

APPLIANCES INCLUDED

Written by

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Based on the short story, Appliances Included

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FADE IN:

INT. DOWNTOWN WAREHOUSE - DAY

MARY and LOU GIVENS, early 30s, follow a REAL ESTATE AGENT through a large, open-concept, converted industrial space home, a stylish mix of modern and reclaimed wood.

The agent, trim and professional with an easy smile that never quite reaches her eyes, has a knack for knowing when to back off so the couple can talk.

LOU
(whispers to Mary)
Game face. The price climbs every
time you grin.

The smile drops from Mary's face.

The tour ends in the

LAUNDRY ROOM.

It's a large ample space dominated by a commercial grade washer and dryer. The agent turns and extends her arm to draw attention to the machines like a game show model.

AGENT
All appliances are included with
the house.

MARY
They look really old.

The agent's smile fades.

AGENT
They're industrial quality and have
been impeccably maintained.

She swing's the dryer door open for Mary's inspection.

Mary peers inside. The stainless steel sparkles. Her face reflects off the mirror-like surface. Mary furrows her brow.

MARY
I do worry about the energy rating
of such old machines. In fact, I
have concerns about the wiring and
plumbing in general. Older
buildings have a habit of turning
into a homeowner's nightmare.
Exactly how old is this building,
and what's its history.

The agent smiles and seems eager to answer.

AGENT

The building was erected in the mid-nineteenth century and has housed a number of businesses. About ten years ago, it was converted into a residential dwelling. It was gutted down to the brick and built back up. All the systems, windows, and insulation are modern and up to code.

The agents eyes dart between Mary and Lou.

AGENT (CONT'D)

Why don't I give you two a little time to discuss? I'll be in the kitchen.

As soon as she leaves, Lou breaks into a grin.

LOU

What do you think?

Mary tries to restrain her glee.

MARY

It's incredible, but way more house than we need.

LOU

Yeah, but it's half the cost of places half this size. We can grow into it and we'll make a fortune when we sell.

Mary gets a quizzical look on her face.

MARY

Grow into it? Are you saying we can have more kids?

LOU

(nods)

Want the house?

MARY

Are you kidding? Yes, yes.

INT. THE GIVENS' NEW HOUSE - NIGHT (A WEEK LATER)

Stacks of boxes clutter the counter tops and floor. Mary loads plates and dishes into the kitchen cabinets, still in disbelief that this is their home.

HANK, 4, her Energizer bunny of a son, plays with the family cat, Taffy. The boy runs in circles towing toy truck on a string. He bursts into giggles whenever the cat pounces on the truck.

The cat gazes at the truck confused that its prey is no longer alive.

Hank runs out of the kitchen.

The cat darts after him swatting at the truck.

MARY

Hank, where do you think you're going?

Lou walks into the room twirling a hammer on his finger like a television gunslinger. He catches the hammer head and points the handle at Mary like a pistol.

LOU

Don't fret, pretty lady, he'll be okay. I just done installed yonder kiddy gate at the foot of the stairs. That oughta head him off at the pass.

He leans in and pecks her on the lips.

Mary hooks her hands around his waist and pulls his body tight to hers.

MARY

That the best you can do, sheriff?

LOU

(grins)
How much better do you want?

MARY

I don't know?
(grins slyly)
How about something passionate and maybe illegal in Alabama?

Lou laces his fingers in her hair and draws her close.

She tips her head back and closes her eyes.

He presses his mouth to hers, tugs at her lip with his teeth, probes with his tongue.

She settles her weight into his arms and surrenders.

When he pulls away, she gasps for air.

LOU
(sultry voice)
Better?

Mary slowly opens her eyes, a wowed expression on her face.

MARY
Uh-huh. In fact, if you don't
follow up on that tonight, I'm
going to be awfully disappointed.

A tug at her jeans breaks the spell.

HANK
Mom? Mom?

She smiles ruefully at Lou.

MARY
Sure you want another one?

HANK
Mom, Taffy's gone.

MARY
(to Hank)
It's okay, she's just hiding.
She'll come out when she's ready.

Hank jerks at her pant leg again. His voice rises in pitch and has an edge signaling an impending tantrum.

HANK
Taffy's gone.

She shoots a pleading look at Lou.

MARY
Can you take this one. If I don't
get this done, we don't get dinner.

Lou shrugs.

LOU
No problem.

He tousles his son's hair.

LOU (CONT'D)
So what's up, sport?

HANK
(angry)
Taffy dist-appeared.

LOU
Yeah, I got that part. Why don't
you show me?

Lou reaches out and Hank wraps his hand around one of his father's finger.

Mary watches as the boy tows his father out of the room.

LATER

Lou returns carrying Hank, the boy clutching onto his father like a starfish, face buried in Lou's chest while he sobs.

Lou wags his head when Mary makes eye contact.

Mary gives Hank a sympathetic smile.

MARY
She's here someplace. The house is
a mess. She probably found a place
to hole up for a while.

Mary searches through the boxes.

MARY (CONT'D)
It's been a long stressful day for
everyone.

She finds what she's looking for and hands a can of cat food to Lou in exchange for her son.

MARY (CONT'D)
She hasn't eaten yet. Open that and
see what happens.

Lou searches for a can opener while Mary soothes Hank and strokes his hair.

INT. GIVENS' HOUSE - MORNING

Mary loads clothes into the washing machine and notices the cat food is untouched and litter box unmarked.

LATER

A worried Mary perches on the couch and dials the phone.

MARY

I feel silly calling you at work...
Do you think Taffy might of found a
way outside?

LOU (V.O.)

She's still gone?

MARY

Do me a favor. Swing by our old
place on your way home. Sometimes
cats return to their old haunts if
they get the chance. Seems like a
long shot, but it's worth a shot.

LATER

Mary meets Lou with expectant eyes and a whining child.

Lou sags and wags his head "no".

HANK

I want Taffy!

Mary lifts her son and sits with him in her lap of the sofa.
She rocks him.

MARY

(to Hank)

Don't worry, we'll find her.

Hank drifts off to sleep.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Mary jaunts down the front steps with an armful full of
Xeroxed posters featuring a picture of Taffy and a promise of
fifty dollars for whoever finds her.

Paper notices already sheath the telephone poles down the
block like a calico layer of bark. They advertise local rock
bands, painting and cleaning services, pleas for information
on missing persons, and rewards for lost pets.

Putting up a poster means covering someone else's. Mary puts
the first one up over a notice for carpet cleaning.

Further up the block, she enters grocer, talks to the manager
MOS. Moments later she tapes a poster to the glass door.

At the corner lamp post, she decides to cover a poster for a
rock band.

An woman on an electric scooter wheels up, a cigarette dangling from her livery lips. SADIE MCFADDEN, 90's, knows everybody business. She's the block busybody.

SADIE
Your cat?

MARY
Yeah.

SADIE
I wouldn't put it there.
Neighborhood kids love Pins and
Needles. Cover Binky instead - the
schnauzer. They found him on the
parkway last week. Not a happy
ending, if you know what I mean.

Mary pulls down the poster covering Pins and Needles and covers Binky instead. She turns and notices a clear tube running from Sadie's nose to an oxygen tank mounted on her scooter.

MARY
Is it safe to smoke on oxygen?

SADIE
(cackles)
Honey, I'm ninety-two. At my age
it's not safe to do anything.

She extends her hand.

SADIE (CONT'D)
Sadie McFadden.

Mary shakes Mary's hand gingerly.

MARY
Mary Givens.

SADIE
You the new people living in the
looney bin?

MARY
I beg your pardon.

Sadie points across the street.

SADIE
You live there?

MARY
Yes.

Sadie's brow wrinkles with concern.

SADIE

What did they tell you about the place?

MARY

Just that it was built in the eighteen hundreds, then gutted and turned into a home a few years ago.

SADIE

They tell you it used to be a sanitarium?

Sadie studies the surprise on Mary's face and wags her head.

SADIE (CONT'D)

Didn't think so. Why would they? You're house has quite a history, not all of it appetizing. Want to hear it?

Mary glances at her watch, then at the stack of posters in her hand. When she looks up, Sadie eyes are focused on the posters too.

SADIE (CONT'D)

I can help you put those up. We can talk along the way.

Sadie's scooter whines as she keeps pace with Mary. She doesn't actually hang any posters, and instead offers advice about which posters to covered.

Sadie points to a row of buildings behind her.

SADIE (CONT'D)

I've lived here my whole life. Your place became a sanitorium during the depression. I think it was a laundry before that. The building stood vacant for five years after the laundry went tits up.

Mary stops beside a telephone pole.

SADIE (CONT'D)

That poster for The Flesh Tones can come down - broke up a couple weeks ago. Nobody's going to miss them.

Sadie drops her cigarette butt on the sidewalk and fishes an open pack and lighter from the pocket of her smock.

The flame from her lighter jitters around the cigarette as she tries to light it.

Mary takes the lighter, sparks up the flame and holds it steady. Sadie puffs and nods her thanks.

SADIE (CONT'D)

The Ricci brothers bought your place for a song in the thirties. At first, people got all up in arms about having a nut house in the neighborhood. But it was quiet and there was never a lick of trouble... until the cops shut it down in the fifties. Seems the Ricci's were collecting Social Security for more people than the place would hold. Whenever someone died, it didn't get reported. The Riccis just kept cashing checks. And every death opened up another bed. One day the Tribune sent someone to cover the hundred-and-fifteenth birthday of one of the residents.- You know, oldest-person in-the-city human interest crap. Only he wasn't there of course. Hadn't been for thirty years. That blew the lid off everything.

At the next telephone pole, Sadie points a poster for a car for sale.

SADIE (CONT'D)

That car was a piece of junk. Got towed last month.

She takes a drag on her cigarette as though it's the life giving force she needs to keep going.

SADIE (CONT'D)

Strange part was, the cops didn't find any bodies. Never did. The Ricci's claimed they didn't do anything, that those people just disappeared. Cops didn't believe it, and neither did the jury. After that, the building sat vacant for forty years. Kids broke in every now and again, doing what kids do. Every now and again one or two of them would go missing.

(MORE)

SADIE (CONT'D)

Then in ninety-five, or was it ninety-six, a nice gay couple bought it for a pittance and started renovations. After they moved in, they began hearing noises at night - voices. Geoff, one of the boys - listen to me, one of the boys--

(waves dismissively)

they were in their fifties. Any way, Geoff liked to talk to me because he said I reminded him of his mother.

Sadie takes another long drag from her cigarette.

SADIE (CONT'D)

Can you believe that? They say gays are supposed to be so damn sensitive, but I didn't see it. His dead mother for Christ sake, who wants to be compared to that? Oh well. Geoff said the voices came from the laundry room. One night, his roommate - is that the right term? Anyway, he went downstairs to investigate... and never came back. They never did find him. Geoff was despondent and scared. He moved away, New York I think, and let the bank foreclose. Since then, no one has managed to live there more than a year. New couples come and go. Only, not all of them go. Usually someone winds up missing, sometimes only a pet.

Sadie looks up and realizes Mary is no longer beside her. She's stopped and staring at her posters. Sadie backs her scooter up.

SADIE (CONT'D)

I've said too much, haven't I?

Mary force a smile.

MARY

No, of course not. It's so nice to have met you, Sadie, but I have errands to get to. Maybe we can talk again soon.

Mary darts off, upset, and resists the urge to run.

INT. GIVENS' HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Mary drops the posters on the table next to the door. She glances out the window. Sadie is gone.

LATER

Mary brings Hank home from preschool. As he passes the posters of Taffy near the door he reaches out for the image of his cat and wails.

Mary takes a poster off the stack and crouches onto her knees in front of her son.

MARY

See this?

She holds up the poster.

MARY (CONT'D)

We're offering people money to help find Taffy. The whole neighborhood is looking. It won't be long now.

Hank snuffles and settles down. He spots the Legos Mary left out for him. He plops on the floor and begins to play.

LATER

Lou returns from work. His eyes settle on the posters.

LOU

Any luck?

Mary wags her head.

MARY

Met an interesting lady who seemed to know a lot about our house. Ninety-two, rides around on an electric scooter.

LOU

Yeah, I've seen her around.

MARY

According to her, this used to be a sanatorium. She said people have been disappearing from here for decades. Pets too.

LOU

And you believe her?

Mary shrugs.

LOU (CONT'D)
I wouldn't worry about it. It's
just old lady talk.

INT. HANKS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Hank wakes in his room, the walls faintly lit by a night light. He anxiously scampers to

THE HALLWAY

unzipping his one-piece footy PJs along the way.

IN THE BATHROOM

He tugs them below his knees. As he positions himself in front of the toilet, a cat mews.

He wanders out of the bathroom following the sound to

THE LAUNDRY ROOM

He stands before the dryer.

The circular door opens and reveals Taffy perched at the back of the drum cleaning her paws.

Hank holds out his hands for the cat, but she doesn't come.

He reaches for her and she edges deeper into the dryer just beyond his reach.

He crawls in after her.

The back of the drum shimmers and falls away leaving a dark hole.

The void begins to swirl and draw air inside.

The power of the vortex sucks Hank deeper into the dryer.

Taffy smiles and disappears.

Hands reach out from the darkness at the back of the drum and jerk Hank in.

The dryer door slams shut.

INT. KITCHEN - THE NEXT MORNING

Coffee brews as Mary trims the rind from cantaloupe slices over the sink and cuts them into cubes.

Lou walks in scanning the headlines in the morning paper.

He leans in and kisses Mary's cheek.

LOU
Smells great. What we having?

MARY
Toast, fruit, and coffee. Hank up yet? He's going to be late for preschool if he doesn't get a move on.

Lou sets the paper on the table and sits.

LOU
Haven't seen him.

Mary pokes her head into the hallway.

MARY
(yells)
Hank Givens, hustle your butt.
You're going to be late.

She returns, prepares a plate for Lou and pours him some coffee.

MARY (CONT'D)
What's keeping him?

She set her jaw and charges

DOWN THE HALL.

The bedroom door stands open.

INSIDE

His bed is unmade.

MARY (CONT'D)
Hank! Where are you? You're making me very angry, little man.

She listens.

Silence.

Mary searches room to room. The warm flush of her anger quickly gives way to queasiness.

IN THE KITCHEN

Lou looks up from his paper.

MARY (CONT'D)

I can't find him. Do you think he could have gotten past the gate?

LOU

I'll check upstairs. Check downstairs again including the closets in case he's hiding.

LIVING ROOM - A FEW MINUTES LATER

They meet at the base of the stairs.

Lou wags his head.

MARY

I'm calling the cops.

LOU

I'll call work to tell them I'm not coming in.

LATER

Lou and Mary stand at the window as a police cruiser pulls to the curb in front of the house.

Two uniformed officers climb the steps.

Mary has the door open before they reach the landing.

OFFICER GOMEZ, devoid of emotion and world-weary, does most of the talking. OFFICER WETTLE scribbles down what's said in his note pad.

The officers glance about the house, take in the stacks of boxes and exchange a look.

OFFICER GOMEZ

Which room is your son's?

Mary leads them down the hall to the open door.

Gomez examines the walls and ceiling as if he might find a trap door.

OFFICER GOMEZ (CONT'D)

Mind if we look around?

MARY

No, of course not.

She steps away from the door to get out of their way.

INSIDE THE BEDROOM

Gomez gives an upward jerk of his head to Wettle. Wettle leaves the room and jaunts up the stairs.

Gomez checks windows, searches the closet and under the bed.

IN THE LIVING ROOM

Mary nervously waits on the sofa with Lou while the officers check the house.

The officers rejoin them.

OFFICER GOMEZ

Were your doors locked last night?

MARY

(nods)

Dead bolted. I had to unlatch it to let you in.

OFFICER GOMEZ

Have a recent photo of your son?

She looks around at the unpacked boxes.

MARY

Somewhere in this mess.

Mary sifts through a stack against the wall.

MARY (CONT'D)

We just moved and haven't had a chance to unpack everything.

She finds an album, pulls a photo of Hank from beneath the protective plastic and hands it to Gomez.

OFFICER GOMEZ

Mind if I keep this. We'll be putting out an Amber alert and a photo will be very helpful.

MARY

No, of course not. It's yours.

OFFICER GOMEZ

Does your son have any distinctive birthmarks or scars.

Mary glances at Lou who shrugs.

MARY

Um, he has a burn on his right forearm.

OFFICER GOMEZ
How'd he get that?

MARY
He bumped up against the barbeque
last summer.

Gomez shares a look with his partner.

OFFICER GOMEZ
I think we have all we need.

He and his partner stand to leave.

MARY
What do we do now?

OFFICER GOMEZ
You wait.

MARY
What?

Lou places a hand on her shoulder. She pulls away.

MARY (CONT'D)
No. There has to be something we
can do.

OFFICER GOMEZ
Just let us do our job ma'am. We'll
stay in touch.

INT. GIVENS' KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Lou tidies up the kitchen, unpacking the few remaining boxes
and putting things away.

Mary sits at the table, her eyes puffy and red, a box of
Kleenex poised in front of her along with a flock of wadded
up discards.

The doorbell rings.

Mary waits while Lou answers it.

MOMENTS LATER

Two men in sport coats trail Lou into the kitchen, badges
hanging from their breast pockets.

One, DETECTIVE MANDELL is tall, Caucasian and balding. The
other, DETECTIVE JACKSON, is short, black and heavysset.

When Mary looks up at them, both men flinch slightly as if they fear what's coming.

MARY

Did you find my boy?

DETECTIVE JACKSON

Not yet, ma'am. I'm Detective Jackson. This is Detective Mandell. We'd like to ask you a few questions.

Mary doesn't bother standing, and kicks out two chairs on the opposite side of the table. The detectives share a look and sit.

DETECTIVE JACKSON (CONT'D)

We realize this is a difficult time for both of you, and we'll try to keep this as brief as possible.

MARY

Why are you here? Why aren't you looking for my boy?

DETECTIVE JACKSON

Ma'am, the more we can find out, the better we can do our jobs.

Mary snatches a Kleenex from the box and blows her nose. She nods.

DETECTIVE JACKSON (CONT'D)

When did you realize your son was missing?

MARY

About seven-thirty this morning.

DETECTIVE JACKSON

And when was the last time you saw him last night?

Mary turns to Lou, her face twisted in confusion. She glares at Jackson.

MARY

We answered these same questions this morning. Don't you guys talk to each other?

Jackson gazes at her a moment, his face unperturbed, heavy-lidded eyes unblinking.

DETECTIVE JACKSON

Ma'am, sometimes when we ask the questions again, people remember something new. It also gives us a chance to confirm our information. That's why we do it.

Mary wearily props her elbows on the table and settles her chin on her hands.

MARY

Bed time. That was the last time I saw him - about nine o'clock.

Mandell jots the information down in his notebook.

DETECTIVE JACKSON

Are you both light sleepers?

MARY

I am. Him... not so much.

DETECTIVE JACKSON

Did you hear anything during the night, or have any reason to visit your son's room?

MARY

No.

Jackson turns to Lou.

DETECTIVE JACKSON

What about you, sir?

Lou wags his head.

LOU

I went out like a light and didn't wake up until seven.

DETECTIVE JACKSON

That true ma'am.

MARY

(nods)

If he gets he gets out of bed, I know.

Jackson pauses, his gaze shifting between Mary and Lou.

DETECTIVE JACKSON

Did either of you find an unlocked window or door first thing this morning?

Mary and Lou look at one another and wag their heads "no".

MARY

I locked up before heading to bed,
and they were still locked this
morning when I let the officers in.

Jackson settles back in his seat and lets out a heavy sigh.

DETECTIVE JACKSON

Now that's where I have a problem.

His eyes settle heavily on Mary.

DETECTIVE JACKSON (CONT'D)

How could someone break in and take
your son, then deadbolt the door
behind them. It just doesn't seem
possible, now does it?

Lou's jaw drops.

LOU

What are you trying to say?

DETECTIVE JACKSON

I'm not trying to say anything.
It's just that unless I'm missing
something, whoever took your son
was in the house last night. So I
figure there must be some detail
you haven't told us. Maybe if we
talk it through, I can fill in the
missing pieces.

MARY

(incredulous)
Missing pieces?

She smacks her hand down hard on the table.

The two detectives flinch.

MARY (CONT'D)

What missing pieces? We told you
everything. Our son is missing, and
instead of looking for him, you're
accusing us.

(points at the door)

Out! Get out!

Jackson begrudgingly lifts his bulk from the chair, his mouth
set in a tight line.

DETECTIVE JACKSON

Maybe we picked a bad time. But we do need to talk. You'll be seeing me again. Count on it.

Lou leads the detectives out.

When he returns, doubt is evident on his face.

MARY

What?

Lou throws up his hands as if he doesn't know what to say.

MARY (CONT'D)

Go ahead and spit it out.

LOU

What happened here last night, Mary?

Mary covers her face.

MARY

(under her breath)

Not you too.

When she takes her hands away, a tear rolls down her cheek.

MARY (CONT'D)

How the fuck would I know? The only thing I'm sure of is you and I would never hurt our son.

LOU

But the locks, how do you explain that?

MARY

Do you realize what you're saying?

Mary covers her mouth to keep from crying and pushes past Lou to get out of the kitchen.

LOU

Where are you going?

Mary scurries down

THE HALLWAY

MARY

Leave me alone. I can't talk to you right now.

She rushes into

INTO HANK'S ROOM

She closes the door behind her and gazes at her son's empty bed. She lifts his teddy bear and hugs it tightly.

The front door slams.

She sits on the mattress and settles onto her side caressing the bear. She inhales her son's scent from its fur and sobs.

INT. HANK'S ROOM - NIGHT

Mary wakes, disoriented still clutching the bear.

The night light glows in the darkness.

She pushes herself up and perches on the edge of the bed.

A voice calls, faint and indecipherable. She turns toward it but it's gone.

She hears it again and goes to the door.

She sticks her head into the hallway.

HANK

Mommy!

MARY

Where are you, baby?

HANK

Help me, mommy.

She races down the

HALLWAY

following the voice.

HANK (CONT'D)

Help me, mommy. It's hurting me.

MARY

What's wrong, honey?

HANK

Help, mommy, help!

MARY

Mommy's coming. Hold on Hank.

She rushes into

THE LAUNDRY ROOM

flips on the lights and shields her eyes with her hand.

The room is empty.

MARY (CONT'D)
Hank? Where are you?

HANK
Help!

Mary turns her gaze to the dryer. She crouches down and peers inside.

The back of the drum appears to have been pulled away like a manhole cover to reveal an abyss.

Hank floats in the void, arms outstretched, terror in his eyes.

HANK (CONT'D)
Help me, mommy!

Hank is sucked deeper into the vortex as if he's falling.

Mary throws the door open, lunges into the dryer and snatches his wrist.

The vortex pulls harder, drawing her son even deeper.

She reaches her free hand toward him.

HANK (CONT'D)
Give me your other hand.

Hank takes her hand.

The fear leaves his eyes.

His expression hardens and turns mean.

He leers to expose two rows of jagged triangular teeth.

She tries to let go, but it has her now.

It jerks.

Her feet rise off the floor.

It pulls again and she is tugged inside the dryer.

The dryer door slams shut.

SERIES OF SHOTS

Sadie McFadden watches a game show when it's interrupted by Amber alert for Hank Givens.

Sadie watches the nightly news as Mary Givens' photo is shown and it's reported she's considered a suspect in her son's disappearance and a fugitive.

Sadie stares out the window as a moving truck and crew collect the Givens' possessions.

Sadie watches a real estate agent hammer a FOR SALE sign into the ground across the street.

FADE OUT.