



# Twilight Zone

by Mary Keegan.

## A "DIFFERENT" STORY

**D**R. BEALBY bent over the bed. He stretched an arm across the knees of the man just dead and touched Mrs. Webster on the shoulder. He touched her very gently, and when she raised her head and lifted her haggard eyes to his, his head bent slowly.

The young wife, beautiful even in her misery, looked up at him with eyes bloodshot and wild from many nights and days of watching. Her white lips drew back across her teeth. She shook her head. Dr. Bealby turned away.

Mary rose from her knees by the bed and lay down beside the dead man. She kissed him. She loosened her long, dark hair and spread it over his head and face. Under this warm canopy she pressed her face to his.

"Godfrey!" she whispered. "Godfrey!"

Dr. Bealby spoke in an undertone to Miss Gunter, the nurse. Then he went out.

"Mrs. Webster," said Miss Gunter, "let me take you to your room."

"Godfrey," whispered Mary, "Godfrey, I'm here! I'm with you! Can't you feel how warm my arms are?"

"Mrs. Webster! Mrs. Webster!" Miss Gunter spoke kindly but firmly, "let me take you to your room."

"Godfrey, Godfrey, come back! I want you to come back! Come back! It's Mary calling you, Godfrey! I can't live without you—and I want to live! Godfrey, come back!"

"Mrs. Webster," whispered Miss Gunter, trying to lift Mary, "you must come with me."

Mary pushed her back.

"There are things to be done, Mrs. Webster, and you ought not to be here."

"Leave me alone," said Mary violently.

"I am disobeying Dr. Bealby's orders, Mrs. Webster, if I leave you."

"This is my house," said Mary; "leave me." She pressed her face against the dead man. "Godfrey!"

Miss Gunter went out and closed the door, remaining on the other side of it.

"Godfrey, you must come back!" commanded the young wife, pressing her body close to the stark figure on the bed. "You must feel my kisses, Godfrey—you must know! It is Mary who is kissing you,

love—Mary!” She pushed the eyelids back from the sightless eyes. “Look at me, Godfrey! Ah, you are not—” She shuddered, then laughed softly. “You are pretending! You are a lazy boy! You are just sleeping!”

A clock in the hall struck four. The room was dim, lighted only by a faint, shaded bulb over the bed. The silence of night and death weighed in the place. In the house there was movement; there were rapid footsteps, low and hurried voices, but Mary did not hear them. In the darks and shadows beneath her hair she kissed her husband’s lips and looked into the narrow slits of gray blue, rapidly glazing under the stiffening lids. There was no gleam of life, no faintest response to the wild heartbeats thumping against his breast.

The door opened softly. “Mrs. Webster,” whispered Miss Gunter, “you must come with me. I will take you to your room.” Miss Gunter paused a moment, “The men are waiting down-stairs to—to— There are things to be done, Mrs. Webster.”

“I don’t care,” said Mary; “go away.”

Miss Gunter went out and closed the door. “I wish Dr. Bealby had not gone! Tell the men to wait,” she said to a servant.

With all the warmth of her young, strong body, Mary pressed the big, lifeless man beside her. She raised his broad shoulders a little and let him fall back again upon the bed. Then she looked into his eyes, peering down underneath the lids. She flung back her hair, the better to see.

“Godfrey, Godfrey, I can tell by your eyes you can see me! Godfrey, Godfrey, I love you! Come back to me, Godfrey! I cannot bear the loneliness while you sleep! Come back to me! Come back! I don’t ask you—I don’t beg you—I just tell you that I love you and I need you—*come back!*”

The awful stillness throbbled with its

own intensity. Mary drew herself a little way from the stark body, leaning up upon her hands.

Godfrey Webster opened his eyes.

Mary screamed and fell unconscious.

The door opened quickly and Miss Gunter came into the room. A housemaid followed.

“Come—help me,” said Miss Gunter; “we will take her to her room.” She bent down and placed an arm under Mrs. Webster and raised her from the bed. She dropped her quickly with a sharp exclamation of fear. The housemaid ran screaming from the room.

It was several weeks before the Websters left town. They went to their house at Newport, out of season. They needed quiet to recover, for both were far from well. They had been so gay and happy there the season before, and again, the season before that—the first after their marriage—that baffled specialists hoped a quiet convalescence there might develop some sort of interest in things about them, and in life itself.

But the weeks rolled into months and no change was visible. They were not ill; they were not well. They were no longer young. They were persons of non-descript age living together peaceably enough, without sympathy, without distractions; without interest in anything, in themselves, or in each other. When old friends called to see them, they left depressed, dismayed. Dr. Bealby, as an old family friend, sometimes took a run over to try to shake them up, as he expressed it, but he left, baffled; and when he had gone it was to them as if he had not been.

Mary, who used to meet him with laughing face, light step and hands extended, came toward him now with slow,

uncertain tread, one hand partly extended as from habit, and a face old and puzzled, and, perhaps, a trifle wistful.

In spite of the passionate personal interest which Bealby took in the case, as a scientist it filled him with keen and impersonal fervor. Any hours that he could spare, and many that he should not have spared, were spent with the Websters, at Newport.

He brought, from time to time, one after another, and sometimes in groups, most of the distinguished men of science in the present decade. Few liked to admit it, but the consensus of opinion reached was that the case was actually outside, and beyond, the pale of science in its present development. They were interested, keen, excited, but admittedly helpless.

With Bealby, in his prime, it was a frenzy, and had to be worked out. He had been twitted by some of his peers with having made a hurried pronouncement; found a man to be dead who was not dead, and so on. But the larger men saw farther—some of them farther than they would admit, or farther than they dared—in short, farther than they could follow.

On his visits to the Websters, Dr. Bealby had studiously avoided any allusion to the strange event, or by circumlocution, trying to reach it from afar, had arrived at so little satisfaction, that he decided on methods more direct. One day when he and Mary were alone he turned to her abruptly:

“Mrs. Webster,” lowering his brows and speaking to her with great intentness, “why did you do it?” He almost barked it at her, wishing to startle her, if possible, into some sudden confession.

Mary was not startled: she looked at him with that puzzled, inquiring expression that had become habitual to her.

“I couldn’t help it.”

“Nonsense,” said Bealby with brutal force, “you had no business to!”

“Why?”

The tables were turned: it was Bealby who was startled.

“Why?” repeated Bealby, in order to gain time and wisdom, “why?” He raised his eyebrows judicially, with an aspect tolerant of absurdities. “Because it was a ridiculous and unnatural thing to do, and,” shaking his forefinger at her, “*thoroughly unscientific.*”

He could picture to himself the Mary of other days and hear her mocking laugh. He felt foolish and self-conscious—as self-conscious as a schoolboy—and he rose quickly and took a turn about the room. He paused momentarily before a little pastel of Mary as she used to be only a year ago. It was done by a famous man in Paris, and succeeded wonderfully in bringing out the fascinating qualities of the healthy, buoyant girl.

“Because I loved him,” said Mary.

Bealby turned and looked at the weak, colorless woman reclining in the corner of a deep, wide chair. When his eyes fixed her, she put a hand to her head as if to remember.

“I think that was it—but it was such a long time ago.”

“Stuff and nonsense,” growled Bealby, “it was less than a year ago.” Then he leaned down in order to be on a level with her eyes, and shook his forefinger at her—in a fashion which would have provoked much merriment in the old days—“Mrs. Webster, why didn’t you do your work better? Were you experimenting, or had you done this sort of thing before, eh?”

“I don’t think so,” said Mary.

“Don’t think what?”

“I don’t know.”

Bealby was sorry he had confused the

questions. "You made a bad job of it, Mrs. Webster. Your husband hasn't enough life in him to count, nowadays. You made a bad job of it, Mrs. Webster—good-by!"

Mary looked at him as if she wanted to detain him. "It isn't what it used to be," she said vaguely, and then, as if the effort were too great, she sighed and lost consciousness.

It was not before she opened her eyes and looked at him that Bealby left—with a sense of having reached his first station on the road to a new discovery.

Mary went up-stairs slowly to where Godfrey sat alone in his study, always in the same place, facing a window, his eyes fixed on the line of the horizon. He rose instinctively as she entered, but he did not turn or greet her in any way. His eyes did not leave their hold on that far distance.

The room was warm and very cheerful. A blaze of crackling logs lighted the creeping twilight. But it could not warm the strange pair seated side by side in the deep window. It played on them as to give a semblance of life. But the other side of them was gray and cold. They were two strange friends, passing and meeting like shadows, never kissing, never touching hands. Mary's eyes were fixed on Godfrey with that puzzled, wistful look they always had; but Godfrey's were far off, filled with longing and loneliness and pain.

There was a slight note of reproach in Mary's voice when she broke into a subject never before alluded to.

"You answered me, Godfrey."

"You called me." His voice was cold and strange and singularly remote and he did not turn or move his eyes.

"You answered me, Godfrey." There was a shade of defense in the dull voice. Those were the first words that had passed

between them that day and they were the last. They sat side by side at the window. She looked out at the line of the horizon, too. She saw vaguely a dull, gray-green sea tossing under a wintry sky, and against it, very dimly, a little sail far off. But Godfrey saw more.

Dr. Bealby felt that it would be absolutely necessary for him to look in on the Websters, if not every day, at least several times a week. This would be impossible while they remained at Newport; so, making an anniversary an excuse, he arrived in his happiest mood and insisted on taking them back in his own car to New York.

Servants and luggage would go a little ahead of them in their own car. They offered no resistance, and when Dr. Bealby emphasized the fact that this was the anniversary of Godfrey's return, neither offered any comment.

"And for that reason, especially," said Bealby, "will you have me to dinner tonight? I feel that I must drink to the continued health and long life of our friend here. What do you say, Mrs. Webster?" But a shudder seemed to pass through Godfrey, and Mary said nothing. The dinner was as good as a good cook could make it, and the wine was better but it was a dull affair. Not so Bealby, who began to make a new discovery at every course. He left early, and ordered them to bed and rest.

A call by phone next morning caused Dr. Bealby to cancel an important appointment and hasten to the Websters'. The call explained nothing—in fact, said nothing, and was made by a servant, but something about it struck Dr. Bealby as unusual; moreover, this was the very first time since the strange occurrence that he

had been called to the Websters at all. His visits had always been taken as a matter of course.

He went up-stairs with a sense of he knew not what. His pulses beat so that for a moment he stood outside of the door to steady his nerve. Then he tapped lightly, as was his habit, with the tip of his middle finger. There being no response, he turned the handle softly and went in, closing the door behind him. Although it was already daylight, the curtains were drawn and the room dim, the only light being a heavily shaded bulb that hung over the bed.

Bealby closed his eyes a moment, fearing to look. When he opened them he saw two figures on the bed. One, Godfrey Webster, a smile upon his lips, handsome, young—dead. The other, Mary, crouched beside him, her dark hair hiding her face and covering his shoulder, her hands clasped about the back of her head. There was an awful stillness.

Dr. Bealby bent down to ascertain if the crouching figure breathed. He found it did, so he stood at the foot of the bed and waited. He waited a long time, and then, unable to endure the torture of suspense, touched her very gently.

“Mrs. Webster—”

The touch and the voice brought from her a long, deep sob, followed by longer and deeper ones. Presently Bealby took her by the hand and drew her into a sitting position and looked into her face.

“Good God!” There was a sudden, unrestrained note of exultation. It was the Mary Webster of a year ago.

“I had to do it,” she sobbed.

Bealby bent closer. “*Had* to?” he whispered, apprehensively. “Why did you?”

“He wanted to go back and I had to let him.”

“How did you do it?” he repeated, with a sickening sense of dread.

She looked at him with her wonderful clear eyes. “I couldn’t hold him any longer,” she answered simply. She turned to what had been her husband. “See how glad he is! Oh—” She broke off suddenly, her voice choked with sobs, “I—I can’t bear it!”

“Go look at yourself in the glass. Mrs. Webster,” said Bealby with authority, as he turned to examine the dead man. Mechanically she obeyed, and the reflection which Bealby took pains to notice, had streaming eyes, but the mouth twitched upward at the corners.

“You’ve come back again! You had gone part of the way to meet him. That was your mistake. You were too impatient. You were neither here nor there, and he was neither here nor there. A little longer and he would have come all the way. You were too impatient!”

“Oh, how cruel you are! Why do you say such things?” bowing her beautiful head, her body shaken with sobs. “Isn’t it bad enough?”

“No!” Bealby spoke reflectively. “Anything is better than the past year—even separation. At any rate, he is—There—wherever that may be—and you are Here.”