

Resigned

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A 10 minute play

By Kym Fraher

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A sickness that causes the afflicted to fall into comas is sweeping across the country, impacting adult women exclusively. Is it organic or a mass hysteria and what can be done about it?

## CHARACTERS

TOM -- Male, mid to late 60's, News anchor, poster child for celebrated white male mediocracy, sincerely thinks he's the smartest guy in the room at all times, married/divorced multiple times, intolerant of anyone who doesn't think he's as great as he thinks he is, refuses to put himself in another person's shoes because, why should he?

SANDRA -- Female, early 30's, newish member of news anchor staff, serious and driven, profoundly understands the need to tread lightly on male egos in the industry but the effort is taking its toll, solidly interested in maintaining a professional association of those she works with but not interested in making friends at work, socially fulfilled by a crew of female friends outside of work.

ANDY -- Male, mid 50's, gentle, dedicated father who loves his wife, apolitical, currently overwhelmed with the task of managing his wife's medical needs, naive but harbors a fierce loyalty to his family over all else.

TESS -- Female, 20's, brilliant and driven, studying to be a research doctor, idealistic, willing to make sacrifices in order to help create a better world, feminist, frustrated by the political inaction of her family but loves them anyway.

\*\*Voice from off-stage in first scene--presumably the newscast director/Introducer, male

Resigned

A newsroom. Consists of the basics to create the scene, including a glass news anchor desk that that allows the audience to see what is going on beneath the surface. TOM and SANDRA are conducting last minute preparations before the cameras role for the newscast. SANDRA is fixing her hair while looking over her notes. TOM is watching SANDRA.

TOM

What'd'ya say we go get a drink after we're done here.

SANDRA

(forced smile)

Ya know, I can't. Thanks though.

TOM

C'mon, you've been using every excuse in the book for 6 months now, and no one here has even met your "so-called" boyfriend. Give me a chance. I think you're going to like having an older man around. I can take care of you. In all the ways a woman likes to be taken care of.

TOM reaches over beneath the anchor desk and puts his hand on SANDRA's thigh.

Let's stop the games. We've got chemistry. Why fight it?

SANDRA moves her leg away from TOM's reach.

SANDRA

No. Tom, I said no.

VOICE FROM OFF STAGE

We're a go in ten seconds! Ten seconds everybody!

TOM

(voice low so only SANDRA can hear)

Why're you being such a frigid bitch? I'm offering you something good, something valuable. You're just too stupid to recognize it.

VOICE FROM OFF STAGE

3, 2, 1--We're on!...(sounds recorded and grandiose) AND NOW, CHANNEL 5 NEWS, LOCALLY AND FROM AROUND THE WORLD WITH SANDRA AND TOM!

SANDRA and TOM snap into professional mode with wide, toothy smiles.

TOM

Good evening. I'm Tom Culver-

SANDRA

And I'm Sandra Shaw. We start this evening with a disturbing trend that seems to be gathering momentum. What started in Texas has now spread to 3 more states--So far, 199 women have fallen into a deep, coma-like sleep that doctors are calling "Sleeping Beauty Syndrome." Experts inform us that the onset of this mysterious illness is sudden. Victims fall into a deep sleep and cannot be awakened. The cases in the US have been exclusively adult females ranging in age from 16 to 55, who seem to be normal one moment and comatose the next. Overseas, children have succumbed to this illness and have remained asleep for months, even more than a year in several cases. Officials in the United States stress that this illness does not appear to be contagious and are describing it as "female hysteria." We will be following this situation closely and bring you updates as they become available.

The camera pans to TOM.

TOM

(wooden, not that interested) Wow, 199 women. Thank you Sandra for that important update...(now with more enthusiasm) States are now weighing in on the new ruling from the Supreme Court limiting birth control access for women. Some groups are calling it, "a War Against Women" while others hail it as a move toward traditional family values. Our Gary Shinto is at a protest against the ruling downtown. Gary?

As TOM is speaking, SANDRA begins to look upset, disturbed, and overcome. As soon as TOM turns the story over, SANDRA slumps in her chair, unconscious. TOM hesitates for a second before turning to catch her as she falls to the floor.

END OF SCENE

## SCENE 2

A bedroom in a modest home with a door to the rest of the house on one side and a closed window with a gauzy curtain on the other. A middled-aged man, ANDY, sits beside a woman seemingly asleep in a double bed. She remains a still form throughout the play. ANDY is slowly, carefully depressing a giant syringe into a tube that leads into the woman's nose. His movements are gentle and efficient--it is clear that he's been doing this for a while, and he hums to himself as he performs this task. He continues to administer the feeding for most of the scene. There is a slight tap at the door.

ANDY

Come in...?

The door opens and in walks TESS, a fit and healthy woman of about 20 years wearing a University of Texas Medical School sweatshirt and a backpack on her shoulder. She looks tentative.

TESS

(whispers)

Hi Dad. Is it okay...?

ANDY

(regular voice)

Tess! What a great surprise! Come in, come in. I'm just giving your mother her dinner. We're so happy to see you! You should've told me you were coming home!

TESS

Can she...um...can she hear us?

ANDY

(positive attitude always)

Yes. The doctors say that her senses are fine, and she is picking up on everything that's happening around her. We want her to be informed of everything. Now, it's important to make sure your attitude, your tone, around her is positive, upbeat. Those cases overseas, with the kids, they eventually came out if it once there was an element of hope, so we're shooting for that. Your mother's brain is looking for positivity to decide how to respond.

TESS

How long has it been?

ANDY

(very plucky and can-do)

Since she's been asleep? This is day...(he thinks for a second, counting)...200! Well, will ya look at that--200 days. Wow, y'know, thinking about it, we'd heard in the news about all those women falling over sick just-like-that everywhere else, but when I got the call telling me that your mother had collapsed at the Jiffy Lube, I certainly never thought I'd have to be doing this 200 days later! Life sure throws some curve balls sometimes. But ya gotta keep going. (to his wife) Isn't that right, Julia? Gotta keep goin'...

TESS

Oh. Wow. 200 days.

TESS sits gingerly on the bed and places her backpack beside her. It falls to the floor and several pill bottles fall out. ANDY sees them but doesn't know what they are. TESS hurriedly stuffs them back into the backpack, closes it, and places it on the floor.

TESS

(nervously)

Those are...uh...just a bunch of samples that I have to do a project for at school, in organic chemistry...?

ANDY

(not sure why she's nervous)

Oh, okay...So, how are the classes going? I know you said that that organic chemistry class seemed like it was going to be hard.

TESS

(gestures to her mother)

Really? You want to talk about my classes?

ANDY

Yes. We want to hear all about it.

TESS

Okay...my advisor was cool, and she approved my extensions.

ANDY

...your extensions?

TESS

Yea, because of family hardship. Because of what happening with Mom.

ANDY

(suddenly more intense)

Tess. Your mom does not want you to use what's going on with her as an excuse for slacking off. It's more important now than ever that bright young people like you enter the field of medicine to help us all/

TESS

/It's not slacking off. Mom's sick. She's...she's like this!

ANDY

She's not dead. She's still with us. She's just...she's asleep.

TESS

This isn't sleep, Dad--this is a coma! Sleep, you wake up from, after eight or nine hours./

ANDY

/This is temporary. She's going to come back to us.

TESS

When, Dad? They're saying that the reason that thousands of women are sick with this in the US is because of what's happening--That it's a desperate response to all these new laws, how we're losing our agency, our rights, more and more every day. Do you see *that* turning around and getting better anytime soon? Cuz I sure don't.

ANDY

(whispering urgently)

Hey. Remember what I said about staying positive and only talking about good things when you're in here? She can hear everything you're saying.

TESS

But Dad, if I came in here and blew a bunch of sunshine around, and she woke up or whatever and saw that nothing was any better at all, then what would happen? Would she go back under again? How would that even work?

ANDY

I don't...they don't know. The only thing they have to compare it to is what happened to those children in the detention camps--I know it's not exactly the same thing, but... (beat) Are you taking your medication?/

TESS

/Yes. I'm taking it. I'm not freaking out because I'm not taking my medicine, Dad/

ANDY

/I know you're not/

TESS

/Jesus. I'm freaking out because it sucks to be a woman in this country. I'm freaking out because the only thing my mother felt like she had the power to do in the face of *all this shit*, was to disappear out of her own body!

ANDY

I know. It's terrible. But what can you do?

TESS

It's still a democracy, isn't it--or at least supposed to be...

ANDY

Yes, it is...last I checked.

TESS

When was the last time you checked? (whispers) Did you know that some women who have Sleeping Beauty Syndrome are being regularly raped by their male caretakers--family members, so-called friends? Did you hear about that? That's the world we live in right now, Dad. It's a place where women are going into comas to hide. And some men are using this sickness--that they caused, or at least did nothing to prevent--as their opportunity to violate women even more--It's so enraging!

ANDY

(over it)

I can only do what I can do. My life has been on hold for the past 200 days so I could care for your mom. I have to exercise her limbs so her muscles don't atrophy, I have to feed her through this Ng tube twice a day, I have to change her diaper and give her a bath...I have to do this all this by myself--I have neither the time nor the emotional bandwidth to do anything about those poor souls whose family and friends are so disrespectful and so cruel. I'm too busy making sure my wife understands how valued and safe she is. Do you understand that?

TESS

Yea, I guess I do.

ANDY

(sympathetic)

Listen.

I know you care about those women who are being abused--I do too, when it comes down to it--but you can't let things bother you more than you're able to handle or able to do something about. The world is not made better by your anger alone, Tess. It becomes better if you can channel that sense of outrage into something meaningful and constructive.

TESS

I just feel so helpless. And livid.

ANDY looks at his wife.

ANDY

Yea, there's a lot of that going around lately.

Beat.

TESS

Do you think I'm more likely to get this? To this happening to me? To falling asleep-BOOM-just like Mom did?

ANDY

I don't know. Maybe? It probably helps that you're taking medication for your anxiety.

TESS

But Dad, the thing is, I don't know if I want to be medicated, to be numb to this. Maybe my anxiety is the canary in the coal mine. Maybe I should be listening to my mind's rage instead of suppressing it.

ANDY pauses the feeding and turns to his daughter.

ANDY

Tess. Do you remember how things were before you started taking your medication? How you were unable to focus on anything? How you couldn't even sleep because of your anxiety? It is...unlikely that you'd be able to do anything useful if you were to stop taking your meds right now. It's a Catch-22.

ANDY turns back to his task and begins disassembling the feeding equipment.

ANDY

(Sweetly, to his wife) Julia, you had your lunch, so I think it's time for me and Tess to go get something to eat, ourselves. (turns to TESS) Are you hungry?

I could make something here and we could eat in the bedroom, with Mom--I'd be like a picnic! Or we could go out. Your choice. Whatever you want to do.

TESS  
(whispers)

I think I'd rather go out.

ANDY

That's fine. Suit yourself. I'm going to go rinse this stuff out and get it sterilized for next time. While I do all that, stay here. Talk to your mother. Remember--be positive. Tell her about your classes, what you're learning. I'm sure she'd love to hear about that, wouldn't you, Julia?

ANDY exits and TESS stares nervously at her mother. She is clearly uncomfortable--it's like being in the same room with a corpse.

TESS

Uh, hey Mom. It's Tess--I guess you probably already know that. (laughs nervously) Dad wanted me to talk to you about college, about happy things...but I can't. Not right now. (beat--she looks toward the door) How could I do that when, instead of sticking up for women and responding with our numbers and our united support, politicians are causing more of us to disappear, like you did? Which of course, just allows the patriarchy to keep doing what it's been doing....Don't tell Dad--not that you can--but I haven't been going to classes. At all. I can't. I know the world needs more pathologists in the future to help fight diseases, but I'm too busy trying to fight, for us. Here. Now. If a woman gets pregnant in this state, it's all over for her. So I've been doing something about it. Here, look--

TESS takes a few pill bottles from her backpack, some of the ones that spilled out earlier, and "shows" them to her comatose mother.

(whispers) I've been running Plan B pills interstate. With my medical training and background in chemistry, I can help make sure the stuff we're running is pure and not tainted or not going to work--They're doing that now, you know, sabotaging, trafficking sugar pills so they won't work. God, it's a whole thing! I'm only telling you because, I don't know, I need you to understand I guess. At least *you're* not going to rat me out, not when you're like *this*. It's just...I'm not sure, but I think they're on to me. So I wanted to stop in and say goodbye. I don't know when the next time I can risk contacting you will be.

From offstage, we hear ANDY speaking to someone as he approaches the room.

ANDY

(in a friendly but slight confused tone)

You're lucky she's here, because she doesn't come home to visit very often. She's just in the bedroom, talking to Julia, her mother. My wife has had that Sleeping Beauty Syndrome for a good while now, so Tess is getting her caught up on what's going on with her studies and whatnot. She's going to be a doctor, maybe help find out what's happening to all these women, y'know?...You said you're a friend of hers from the dorms? Mark, was it? I don't remember her mentioning you, but hey, what do *I* know?

As ANDY approaches, TESS grabs her backpack, opens the window, and begins to climb out.

TESS

(as she collects her backpack)

Shit. I gotta go.

TESS exits the window but turns around.

Please wake up Mom. We need you awake, alert, and on the front lines with us. I love you.

She is gone. The door opens and ANDY sticks his head in and looks around. He sees the open window and suddenly senses that the stranger represents a danger to his daughter, even if he doesn't understand exactly why. ANDY enters the bedroom but turns and blocks the doorway from the unseen stranger.

ANDY

(super friendly)

You know what--where's my mind? It's just been so crazy around here, what with everything I have to do for my wife, I totally forgot! She left. She said that she needed to go study at the library for a test that's coming up soon--I think it was just my wishful thinking that made me forget--I really wanted her to stay here, with us for the afternoon, but she had to go. Since you're a friend from school, you probably know where to find her on campus, right? Here, I'll see you out.

He decisively exits the room and closes the door behind him.

Pause on the scene of a still figure in the bed.  
The curtains at the open window sway in the  
breeze.

END OF SCENE