

# UNIVERSAL REMOTE

A Play for Radio

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## CHARACTERS:

TURNER  
HOME LOAN AD  
ACTION MOVIE HERO  
TRICIA  
ALLEN  
SHERI  
YVONNE  
OPERATION ANNOUNCER  
'NURTURE' NARRATOR  
'ODD SOUNDS' ANNOUNCER  
AM HOST  
FIRST CALLER  
SECOND CALLER  
PETWORLD GUY  
CARTOON GIRL VOICE  
SMALL VOICE  
NEIGHBOR  
MADAMMA CASSANDRA  
THE GODDESS INSOMNIA

SFX:

PACING

FLOORBOARDS CREAK UNDER FOOTSTEPS

FOOTSTEPS STOP

TURNER

Night has fallen. Night has fallen. Night has fallen in on me. I can't sleep under its weight. The lights in the buildings are few. Solitary stars. A constellation of wakefulness. A galaxy of the delinquent. We love the day, don't we? The sun warms our souls, cheers our hearts. I want to escape the stark daylight; the fluorescent tubes' cold glow that turns all of us to ghosts. Yet within this womb-like darkness I fear the cold reality of my dreams. Rather live in this half-world between the two: this quiet, luminous time. While the town nods on I ponder. Thoughts whirl like dust clouds on a plain. I'm in a quandary. There can be no easy, over-the-counter solution. The ancient fear of the dark still grips us. The Medieval mind peopled the forests with ghosts and demons, then cut the dark woods down. The modern mind electrified cities. White light outshone the stars that once domed the world. No more the orange fires that warmed us at our hearths. Lost the candlelight quivering with the whispered words of lovers. Imagination we find, not in the mind or the voice of the storyteller, but in pictures painted with light on the walls of cinema caves. We discover once wild and dangerous fantasies pressed flat in the pages of psychoanalytic texts, like century-old flowers. Is it any wonder I've ceased to dream? In an age when monsters are made of latex rubber, what nightmares may I call my own? (Pause.) I think I'll turn on the television. I want to lose myself in the maze of media.

TV POPS ON.

HOME LONE AD

Homeowners! Now's the time for a second mortgage and Shady Lane Refinancing is the place. And, if you make your payments on time, it won't cost you an arm and a leg. So come on down and make a Shady deal.

CLICK OR CHUNK OF  
REMOTE CONTROL  
(DISTINCTIVE)

ACTION FILM

Mow 'em down, Jack.

MACHINE GUN FIRE,  
BAZOOKA, CANNON,  
MORTAR, ETC.  
CLICK  
SOAPY. DRAMATIC,  
NEUROTIC MUSIC

TRICIA

Oh Allen, Allen, tell me the truth.

ALLEN

Tricia, I'm tired of living a lie. I did sleep with one of your multiple personalities before you were lost in the Amazonian rain forest with amnesia after the plane crash and your twin sister Freida who you were separated from at birth tried to take your place.

TRICIA

Which one of my multiple personalities did you sleep with before I was lost in the Amazonian rain forest with amnesia after the plane crash?

ALLEN

She called herself Chifonna. Call it a betrayal, but I liked it. At least Chifonna was capable of multiple orgasm.

TRICIA

But Allen, Chifonna is one of my male personalities. Chifonna is a drag queen.

ALLEN

You're saying I'm a, I'm a —.

TRICIA

That's right, you're a sexuality they haven't even categorized yet. Wait! If you slept with Chifonna before I was lost in the Amazonian rainforest with amnesia after the plane crash, that means!

ALLEN

Exactly! That means: I'm the father of the triplets!

TRICIA

All of them?

ALLEN

You're telling me that the triplets aren't identical?

TRICIA

Identical? They're not even related!

HEAVY, MELODRAMATIC CHORD

CLICK



SULTRY SAX MUSIC

SHERI

(phone line women's voices are alternating, soft, sultry and sexy,  
then building to bitter, harsh and loud.)

Hi, I'm Sheri.

YVONNE

And I'm Yvonne.

SHERI

We're single.

YVONNE

We're lonely.

SHERI

We're desperate.

YVONNE

We're jaded.

SHERI

We're bitter.

YVONNE

We're waiting.

SHERI

We're tired of waiting.

YVONNE

We're tired of you.

SHERI

So don't bother to call 1-900-HARD UP.

YVONNE

We'd only hang up on you.

SHERI

And frankly, you're not worth our time.

PHONE RINGS

YVONNE

Hello? Oh, you again. Listen, you pathetic little monster, they can't pay me enough money to talk to creeps like you. Don't you ever, ever, ever call me again.

PHONE HANG UP

(NO CLICK OF REMOTE)

OPERATION ANNOUNCER

Welcome back to live brain surgery. Remember, the patient is under local anesthesia and is awake during the entire procedure. The doctor is now preparing to open the top of the patient's skull with a miniaturized circular saw, revealing the brain tissues inside.

HIGH PITCHED WHINE OF SAW

CRACK!

TURNER

Yeeeeee, ugh! Ooo!

CLICK

'NURTURE' NARRATOR

While most growing things need light to live and strain for even the tiniest glint of sun, mushrooms thrive in the deepest, darkest recesses of the forest. These strangely beautiful, often deadly, essential creatures of the living world hide from the sun. They spring up from tiny spores after a rainfall. They devour the dead and fallen limbs and trunks of trees and other plants in the process of decay that recycles nature's nutrients so that plant and animal life may begin again. Tonight, on NURTURE, we'll take you to places you've never seen, even below the ground, in a search for one of our darkest fears and closest friends in this program entitled: FUNGUS, THE LURKING WORLD.

MUSIC UP

TURNER

I don't have to watch this. I could open my refrigerator door and see much the same thing. It takes half an hour to find out there's nothing to watch. Then you start over.

AN OBVIOUS DOORBELL

TURNER

Huh? Who could it be at this hour? Let me look.

CLICK OFF TV

FLOORBOARDS CREAK

UNDER FOOTSTEPS

TURNER

Let me look through the spy lens. Oh! Just a minute.

DOOR OPEN

TURNER

Hi, neighbor.

NEIGHBOR

Hello, Turner.

TURNER

What's that you've got in your hand? A stun gun?

NEIGHBOR

It's an electric razor.

TURNER

And you're planning on using it for...?

NEIGHBOR

Shaving. What else?

TURNER

You never know. You could be a serial killer living right across the hall.

NEIGHBOR

Sure, right. Can I borrow some electricity?

TURNER

Don't you have enough of your own?

NEIGHBOR

I blew the fuse just now, you know, hacking up corpses with my jigsaw, and I saw your light under the door. The battery on this thing isn't charged, so I have to plug it in.

TURNER

I'll charge your batteries for you.

NEIGHBOR

When it works you can shave under water.

TURNER

That's great if you live in a nuclear submarine. All right then, get your apparatus on in here.

FOOTSTEPS

DOOR CLOSES

NEIGHBOR

Thanks.

TURNER

Why are you in a bathrobe? Is this a social call?

NEIGHBOR

Not really. I'm just getting up for work.

TURNER

Work? In the dead of night?

NEIGHBOR

Graveyard shift. I won't take long. Don't want to keep you up.

TURNER

I was just giving up on sleep entirely.

NEIGHBOR

Where can I plug this in?

SFX:

TURNER

Oh, anywhere. The bathroom has an outlet.

STEPS

DOOR OPENS

STEPS OVER CREAKING HINGES

DOOR CLOSSES

BUZZING

TURNER

Be careful in there with that. I read about a man who got electrocuted with one of those things.

NEIGHBOR

Hey, there's some water on the floor in here! I'll have to —. (Shriek horrifyingly, abruptly stops.)

BUZZING STOPS

TURNER

Oh my God!

DOOR OPENS, CREAKING

NEIGHBOR

Just kidding!

TURNER

Son of a ...

BUZZING

(DOOR IS LEFT OPEN)

NEIGHBOR

What are you doing up anyway? Can't sleep?

TURNER

No. Not usually.

NEIGHBOR

You know, you should drink chamomile tea.

TURNER

It tastes like sawdust. You like working overnight?

NEIGHBOR

Yeah. I don't like being around the day people. Total neurotics, all of 'em.

TURNER

You're avoiding something.

NEIGHBOR

No. It's really okay. I see friends on weekends. In the summer, I can go to the park during the day. Whatever I want. Everyone else is trapped inside.

RAZOR OFF

TURNER

Hmmmm.

NEIGHBOR

Yeah, try it sometime. Anyway, I have to go.

TURNER

Nice of you to drop by so little clad.

NEIGHBOR

Thanks for the juice.

TURNER

Call again. We're always open.

DOOR OPENS

NEIGHBOR

I will. Bye, now.

TURNER

Bye.

DOOR CLOSES

TURNER

Nice guy. A little strange. I like that. I wonder what's on municipal radio?

ODD NOISES HOST

You're listening to ODD NOISES, dedicated to bringing you the best in exotic and discordant musics. Next up a piece on the See-Thru Label from a group known as Pink Grapefruit Knife. The album, their third to date, is called Vertigo Plains. On it you'll find a number of cuts, of which this is one. Again the group Pink Grapefruit Knife from the Vertigo Plains album on the See-Thru Label with a work entitled Duet for Two Rolling Trash Cans Filled with Children's Musical Instruments.

SOUND OF TWO TRASH CANS

FULL OF TOY INSTRUMENTS

ROLLING AROUND



TURNER

This is exactly why I stopped going to see music at the Hat Blocking Emporium.  
(As old geezer.) I tell you, music today - it's all noise. I guess there's nothing to  
do but descend to the depths of AM radio, which you should only listen to in the  
A.M.

CLICK

"RADIO EIGHTY-SIX"

(STATION SIGNATURE, SUNG)

TURNER

Not even a local station. Must be a clear night.

AM HOST

Our topic tonight: Brushes with destiny. So call in and tell us about your very  
own BRUSH WITH DESTINY. And you're the next caller on Radio 86.

[echo on "BRUSH WITH DESTINY."]

FIRST CALLER.

Bob? (Echoes) Bob?

HOST.

Turn down your radio. (Pause.) Hello? Are you there?

FIRST CALLER.

Bob, I was listening to your show earlier when you had the guy  
on who said the NASA spy satellites could see everything you do in  
your home.

HOST.

You should have called Doctor Conspiracy while he was on the air.

FIRST CALLER.

He said the US Information Agency is using spy satellites to look through our windows day and night. But they don't need to do any of that, because all the cable tv converter boxes and the new VCR's have tiny little cameras in them. And the cable company watches everything you do.

HOST

By the way, I see on my monitor that you're wearing nothing at all, and it's not a pleasant sight.

FAKE LAUGH TRACK

(DRUNKEN CROWD)

FIRST CALLER

You laugh, but you're on the radio, so you've got the radio waves inside your brain. Pretty soon we'll all be robots run by microwaves beamed down from satellites. The world conspiracy will make us work by remote control. We'll breed generations of radio slaves, because we've got their frequencies in our heads. We're just receiving it all now. They're just warming us up. Wait until they're ready. Not none of us is safe. We've got to wear radio wave-proof helmets day and night. It's the only way we can think for ourselves.

HOST

Ever think that if you were run by remote control, your personality might improve a great deal? Sir I'd love to go on, but I don't see the point.

GIANT EXPLOSION

Tonight's guest brought his own dog biscuits. Good to know he has so many followers. Again, gentle listeners, and I can't stress this enough: The last call illustrates the danger in going off your medication and moving into your fallout shelter with the mannequin of your dreams. Next caller. You're on the air on Radio 86.

SECOND CALLER

Hello? (Echoes.) Hello?

HOST

Turn down your radio.

SECOND CALLER

I wanted to tell you my alien abduction story.

HOST

Go ahead. I've got nothing better to do and obviously, neither do you.

SECOND CALLER

I was driving down the road in my pickup late one night, when I saw these lights. And the car stopped by itself, the engine just shut off. Suddenly this spaceship landed in front of me.

HOST

What did it look like?

SECOND CALLER

The spaceship ... ?

HOST

Yeah.

SECOND CALLER

It kinda looked like my girlfriend's diaphragm case, but a lot bigger. Real big.

AM HOST

Sir, that's sick, but at least she takes precautions against people like you reproducing.

CROWD APPLAUSE

Do go on.

SECOND CALLER

Anyway this spaceship landed. Then this door slid open and a ramp rolled down, and these two aliens come out. Little guys with big black eyes, just like the drawings in the Weekly Weird News and all. I knew what I was in for right then and there. So I grab my shotgun off the rack, you know.

AM HOST

I didn't know it was alien hunting season. Do you have a permit?

GUFFAWS

SECOND CALLER

Look I wasn't gonna get stuck with no elephant needles and have my privates poked with no laser beams. So I got out of the truck and they come at me and I fired a shot right over their heads. Then they scream and start to run back to the ship. So I ran after them and I tackled one. The other must'a got in, cause the ship took off. I had some rope, so I drug the creature back and I tied him up, right? And I throwed him in the back of the truck and started off driving.

AM HOST.

You mean the aliens didn't get you? I thought this was an alien abduction story.

SFX:

SECOND CALLER.

That's what I've been trying to tell you. It was me abducting the alien. (Cackles.)

AWW...

(AUDIENCE LET DOWN)

AM HOST

Yeah, I get it. You really had me going there.

SECOND CALLER

This is true. Now I got this thing living in my garage and I don't know what to feed it.

AM HOST

You mean they don't make an Alien Chow?

SECOND CALLER

Not one's I know of.

AM HOST

Then, why not feed it nuts like you? Sorry, got to go. It's been fun though.

SOUND OF MAN

FALLING, HITTING

Now an exciting commercial message.

PETWORLD GUY

DISCOUNT PETWORLD! Specials this week on used and damaged pets. Up to

50% off on:

Flabby Tabbies!

VERY DEEP MEOW

Fractured Frogs!

SFX:

REEDEEP, (1 BEAT) UH!

Limping Lizards!

CARTOON GIRL VOICE

Limping Lizards!

PETWORLD GUY

Introverted Turtles!

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

SMALL VOICE

Come out Fred.

PETWORLD GUY

Pit-bulls seized in drug raids.

GRRRR! ... GRRRRRRRRR! ...

Little dogs that do nothing but bark!

YAP, YAP, YAPYAPYAPYAPYAP YAP!

If you've got a place in your heart, we've got the wrong pet at the right price.

Trade-ins welcome.

CARTOON GIRL VOICE

Limping Lizards!

TURNER

Is everyone awake at this hour insane? Or is it just me? Let's spin the dial and  
play radio roulette.

STATIONS ZOOP BY

MADAMMA CASSANDRA

You are all now listening to the radio psychic hour. I am Madamma Cassandra and I am in touch with the unseen. I will communicate with the beyond by means of my telepathic fax machine. Let us now go to the next phone call.

PHONE RINGS

TURNER

Hello? (Radio echoes). Hello?

MADAMMA CASSANDRA.

Turn down your radio.

TURNER

What is this?

MADAMMA CASSANDRA.

Hello, this is Madamma Cassandra.

TURNER

I don't believe you.

MADAMMA CASSANDRA.

Good. That's a start. I have a very strong vibration that you're having trouble sleeping lately.

TURNER

This is insane. How did you get this number?

MADAMMA CASSANDRA.

You are listening to my show?

TURNER

Uh, yeah.

MADAMMA CASSANDRA.

And you can't sleep?

TURNER

The one would follow the other, wouldn't it?

MADAMMA CASSANDRA

Don't get snappy with me.

TURNER

I was only saying...

MADAMMA CASSANDRA

Madamma Cassandra gets angry when you do that. This insomnia, it must be terrible for you.

TURNER

I don't know. I have nothing to compare it with.

MADAMMA CASSANDRA

Why don't you sleep?

TURNER

Because I have lunatics invading my reality at all hours.

MADAMMA CASSANDRA

I told you to watch that. Madamma Cassandra must not be toyed with. Remember, karma is like a boomerang; it comes right back at you. You should not have thrown away that chain letter two months ago.

TURNER

How did you know about that?



MADAMMA CASSANDRA

A lucky guess. (Sinister laugh.) It is lucky for you this is all that happened. You remember what the letter said happened to that man in Topeka?

TURNER

I was supposed to believe that? Come on! How quick to you have to be to get out of the way of a steamroller?

MADAMMA CASSANDRA

Funny how fate can sneak up and flatten you.

TURNER

Is there really something to all this stuff?

MADAMMA CASSANDRA

You know, the psychic business is America's second fastest growing industry, right after prison construction. The mysteries of the unseen could become our greatest export.

TURNER

Mysteries of the unseen — as opposed to what? — Mysteries of the painfully obvious?

MADAMMA CASSANDRA

What do you want? It's all in the packaging. I could sell someone a box of dirt if I said it came from under the Great Pyramid.

TURNER

I guess you're right. So what can you do for me?

MADAMMA CASSANDRA

Listen. Call 970-DOZE and I shall share with you the timeless secrets of tranquillity.

TURNER

What's it cost?

MADAMMA CASSANDRA

Only five dollars a minute.

TURNER

Now I know you're a fake. You clearly have no concept of my bank balance.

MADAMMA CASSANDRA

We do a real hypnotism over the phone.

TURNER

Then I fall asleep before I hang up and you rake it in.

MADAMMA CASSANDRA

Are you sure you don't have some psychic powers yourself?

TURNER

Goodbye Madamma Cassandra.

MADAMMA CASSANDRA.

Wait!

HANG UP

TURNER

Now they're invading my home. I've got to get media out of my life!

TURNS OFF RADIO

TURNER

Oh when will this torment end? Oh Insomnia, when will you ever leave me?

HARP THROUGH

ADDITIONAL

MYSTERIOUS SFX

What's this I see? A whirl of mist, a wisp of fabric? A figure bathed in white light holding a glowing paper coffee cup showing the Parthenon and bearing the inscription: IT IS OUR PLEASURE TO SERVE YOU? Who could it be? Who the hell are you?

MYSTERIOUS SFX END

HARP CONTINUES (2-3 BEATS)

HARP STRING BREAKS

THE GODDESS INSOMNIA

I am the Goddess Insomnia.

TURNER

Let's see, the TV's off, the radio's off. I hung up the phone. I'm hallucinating.

THE GODDESS INSOMNIA

Excuse me. You're having a divine visitation. Pay attention.

TURNER

What do you want with me?

THE GODDESS INSOMNIA

You called my name and I arrived. Got any coffee on? Freeze-dried's okay too. No decaf. I don't understand decaf. I mean, if you don't want coffee, drink an herbal tea or something.

TURNER

Uh, sure, let me pour.

POURING

THE GODDESS INSOMNIA

You know, you gotta knock off this stuff. Keeps you up all night. Where was I? Oh yeah. (Intones.) I am Insomnia. The goddess of twenty-four-hour donut shops, convenience stores, vegetable markets and locksmith services. I am the goddess of operators standing by to take your order, of people who vacuum offices. I watch over bakers, night nurses and women who give birth before dawn. I am the keeper of old B movies, the protector of students with deadlines, the bringer of hope to weekend parties where the neighbors call the cops. In ancient times I gave the world caffeine. My sacred animal is the shark. And so on and so forth.

TURNER

Great, but what does all this have to do with me?

THE GODDESS INSOMNIA

I protect the wakeful, for they are the guardians of the well-rested. I watch those who keep watch by the fire. I have come here to free you of your sleeplessness. Funny word sleeplessness. It seems to concretize a state of nonexistence, don't you think?

TURNER

I never gave it much thought.

THE GODDESS INSOMNIA

I've seen a lot of bug-eyed people in my time, but you take the prize. You think too much. You worry. You work yourself into such a state. Why are you up, pacing the floor, muttering, distracting yourself with edutainment and infomercials?

TURNER

Edutainment and infomercials?

THE GODDESS INSOMNIA

It's enough to make you go back to reading books, isn't it?

TURNER

It's come to this. I've lost my mind.

THE GODDESS INSOMNIA

Still think you're hallucinating?

TURNER

Maybe.

THE GODDESS INSOMNIA

Then try this.

WHACK!

TURNER

Ow!

THE GODDESS INSOMNIA

See? What'd I tell you? Listen, I have a warning for you. You are guilty of abusing my power to conquer night. It's not like twenty years ago, when no one came home before dawn.

TURNER

I know, I know.

THE GODDESS INSOMNIA

And may I say it might be easier to get at least some sleep if you had some steady company.

TURNER

Why are you badgering me?

THE GODDESS INSOMNIA

Because you're stubborn and you have no excuse.

TURNER

Flatter me more.

THE GODDESS INSOMNIA

You fear your own dreams.

TURNER

Doesn't everyone?

THE GODDESS INSOMNIA

All except the truly oblivious. Embrace your dreams. Conquer your fear.

TURNER

But how?

THE GODDESS INSOMNIA

If you nurture your imagination, you have nothing to fear from your dreams. It's time for a change. Get out and see people. Do things. Have a little fun. Get a new love interest. This is no way for a grown person to live.

TURNER

So what are you going to do about it?

THE GODDESS INSOMNIA

I shall now withdraw my powers from you with a wave of my magic red plastic coffee stirrer. Stand back. Sometimes this thing misfires.

TUNING FORK OR  
ELECTRONIC HUMMING

TURNER

It's glowing. I'm bathed in amber light. I feel all tingly. What's happening to me?

WINDING DOWN SFX

THE GODDESS INSOMNIA

There. It's done. From now on you will not be able to stay up without a good reason.

TURNER

Fine, now I'm the only adult with a bedtime.

THE GODDESS INSOMNIA

Someone's got to lay down the law with you. You're unreasonable.

TURNER

That's half my charm.

THE GODDESS INSOMNIA

That would be okay if there was another half. Look, I've gotta go. There are lots of troubled souls out there that need my time.

TURNER

But there's so much I need ask you. Where is the world going? Do reptiles dream in color?

THE GODDESS INSOMNIA

(Fading away into the distance.)

Don't lose any sleep over it.

POP & EXIT SFX

TURNER

Alone again. Now at last I have gained true insight:

SFX SEQUENCE

THROUGH NEXT:

BUBBLE SOUNDS

SPLASHING SEAS

UNINTELLIGIBLE

MURMURS AND

WHISPERS

SIREN

ALARM

TURNER

As we are 98% water, to sleep we must become liquid, ebbing and flowing with the tides. The brain floats in the fluid sphere the skull encases. The heartbeat



metronome pulls us back from consciousness into the primordial ocean, the timeless rhythm of slumber. The mind the thin surface of that ocean. A mist drifts over that placid sea, lit by a dancing moon. The dream begins. We are there, surrounded by phantoms who dwell in a mirage. They speak our names. They know our inmost fears. If we run, they follow, circle and crowd in. No rest in sleep. We are lost without a map. We cry out. Sirens shriek, searchlights cut through the haze. Our eyes open. We stare into the cruel white light of the sun; hear the alarm. Reach out, hit the button on the clock radio. 'Five more minutes,' we murmur, turn over, close our eyes to find no refuge in either realm.

UP THROUGH LAST:

BIRDS CHIRPING

Look! The ruddy hues of dawn. Listen! Birds. Chirping. Singing. Such noisy creatures.

BIRDS UP AND  
FADE

END