from him.

MARY
The 20th, wasn't it?

PARVIS
(with a sharp look at her)
Yes, the 20th. Then you DID know?

MARY
I know now.

Her white stare continues to travel past Parvis.

MARY (CONT'D)
Sunday the 20th -- that was the day
he came here the first time.

Parvis's voice is almost inaudible.

PARVIS
Came here?

MARY
Yes.

PARVIS
You saw him twice, then?

MARY
Yes, twice. He came first on the
20th of October. I remember the
date because it was the day we
moved in.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROOF -- FLASHBACK -- DAY

Mary remembers seeing the man in the ball cap wandering up the drive like a stranger seeking his way.

MARY (V.O.)

We saw him from the roof. He came down the road toward the house. Ned saw him first.

Suddenly Ned pushes past Mary and dashes down the stairs.

MARY (V.O., CONT'D)

Ned was frightened, and ran down ahead of me, but there was no one there. The man had vanished.

FLASHBACK ENDS.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. LIBRARY -- DAY

Mr. Parvis continues to scrutinize MARY.

PARVIS

(falteringly)

Elwell had vanished?

MARY

Yes. I couldn't figure out what had happened, but I see now. Elwell TRIED to come then, but he wasn't dead enough -- he couldn't reach us. He had to wait two months, and then he came again -- and he took Ned with him.

She nods at Parvis with the look of triumph of a child who has successfully worked out a difficult puzzle. But suddenly Mary lifts her hands with a desperate gesture, pressing them to her bursting temples.

MARY (CONT'D)

(screaming)

Oh, my God! I sent him to Ned --

CUT TO:

EXT. GARDEN -- FLASHBACK -- DAY

MARY remembers speaking to Robert Elwell.

MARY
...You'll find him in the library.

FLASHBACK ENDS.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. LIBRARY -- DAY

Mary continues.

MARY (CONT'D)
I sent Elwell to this room!

The walls of the library seem to rush toward Mary like inwardly falling ruins. Through the tumult, Mary hears one clear note, the voice of her real estate salesman, echoing inside the vacant country house.

ALAN (V.O.)
...You won't know 'til afterward.
Not 'til long, long afterward.

FADE TO BLACK