

INSOMNIA

TEN MINUTE PLAY

By Patrick Gabridge

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SYNOPSIS: Mary's struggles with the pressure of motherhood produce an intense, lyrical, sleepless night. A wild romp - - perfect for anyone who's ever had a hard time falling asleep.

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(2 WOMEN)

ANNA (f)

MARY (f)

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SCENE: *A bedroom with a bed or cot and a chair or stool. For contest purposes, the floor and two chairs will be adequate.*

AT RISE: *MARY, in a nightgown (if costumes are used), sitting up on the bed, facing the audience. ANNA, also wearing a nightgown, stands behind her, or perhaps is perched on a stool or chair.*

ANNA: *Insomnia. Noun. Chronic inability to fall asleep or remain asleep for a length of time. Insomniac. Noun. One who suffers from insomnia.*

MARY: *I am not an insomniac. Not by nature. I have always been a good sleeper, one of those people who doesn't linger or mull before drifting off at night. I may spend my day slogging through various mental mud pits, but when it comes time for sleep, I'm ready. I always felt that insomniacs didn't value sleep enough, that they were somehow weak.*

ANNA slumps into the chair in a fetal position. ANNA begins to cry, loudly, the cry of a young baby.

MARY: *I am now a mother, which by definition should read: Mother, see also: insomniac - - one who suffers from the inability to remain asleep for a length of time. Every night.*

MARY rises from her bed and tenderly takes ANNA in her arms to comfort her. This takes a moment. MARY disengages herself and tiptoes back to bed. The instant SHE is relaxed, ANNA begins to cry again.

MARY: *I don't understand it. It's as if she possesses a special sensor that informs her of the instant that I'm on the edge of sleep again.*

MARY rises and comforts ANNA again. MARY returns to bed. Settles down. ANNA creeps to her side, as an older child now, and tugs on MARY's sleeve.

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ANNA: Mom. I have to pee. Mom. Mom, I have to pee!

MARY opens an eye, sits up, and points.

MARY: The bathroom is that way. Go. Don't stand there looking at me, go to the bathroom. Go on. Go!

ANNA circles behind MARY, who relaxes again. ANNA comes and tugs on MARY's sleeve again.

ANNA: Mom. Mom. Mom. Mom. Mom. Mom. Mom. Mom.

Repeatedly, until MARY addresses her directly.

MARY: I am awake. *(To audience.)* She knows I am awake, since she woke me up only a few minutes ago. But she won't ask her question, and she won't go away. I'm a bad parent, because all I want from her, at this very moment, is for her to go away. I am filled with rage, and it is everything I can do to keep from leaping from bed and throttling the life out of her. *(To ANNA.)* WHAT?

ANNA: There's a spider in my room.

MARY: No, there's not.

ANNA: Yes, there is.

MARY: No, there's not.

ANNA: Yes, there is.

MARY: How do you know?

ANNA: I saw it.

MARY: It's dark. How can you see a spider in the dark? Do you have magical spider detection vision?

ANNA: There's a spider in my room. I can't sleep with a spider in my room.

MARY: *(To audience.)* Which means that I cannot sleep while there's a spider in her room. Which means that I will now annihilate the spider.

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MARY gets out of bed, pulls over ANNA's stool, stands on it, reaches up, at the very tips of her toes, swats the spider, then jumps down, and completely, violently, totally obliterates the spider with beating and kicking and stomping. ANNA is a little frightened.

ANNA: Thanks, Mom.

MARY returns to bed.

MARY: I don't understand why the spiders seek out her room. Even if I do a preemptive spider sweep before bedtime, they congregate there at night. I am conspired against by arachnids.

ANNA makes the awful retching sound of a cat vomiting. MARY very slowly gets out of bed and cleans up after the cat. ANNA rubs against MARY's leg and purrs.

MARY: And felines. I don't care if she throws up in any other room of the house, as long as I don't have to hear it. If I don't hear it, I will clean it in the morning. But if I hear it, then I'm burdened with an obligation to clean it up right away.

ANNA: Sleep. Noun. A natural periodic state of rest for the mind and body, in which the eyes usually close and consciousness is completely or partly lost so that there is a decrease in bodily movement and responsiveness to external stimuli.

MARY: My lack of sleep at night has given way to partial sleep during the day. The decrease in bodily movement and responsiveness to external stimuli - - I have that. I'm living my life underwater. Sometimes it's as if I'm filled with water or filled with bile, and the kids bump against me and it blurps out all over them. (*Screaming at ANNA, who cowers.*) What the hell is the matter with you? There is maple syrup all over the table, the chair, the floor. Look, the baby is stuck in syrup, I am stuck in syrup. What is wrong with you?

ANNA: It was an accident.

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MARY: I don't care. Did you clean it up? Did you clean it up? Why am I the designated cleaner of all messes? Clean it up. Clean it up and take a time out and you're grounded for the rest of the month and I'm throwing away all your toys and you're never going to taste syrup or sugar again for the rest of your natural life.

ANNA: That's not fair!

MARY: Or I will kill you.

ANNA starts cleaning up the mess. MARY returns to bed.

MARY: And she knows I mean it. Because I have become unbalanced. I love my children. They know that I do . . . I think. But I've become incapable of expressing it in some valid form. I am prepared to sleep. I am exhausted. The house is quiet.

ANNA begins to snore, loudly, with the occasional snort.

MARY: With the exception of my husband. Who can sleep through anything. Whom I love dearly and desperately, though I barely speak to him any longer, and I may smother him with my pillow if he doesn't STOP SNORING THIS INSTANT.

ANNA stops snoring abruptly.

MARY: I hear every little noise. The drip of the faucet, the scrape of branches against the house, the neighbor's car alarm that if I hear one more time I will take a brick and smash his windshield to pieces because it only ever goes off at two in the morning on hot summer nights when the windows have to be open or we'll all suffocate. Even the sound of my own breathing is enough to keep me awake. (*Beat.*) I used to wonder how people went mad or how they beat their kids or abused their dogs or shot their husbands. But I don't anymore. I know. They couldn't sleep. They were not allowed to sleep. It is a basic torture technique, you know. You take the prisoner and prevent her from sleeping for one or two days before the interrogation.

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ANNA slams her chair down next to MARY. In some type of foreign accent.

ANNA: Give me the names of your conspirators.

MARY: I don't know.

ANNA: Comrade, you are not strong. You are weak. I will break you, and you will tell us everything.

MARY: Never.

ANNA: Bring her back in two days. No sleep.

MARY: Anna Gordova, Peter Popov, Ivan Dimitrivich, Olga Karelin, I'll think of more, I'll find more for you. I'll tell you anything you want. Just let me sleep. Please. I beg you.

ANNA: Take her away.

MARY lies down on the bed. ANNA kneels by her head.

MARY: It is quiet. No snoring, no screaming, no retching. It is quiet. My clock has large red numbers, big enough that I can even see them without my glasses. I'm always checking.

ANNA: Three twenty-one.

MARY: Okay. This is good. I'm no longer thinking about a night of sleep. That's long gone. But three twenty-one is good, because that means the alarm will not ring for three hours and nine minutes. Three hours and nine minutes is longer than an excessively long nap. A three-hour nap during the day would feel unthinkable extravagant. Think how well-rested I would feel after a three-hour nap. I am not being deprived of sleep. I am being given the chance for a three-hour nap. I am not suffering. My anger and frustration can flow out of me. Luxury. Three-hour nap.

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ANNA: (*Into MARY's ear, the words all flow together.*) Your deadline on the Roxbury piece is Friday. We need cat food. We need a copy of the front door key. Buy caulk for the window. Anna needs new sneakers. Clean the basement, what's the matter with us, how come we have so much junk, call the mason about the missing brick, turn the soil in the garden, pick up the trash in the alley, mail the check to the association, call Jessica, bake banana bread for Mrs. Templeton, call Tina about the children's museum, take the kids outside before the television turns their brains to mush, sweep the deck, paint the benches, groceries: grapes, milk, eggs, juice, cheese. Why do we eat so much cheese, we're killing ourselves with fat, how about chocolate instead, we really need ice cream. Ice cream. Laundry.

MARY: I'm up. I'm up. And I break the rule; I leave the bed, go to the office and turn on the light. Turning on the light is a defeat, giving in to the voices of the mind. My husband says to do it right away and get it over with, write it all down. He doesn't understand.

SHE grabs a pad from under the bed and writes furiously. Quickly fills a sheet, rips it off, starts another. And another. Starts ripping sheets from the pad and tossing them in the air.

MARY: Because there is no end to it all. There is no end to the chores, the assignments that need to be completed, stories that can be told, characters created, baking, washing, folding, sorting, cleaning, dumping, scraping, planting, weeding. This never really occurred to me when I was younger. I see old women, worn out, wrinkled, but peaceful, and I wonder, what do they know that I don't? There's wisdom out there that will come, but it just hasn't reached me yet.

ANNA: Four oh eight.

MARY returns to bed and screws her eyes shut tight.

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MARY: Now I'm in trouble, because I'm getting close to the two-hour mark. And less than two hours doesn't count as getting any sleep at all. Less than two hours, and I might as well quit and get out of bed for good.

ANNA: Counting sheep.

ANNA begins prancing, like a sheep jumping a fence.

MARY: One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six. I'm desperate. Sixty-seven. Sixty-eight. Sixty-nine. Seventy.

ANNA: Mary.

MARY: (*Counting very fast now.*) Eighty, eighty-one, eighty-two, eight-three, eighty-four.

ANNA: Mary. You don't want to go out of the house like that. Boys will think you're cheap.

MARY: (*Rolls eyes.*) My mother.

ANNA: Are you sure you want to take all those engineering classes? Boys don't like a girl that's too smart.

MARY: She said that. She really did.

ANNA: Your father and I are getting a divorce.

MARY: This really isn't helping.

ANNA: It's a fourteen-day cruise to Alaska.

MARY: Just one practical tip, just one, on being a better mother, a better wife, or even getting to sleep.

ANNA: Relax.

MARY: Sure, make it sound easy. Do you have any idea what's happening in the world today? Our schools are failing, children shooting children, AIDS killing millions in Africa, global warming, arsenic in the drinking water, economy in a tailspin, racism, homophobia, sexism, cruelty, murder, rape, neglect, despair.

ANNA: Sleep.

MARY: I'm trying.

ANNA: Stop.

MARY: I can't.

ANNA: Just stop.

MARY: And?

ANNA: Stop.

MARY: And?

ANNA: Shhh.

MARY: I give up.

ANNA: Shhh. Baby, shhh.

MARY: *(Very softly.)* I give up.

ANNA: For now. Shhh.

MARY: *(Barely a whisper.)* For now.

Long pause, as lights fade.

ANNA: Six twenty-nine. Six thirty. *(Very, very loud, as an alarm clock. ANNA can make the sound herself.)* Beep beep!

MARY does not stir.

BLACKOUT.

THE END