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# INSOMNIA

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A play for radio.

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ROGER DEGENNARO

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30 Avenue B, #5C  
New York, New York 10009  
673-0060

INSOMNIA  
CHARACTERS:

MAN

MEDIA:

TV HUCKSTER

ACTION MOVIE

TRICIA

ALLEN

PHONE LINE HOSTESS

'NURTURE' NARRATOR

'ODD SOUNDS' ANNOUNCER

AM RADIO HOST

FIRST CALLER

SECOND CALLER

PET WORLD GUY

MADAM CASSANDRA

NEIGHBOR

INSOMNIA

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MAN. Night has fallen. Night has fallen. Night has fallen in on me. I can't sleep under its weight. The lights in the buildings across are few. Solitary stars form constellations of the wakeful, a galaxy of the delinquent.

We love the day, don't we? The sun warms the soul, doesn't it? I however need to escape stark daylight. Even in our great towers the fluorescent tubes' cold glow turns us all to ghosts.

Yet here in this womb-like darkness I fear the intrusion of dreams. I would rather inhabit this half-world between the two. I like this quiet, luminous time punctuated by the occasional car alarm. While the town nods on I reflect. Thoughts whirl like dust clouds on a plain. I'm in a quandary. I can't possibly stay up all night again, can I? Can't use some over-the-counter solution. Afraid to lose consciousness. I have no true nightmares, just dreams of desolate places full of desperate people. Not unlike reality.

This fear of the dark - so European. The medieval mind peopled the forests with ghosts and demons, then hacked them all down. The modern mind electrified cities. White light outshone the stars that once domed the world. No more the orange fires that warmed us in our chairs. Lost the candlelight quavering with the whispered words of lovers.

The voice of the storyteller silenced, replaced by pictures painted with light on the walls of cinema caves. Within the pages of psychology texts we find our fantasies, once wild,

pressed flat like century-old flowers. Is it any wonder that I have ceased to dream? Am I the only one? In an age of latex movie monsters, which ones may I call my own?

I think I'll turn on the television. I want to lose myself in the maze of media. Where did I put the flipper?

TV pops on.

MEDIA. Homeowners! Now's the time for a second mortgage and Shady Lane Refinancing is the place. So come on down and make a Shady deal.

Click.

ACTION FILM. Mow 'em down, Jack.

Click.

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 Nepal and had amnesia and your identical twin sister who you were separated from at birth tried to take your place. Call it a betrayal, but I liked it. At least she was capable of multiple orgasm.

TRICIA. That means!

ALLEN. Yes, that means I'm the father of the triplets!

Click.

PHONE LINE HOSTESS. Hi. Are you sitting around the house bored, lonely? Is the inside of your skull a wind tunnel? Then call 1-900-BLATHER. There are plenty of other witless people out there just waiting to talk to you. Really. Go on and on about anything that comes into your head. Twenty-four hours a day. It's only twenty-five dollars for the first minute, ten dollars every minute after. So don't just moan, pick up the phone. And don't forget to talk into the end that has the little coil thing coming out of it. I've gotta go, I'm on the line right now. Hello. My name? Wait a minute, don't tell me.

MAN. Let me mute this here and look at the schedule.

Rustle of pages.

MAN. Channel 13 has a repeat of Nurture. Let's try it.

'NURTURE'NARRATOR. While most growing things need light to live and strain for even the tiniest glint, 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 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.

MAN. I don't have to watch this. I could open my refrigerator door and see much the same thing. Forty channels and there's nothing on. But it takes half an hour to find that out. Then you start all over again.

An obvious sort of doorbell sound.

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

Floorboards creak under foot.

MAN. Oh.

Door opens.

MAN. Hi, neighbor. What d'ya have there?

NEIGHBOR. Can I borrow some electricity?

MAN. Don't you have enough of your own?

NEIGHBOR. I do, but I blew a fuse just now. I saw your light.

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

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

MAN. Work?

NEIGHBOR. Graveyard shift.

MAN. What's that you've got there? Looks like a small jackhammer.

NEIGHBOR. This is my electric razor.

MAN. You'll excuse me if I don't shake hands.

NEIGHBOR. The batteries lost their charge.

MAN. I'll charge your batteries for you.

NEIGHBOR. When it works you can shave under water.

MAN. That could be useful in a nuclear submarine. All right then, get your apparatus on in here.

NEIGHBOR. Thanks. I won't take long. Don't want to keep you up.

MAN. I was just giving up on sleep entirely.

NEIGHBOR. Where can I plug this in?

MAN. Oh, anywhere.

Sound of buzzing.

NEIGHBOR. What are you doing up at this hour? Can't you sleep.

MAN. No. Not usually. I like listening to catfights in the back alley.

NEIGHBOR. You know, you should drink chamomile tea.

MAN. It tastes like sawdust. You like working overnight?

NEIGHBOR. Yeah. I don't like being around the day people. They're either too bright and chirpy or sexually frustrated and mean. I see friends on weekends.

MAN. You're avoiding something.

NEIGHBOR. No. It's really okay. In the summer I can go to the park or a beach during the day. Whatever I want. Everyone else is trapped inside. I get to wear what I want to.

It works for me.

Razor off.

MAN. Hmmm.

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

MAN. Nice of you to drop by so little clad.

NEIGHBOR. Thanks for the juice.

MAN. Drop by anytime. We're always open.

Door opens.



NEIGHBOR. All right. Bye.

MAN. Bye.

Door closes.

MAN. I wonder what's on municipal radio?

FM VOICE. 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 with a work entitled Duet for Two Rolling Trash Cans Filled with Construction Debris.

SOUND OF TWO TRASH CANS FULL OF CLANKY THINGS BEING ROLLED  
AROUND.

MAN. Help me! We've hit a new low. 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.

Yet another click.

RADIOHOST. And you're the next caller on WXYZin Nullville.

MAN. Not even local. It must be a clear night.

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 that all the Latin American dictators are really actors put there by the CIA, when the real ones are in an old army base in Oklahoma.

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

FIRST CALLER. Yeah, cause I saw on Sally Jesse where she had these celebrity look-alikes like the queen of England. And you couldn't tell the difference.

HOST. Yeah, the Queen. You get the voice down, you hold the handbag, you do that little wave. They could have someone playing her for the next century and no one would notice. The entire family of royal flakes could be replaced by motorized mannequins.

FIRST CALLER. Actors have doubles. How do we know if we're not getting some actor playing another actor?

HOST. I don't see what difference it would make. Sir [or Madam] I'd love to go on, but I don't see the point. Tonight's guest was a lunatic. No wonder he has so many followers.

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.

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 ... It kinda looked like my girlfriend's diaphragm case, but a lot bigger. Real big. 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 World News and all. I knew what I was in for right then and there. So I grabbed my shotgun off the rack, you know.

Yeah?

SECOND CALLER. Look I wasn't gonna get stuck with no elephant needles and have my privates poked with no laser beam. So I get out of the truck and they come at me and I fire a shot right over their heads. Then they screamed and started to run back toward the ship. So I run after them and I tackle one. The other must a got in cause the ship takes off. I had some rope in the back of the truck, so I drag the creature back and I tied him up, right? And I throw him in the truck next to me and start off driving.

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

SECOND CALLER. That's what I've been trying to tell you. It was me abducting the aliens.

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

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

HOST. You mean Purina doesn't make an Alien Chow?

SECOND CALLER. Not one I know of.

HOST. Yeah, okay. Sorry, got to go a word from the sponsor, it's been fun though.

PETWORLDGUY. PETWORLD DISCOUNTS! Specials this week on used and damaged pets. Up to 50% off on: Flabby Tabbies! Introverted Turtles! Fractured Frogs! Limping Lizards! Pit-bulls seized in drug raids! Toy dogs that do nothing but bark! If you've got a place in your heart, we've got the wrong pet at the right price. Trade-ins welcome.

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

Stations zoop by.

MADAME CASSANDRA. You are all now listening to the radio psychic hour. I am Madame 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.

MAN. Hello? (Radio echoes). Hello?

MADAMECASSANDRA. Turn down your radio.

MAN. What is this?

MADAMECASSANDRA. Hello, this is Madame Cassandra.

MAN. I don't believe you.

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

MAN. This is insane. How did you get this number?

MEDIA. You are listening to my show?

MAN. Uh, yeah.

MADAMECASSANDRA. And you can't sleep?

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

MADAMECASSANDRA. Don't get snappy with me.

MAN. I was only saying.

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

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

MADAMECASSANDRA. Why don't you sleep?

MAN. Because I have lunatics invading my reality at all hours.

MADAMECASSANDRA. I told you to watch that. Madam Cassandra must not be toyed with. Remember, karma is like a boomerang; it comes right back at you. You should never have thrown away that chain letter two months ago.

MAN. How did you know about that?

MADAMECASSANDRA. A lucky guess, heh heh. It is lucky for you this is all that happened. You remember what the letter said happened to that man in Topeka?

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

MADAMECASSANDRA. Funny how fate can sneak up and flatten you.

MAN. Is there really something to all this stuff?

MADAMECASSANDRA. What can I say? It's a growing industry. The mysteries of the unseen could become America's greatest export.

MAN. Mysteries of the unseen - as opposed to what? - mysteries of the painfully obvious?

MADAMECASSANDRA. 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.

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

MADAMECASSANDRA. Listen. Call 970-DOZE and I will share with you my secrets of tranquility.

MAN. What's it cost?

MADAMECASSANDRA. Five bucks a minute.

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

MADAMECASSANDRA. We do a real hypnotism over the phone.

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

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

MAN. Goodbye Madam Cassandra.

MADAMECASSANDRA. Wait!

Hangs up.

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

Turns off radio.

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

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 with the Acropolis on it and the inscription: IT IS OUR PLEASURE TO SERVE YOU. Who could it be? Who the hell are you?

INSOMNIA. I am the goddess Insomnia.

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

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

MAN. What do you want with me? Get away or I'll be forced to play back the exorcism video.

INSOMNIA. You called me and I arrived. Got any coffee on? Freeze-dried's okay too.

MAN. Sure, let me pour. (Pours.)

INSOMNIA. I am Insomnia. The goddess of twenty four hour donut shops, convenience stores and vegetable markets. 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 giving

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 neighbors call the cops. In ancient times I gave the world caffeine. My sacred animal is the shark.

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

INSOMNIA. You do not understand. I can free you of your sleeplessness. Funny word sleeplessness. It seems to concretize a state of nonexistence, don't you think?

MAN. I never gave it much thought.

INSOMNIA. I've seen a lot of bug-eyed people in my time, but you really take the prize. You think too much. You worry. There's enough tension in the world. Why get yourself worked into a state? It's not like ten years ago, when no one came home before dawn.

MAN. I know, I know.

INSOMNIA. And you haven't had enough sex lately.

MAN. Why are you badgering me?

INSOMNIA. I protect the wakeful, for they are the guardians of the well-rested. I watch those who keep watch by the fire. You are guilty of abusing my power to conquer night. Look at it my way. Stay up if you're gonna get something out of it. Don't stay awake worrying about worrying.

MAN. You're right. I should listen to you, but I think I've lost my mind.

INSOMNIA. You fear your own dreams.

MAN. Doesn't everyone?

INSOMNIA. All except the truly oblivious. Conquer your fear.

MAN. I've tried.



INSOMNIA. I shall withdraw my powers from you. From now on you will not be able to stay up without reason.

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

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

MAN. That's half my charm.

INSOMNIA. That would be okay if there was another half.

MAN. And you? You're blameless? You're keeping something from me. You're the one who wouldn't let me close my eyes. Now you tell me there was no point to it? No purpose?

INSOMNIA Oh, all right, listen. It's all very simple. I have a mission for you.

MAN. What, is the tape gonna self-destruct after this?

INSOMNIA I had to show you what an empty and pointless life you lead.

MAN. Flatter me more.

INSOMNIA Why are you up, pacing the floor, muttering to yourself? It's time to change. Get a new job, new love interest, whatever it takes. If you're bored, get out and do things. See people. Have a little fun. This is no way for a grown man to live.

MAN. (Sighs.) I guess you're right.

INSOMNIA Why should I go out of my way to lie to you?

MAN. For some people, deception is a hobby.

INSOMNIA I'm not people. I'm divine.

MAN. That's debatable.

INSOMNIA. Look, I've gotta go. There are an awful lot of troubled souls out there that need my time.

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

INSOMNIA. Don't lose any sleep over it.

Pop.

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

Bubble sounds

As we are 98% water, to sleep we must become liquid, ebb and flow with the tides. The brain floats in the fluid sphere the skull encases. The heartbeat's steady drum pulls us from consciousness back into the primordial ocean. The mind the ocean surface. A mist drifts over a placid sea, lit by a dancing moon.

The dream begins. Illusions are conjured from the waking world: The shadows of others emerge, familiar faces become translucent. In their eyes we see our reflections. We join the phantom citizenry of delusional realms. We are there among them, following yet another senseless routine.

If we run, they follow, circle, crowd in. No rest in sleep. We are lost and we know it. We cry out. Sirens shriek, searchlights cut through the fog. Our eyes open. We stare into the cruel white light of the sun. Reach out, hit the button on the digital alarm radio. 'Five more minutes,' we murmur, turn over and find no refuge in either state of insensibility. I guess the goddess Insomnia is right after all: I've got to stimulate my senses, engage my emotions, all that sort of thing. If I nourish my dreams my dreams might start to nourish me.

Pause. The sound of birds comes up. Then more.

Look. The ruddy hues of dawn. Listen. Birds - chirping, chattering, singing. Such noisy creatures.

END