

THE TWILIGHT ZONE

"Nothing in the Dark"

Written by
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ACT ONE

FADE IN and PAN DOWN to a large, darkened BASEMENT ROOM in a decrepit tenement building, just before sunrise. Through the half-boarded up windows, falling snow is visible. The room is cluttered with worse-for-wear furniture including a table with a teapot on top, an ornate mirror, and, against one wall, an old-fashioned bed.

The bed is surrounded by wooden chairs that are meant to act as a sort of makeshift barrier. In the bed, an old woman sleeps, white-haired and wrinkled. Her name is WANDA DUNN. Just outside her window, at street level, the figure of a uniformed police officer appears and crouches near a lamp post, apparently taking cover while he observes someone or something across the street from the tenement building. The sound of BREAKING GLASS from the street awakens Wanda. She looks up, fear in her face, and turns to the window. The backs of the wooden chairs cast shadows on her that resemble prison bars. She sees the policeman and tenses up.

Pushing a chair aside, she puts on a pair of slippers, rises from her bed, and crosses to the only door, to make sure that its locks are secure. Satisfied, she turns to the window where the policeman still waits and watches. A NOISE from the street stirs the policeman who rises and disappears from view. Wanda wraps a shawl around herself and breathes a sigh of relief at his departure.

She is on her way back to bed when a piercing WHISTLE blows, followed by two loud GUNSHOTS. Startled, Wanda turns to see and hear the policeman stagger into view and fall from street level, down a flight of steps, to just outside her door. She moves to the door, fearfully, and presses herself against it. The policeman's gasping voice calls out. His name is HAROLD BELDEN.

BELDEN
(offscreen)
Help. Please, help.

WANDA
Who is it? Go away.

BELDEN
(offscreen)
I've been shot. I need help.

WANDA
Who are you?

BELDEN
(offscreen)
Officer... Police... Please, open the door.
I need help.

She makes no move to help him.

WANDA
You're lying to me. I know you. You can't
fool me.

BELDEN
(offscreen)
Help.

WANDA
You're lying. You're no policeman. Why
can't you leave me alone? I know who you
are. I know what you are.

Her chin trembles. A FAST PAN off of Wanda reveals the
ornate mirror opposite her -- in which stands the
omniscient NARRATOR, wearing a suit and tie.

NARRATOR
An old woman, living in a nightmare. An old
woman who has fought a thousand battles
with death and always won. Now she's faced
with a grim decision. Whether or not to
open a door. And in some strange and
frightening way, she knows that this
seemingly ordinary door leads to the
Twilight Zone.

FADE OUT

FADE IN on Wanda, still pressed against the door.

BELDEN
(offscreen)
Won't somebody help?

Wanda hesitatingly opens the door -- but leaves the chain bolted. Through the crack, Wanda sees the handsome, young, uniformed officer Harold Belden lying on his back in the snow, gasping for breath, and in great pain.

BELDEN
Unless... you help me, I'm going to die. I-
I don't think I can move.

WANDA
Don't say that. It isn't fair. You're
trying to trick me.
(abruptly)
Don't move. I-I-I-I'll close the door.

BELDEN
What? Listen, I've been shot. I'm bleeding
to death. Please. My name is Harold Belden.
I need a doctor. Please, call the hospital.

WANDA
I haven't got a telephone. I'd have to
unlock the door. You can't ask me to do
that. I don't want to die. You understand?
I know who you are.

BELDEN
(incredulous)
You're not going to help me? You're going
to let me die? I don't understand. But --
(wincing in pain)
It hurts... It hurts...

WANDA
Stop. Stop. Why do you torture me? It isn't
fair.

BELDEN
I can't move. It hurts.

WANDA

It isn't fair. It isn't fair.

But she knows she has no choice. Reluctantly, Wanda unchains the door and lets it swing wide open. She hesitates a moment and then scurries OUTSIDE to Belden, bends down, and touches his shoulder. In awe, she draws her hand away, looks at it, and then stares at Belden.

WANDA

I'm still alive.

A wave of joy sweeps over her face. At once, she helps Belden to crawl into her room. Once safely inside, she quickly shuts and locks the door.

DISSOLVE TO

Wanda's BASEMENT ROOM, a few minutes later. Belden rests in a bed on the opposite side of the room as Wanda's. Wanda fixes him some hot tea.

BELDEN

Listen, you should try and get some rest. Really, I feel much better. When the doctor gets here, he'll take me off your hands.

Belden sees the tense expression on Wanda's face.

BELDEN

You didn't call the doctor?

Wanda shakes her head.

BELDEN

Why not?

WANDA

I haven't got a telephone.

BELDEN

But couldn't you go to one of the neighbors?

WANDA

There aren't any. They've all moved away. Trucks came and took away their furniture.

(MORE)

WANDA (CONT'D)

First one, and then another. And... even-
even if I could call the doctor somehow, I
couldn't take a chance and let him in.
Don't you see? It might be him.

BELDEN

Him?

WANDA

Mister Death. I know he's out there. He's
trying to get in. He comes to the door and
knocks. He begs me to let him in. Last
week, he said he came from the gas company.
Oh, he-he-he's clever. After that, he
claimed to be a contractor hired by the
city. I knew who he was. He said this
building was condemned, that I'd have to
leave. I kept the door locked. Then he went
away. He knows I'm on to him.

BELDEN

Mister Death? Is this a person, like you or
me?

WANDA

I know it sounds crazy. But it's true. I
know it's true.

BELDEN

People die all over the world. Now, how
could one man be in all those places at
once?

WANDA

I don't know. Don't ask me that. Maybe
there is more than one. Maybe...

Wanda breaks down in tears. Belden reaches out to her,
touches her arm.

BELDEN

Please. Don't cry. I... I don't want to
hurt you. Please. I-I'm sorry. There.
Wanda rises, pours a cup of tea, and hands
it to Belden who sips from it throughout
the following

WANDA

At first, I couldn't be sure. It was a long time ago. I was on a bus. There was an old woman sitting in front of me, knitting. Socks, I think. There was something about her face. I felt I knew her. Then this young man got on. There were empty seats, but he sat down beside her. He didn't say anything but... his being there upset her. He seemed a nice young man. When she dropped her yarn, he picked it up. Right in front of me. He held it up to her. I saw their fingers touch. He got out at the next stop. When the bus reached the end of the line... she was dead.

BELDEN

Hm. But you said yourself, she was an old woman.

WANDA

But I've seen him since, several times. I've seen him crowds, I've watched for him. Every time someone I knew died, he was there. Once he was a young soldier. A salesman. A taxi driver. Someone you wouldn't notice unless you were watching. I wondered why I could see him. And that no one else could. Then, I knew. It was because I was getting older... and my time was coming. I could see clearer than younger people could.

BELDEN

All right. But if you knew what he looks like, then why be afraid? You could avoid him.

WANDA

Because his face is always different. I couldn't be sure.

BELDEN

How about when you go out? Now, couldn't he touch you then, if he wanted to?

WANDA

I never go out.

BELDEN

Never?

WANDA

I haven't been out for years.

BELDEN

Well, what do you do about food?

WANDA

A boy delivers it. I leave him money and a list. And I always wait until he's gone away before I unlock the door.

BELDEN

How can you live like this?

WANDA

But if I don't live like this, I won't live at all. If I don't watch out, if I let down even for a moment, he'll get in. I know he will.

She looks around at the dark room.

WANDA

I haven't always lived like this. I was young once. People said I was pretty. I lived out in the sunlight.

(touches her face)

People said I'd spoil my fine complexion. I didn't care. I loved outdoor things. I lived out in the sunlight.

Wanda looks down and sees that, beside her on the floor, a small patch of sunlight has found its way through her boarded up windows. She reaches out and puts her hand in its warmth.

WANDA

I've always hated the dark and the cold. I'm old. I've lived a long time. But I don't want to die.

(MORE)

WANDA (CONT'D)

I'd rather live in the dark than not live at all.

Belden leans forward to hand her his empty teacup and winces in pain.

BELDEN

Here. There's nothing to be afraid of. We're alone here. And there's nobody at the door. You need some rest--

The pain becomes too much for him and he leans back in his bed.

BELDEN

And I need help.

At a loss as to what to do, Wanda rises and walks away from him, wringing her hands. She closes a cabinet door, sits on a table, and paces nervously about. Suddenly, her attention is drawn to something outside a window. A burly MAN is walking down the stairs to her door. He KNOCKS. Belden gives Wanda a look, but she is paralyzed with fear, clutching her bed frame, and shaking her head. The KNOCKING continues throughout.

WANDA

No.

BELDEN

There's nothing to be afraid of. You'd better answer it.

Wanda moves slowly to the door.

BELDEN

Go on. That's right. Go ahead. Go ahead, answer it.

Wanda leaves the chain on, but opens the door a crack. The burly man's face appears. He tries to push the door in.

MAN

I'm sorry, lady, but I've got my orders.

Wanda panics and tries to slam the door shut, but the man gets his foot in.

MAN

I can't fool around any longer.

He's too strong for her. The chain breaks and he forces the door in and Wanda collapses to the floor. She lies completely still. Is she unconscious? Dead? The man moves to her body at once and places his hand on her neck.

FADE OUT on the image of the man's HAND is this the touch of Death?

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN on the man standing over Wanda, minutes later. She is in her bed now. And the man is rubbing her hand as she regains consciousness.

MAN

Easy, lady. Just lie quiet till you get your strength back. You gave me quite a scare when you caved in like that.

Wanda stares at the man's face and then at her hand in his.

WANDA

And still I live.

MAN

Well... You've got to understand, ma'am. I-I don't get no pleasure out of bustin' in doors. You don't seem to realize how important this is. I've got a crew and equipment coming in an hour to pull this tenement down. Beggin' your pardon, ma'am, but it's long overdue. I-I'm surprised it's still standing.

WANDA

And you're really... not Mister Death?

MAN

I don't know what you're talking about. All I know is I got a contract to demolish this row of buildings. Everybody else moved out long ago. Until the other day, I thought this building was deserted. I-I seen them windows boarded up and I-I figured you moved when the rest of them did.

WANDA

You want me to go outside? You want me to leave here? I can't.

MAN

You were notified months ago, right? I'm just trying to do my job. These buildings were condemned by the city and I'm the one

(MORE)

MAN (CONT'D)

who's got to tear them down.

WANDA

How can you?

MAN

This building has had it. It's worn out. Used up. All these buildings have got to come down.

Wanda clutches the bars of her bed frame in a way that suggests she is trapped in a cage.

MAN

I ain't a monster, lady. I've got a heart just like anybody else, but, uh -- I can see how you could get attached to a place and not want to see it wrecked but when a building is old, it's dangerous. It's gotta come down to make room for a new one. That's life, lady. Old make room for the new. People get the idea that I'm some kind of destroyer but -- They think I get kicks out of, uh, tearing stuff down. That ain't the way it is. I just clear the ground so that other people can build. In a way, I help them do it. Look around, it's the way things are. A big tree falls and new ones grow right out of the same ground. Old animals die and young ones take their places. Even people step aside when it's time.

WANDA

I won't.

Wanda suddenly notices that her door is wide open.

WANDA

The door!

She rises at once and shuts it. The man confronts her.

MAN

There's no need in...

Wanda turns from him and presses herself against the door.

MAN

What's the sense of locking a door that won't even be here in an hour? If you've got any possessions you'd want to keep, I-I'd move them out. I'll help ya.

Wanda turns to glare at him.

MAN

Now, look, I've been trying to go easy but if you insist on staying here, I'll have to call a cop. Please cooperate, lady.

The mention of the police reminds Wanda of something. She leaves the door and crosses halfway to the mysteriously silent Belden, still lying in bed on the other side of the room.

WANDA

(to herself)

Of course.

(to Belden)

Explain to him. Tell him the reason I can't go out there. You'll help me, won't you?

Belden merely looks at her, saying nothing. The man joins Wanda in the middle of the room and stares right at Belden, but is somehow unable to see him.

MAN

(to Wanda)

What are you doing? Who're you talking to?

WANDA

(to the man)

Mister Belden is a policeman.

(to Belden)

Please tell him.

But Belden remains silent. And the man sees no one. The man looks at Wanda as if she's crazy.

MAN

(to Wanda)

I'm sorry, but if you're still here when the crew arrives, I-I'll have to call a cop.

The man crosses to the door, opens it, pauses to look back sympathetically at Wanda, then exits, leaving the door wide open. Wanda watches him go, then turns to Belden.

WANDA

Why didn't you help me?

She hurriedly crosses to the door.

WANDA

I thought you understood.

She shuts the door and, as she does so, it begins to dawn on her. She turns back to Belden.

WANDA

You. He looked right at you... and didn't see you.

(full realization)

No!

BELDEN

Look in the mirror, Wanda.

Wanda turns, walks to the ornate mirror, and looks. In the mirror, Belden's bed is empty. She turns quickly to see -- and a FAST PAN reveals -- Belden still lying in the bed.

WANDA

You tricked me! It was you all the time.

BELDEN

Yes. I tricked you.

WANDA

But why? The moment I let you inside, you could have taken me. Anytime. But you were nice. You made me trust you.

Slowly, Belden sits up in bed, no longer in pain.

BELDEN

But I had to make you understand. Am I really so bad? Am I really so frightening? You've talked to me. You've confided in me. Have I tried to hurt you?

Belden rises.

BELDEN

It isn't me you're afraid of. You understand me. What you're afraid of is the unknown. Don't. Don't be afraid.

WANDA

But I am afraid.

Belden takes a step toward Wanda.

BELDEN

The running's over. It's time to rest.
(offers his hand)
Give me your hand.

WANDA

I don't want to die.

BELDEN

Trust me.

WANDA

No. No.

BELDEN

(gently)
Mother...
(steps forward)
Give me your hand.

An odd expression crosses Wanda's face. Very slowly, she takes his hand. Belden smiles.

BELDEN

You see? No shock. No engulfment. No tearing asunder. What you feared would come like an explosion is like a whisper. What you thought was the end is the beginning.

WANDA

When will it happen? When will we go?

BELDEN

Go? Look.

He nods toward her bed. She turns and sees... her body lying on the mattress, a peaceful smile on its face. She turns back to Belden and grins.

BELDEN

We have already begun.

Belden opens the door and leads Wanda to the doorway. The room magically darkens behind them as Belden offers Wanda his arm and she takes it. They walk into the sunshine, up the stairs, and down the street, chatting amiably.

NARRATOR

(voice over)

There was an old woman who lived in a room and, like all of us, was frightened of the dark. But who discovered in the minute last fragment of her life that there was nothing in the dark that wasn't there when the lights were on. Object lesson for the more frightened amongst us -- in or out of the Twilight Zone.

PAN UP and DISSOLVE TO to a field of stars in a night sky and FADE OUT.