from *Gone Girl* by Gillian Flynn

Quiet. The complex was always disturbingly quiet. As I neared our home, conscious of the noise of the car engine, I could see the cat was definitely on the steps. Still on the steps, twenty minutes after Carl’s call. That was strange. Amy loved the cat, the cat was declawed, the cat was never let outside, never ever, because the cat, Bleecker, was sweet but extremely stupid, and despite the LoJack tracking device pelleted somewhere in his fat furry rolls, Amy knew she’d never see the cat again if he ever got out. The cat would waddle straight into the MIssissippi River -- deedle-de-dum--and float all the way to the Gulf of Mexico into the maw of a hungry bull shark.

But it turned out the cat wasn’t even smart enough to get past the steps. Bleecker was perched on the edge of the porch, a pudgy but proud sentinel -- Private Tryhard. As I pulled into the drive, Carl came out and stood on his own front steps, and I could feel the cat and the old man both watching me as I got out of the car and walked toward the house, the red peonies along the border looking fat and juicy, asking to be devoured.

I was about to go into blocking position to get the cat when I saw that the front door was open. Carl had said as much, but seeing it was different. This wasn’t taking-out-the-trash-back-in-a-minute open. This was wide-gaping-ominous open.

Carl hovered across the way, waiting for my response, and like some awful piece of performance art, I felt myself enacting Concerned Husband. I stood on the middle step and frowned, then took the stairs quickly, two at a time, calling out my wife’s name.

Silence.

“Amy, you home?”

I ran straight upstairs. No Amy. The ironing board was set up, the iron still on, a dress waiting to be pressed.

“Amy!”

As I ran back downstairs, I could see Carl still framed in the open doorway, hands on hips, watching. I swerved into the living room, and pulled up short. The carpet glinted with shards of glass, the coffee table shattered. End tables were on their sides, books slid across the floor like a card trick. Even the heavy antique ottoman was belly-up, its four tiny feet in the air like something dead. In the middle of the mess was a pair of good sharp scissors.

“Amy!”

I began running, bellowing her name. Through the kitchen, where a teakettle was burning, down to the basement, where the guest room stood empty, and then out the back door. I pounded across our yard onto the slender boat deck leading out over the river. I peeked over the side to see if she was in our rowboat, where I had found her one day, tethered to the dock, rocking in the water, her face to the sun, eyes closed, and as I’d peered down into the dazzling reflections of the river, at her beautiful, still face, she’d suddenly opened her blue eyes and said nothing to me, and I’d said nothing back and gone into the house alone.

“Amy!”

She wasn’t on the water, she wasn’t in the house. Amy was not there.

Amy was gone.