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Dramatic Publishing

SUNDAY, SUNDAY

A Play in One Act

by

SANDRA FENICHEL ASHER



Dramatic Publishing

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(SUNDAY, SUNDAY)

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SUNDAY, SUNDAY

A Play in One Act
For Three Women

CHARACTERS

MILDRED in her thirties
ANNA mid to late twenties
SLEEPING BEAUTY a non-speaking role

SETTING:

A hospital room in the psychiatric ward of a hospital.

TIME:

The present. One Sunday—morning through evening.

Playing time: About 90 minutes.

Acknowledgments

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S.F.A.

The current script is the result of a full production by the Actors' Guild of Lexington, Kentucky, which opened on May 7, 1992, and was directed by James W. Rodgers. It featured the following cast and staff:

Mildred *Georgia Ferrell*
Anna *Andrea Sayre*
Sleeping Beauty *Gwen Brown*

Cellist *Suzanne Barber Veiga*
Set and Lighting Designer *David Tillman*
Costume Designer *Deborah G. Martin*
Stage Manager *Carolyn Ferber*

SUNDAY, SUNDAY

SETTING: *A hospital room. The curtains are open at the window UC.*

AT RISE: *It is early morning; sunshine streams through the window. (As the day moves on, lighting changes to indicate passage of time.) SLEEPING BEAUTY lies motionless in the UC bed, her arms outside the covers. ANNA is asleep in the bed at L. MILDRED stirs in the bed at R. She stretches and yawns noisily, then sits up, takes a pack of cigarettes and a lighter from her night table, and lights up—but it's the filter end. She grabs an ashtray from the table and stubs out the cigarette.*

MILDRED. Ah, crap.

ANNA (*waking*). What?

MILDRED. I lit the damn filter. Jesus, that stinks.

ANNA. Oh. You scared me.

MILDRED. So what else is new?

ANNA. I was asleep.

MILDRED. How could you be asleep? The nurse's aide just took your pulse. She stuck a thermometer in your mouth.

How could you be asleep? (*She is trying to pinch off the filter and salvage the rest of the cigarette.*)

ANNA. I dozed off again, I guess. I started dreaming the thermometer was a lollipop. I almost bit right through it. Lucky I didn't break my teeth.

MILDRED. Lucky you didn't break the thermometer. You could have swallowed mercury. You could have died a rather nasty death.

ANNA. I never thought of that. You're right. I should try to stay awake. I should—

MILDRED (*interested only in her cigarette*). You have a scissors? I can't get this filter off.

ANNA. A scissors? In here? I thought they weren't allowed.

MILDRED (*as mangled cigarette disintegrates*). Ah, nuts! (*She jumps out of bed and brushes off her pajamas and the sheets angrily.*) Why do they have to do this to us? What is the point of waking us up at 6:45 a.m.? I lit my filter. I wasted a cigarette. I've got tobacco all over myself and my bed. And if that isn't enough to drive me crazy, it's Sunday.

ANNA. Sunday?

MILDRED. Yes, Sunday. Sunday! Why do they wake us up at the crack of dawn on Sunday? Why wake us up at all? What goes on in a hospital on Sunday that anyone needs to be conscious for?

ANNA (*indicating SLEEPING BEAUTY*). Mildred. Shhhh!

MILDRED. Huh?

ANNA. I think she's still asleep.

MILDRED (*following ANNA's gaze to the third bed*). Where'd she come from?

ANNA. They brought her in late last night. On a stretcher.

MILDRED. Jesus H. Christ.

ANNA. You really shouldn't say that, Mildred.

MILDRED. Why? 'Cause I'll go to hell?

ANNA. You might.

MILDRED. I thought I was already there.

ANNA. You're not. This is nothing compared to that.

MILDRED. You've been there?

ANNA. Of course not. How could I have been there?

MILDRED. I don't know. Maybe your Sunday School class took a field trip.

ANNA (*lies down*). Oh, honestly.

MILDRED (*mimicking ANNA's voice and actions*). Oh, honestly.

ANNA. Mildred, don't do that.

MILDRED. Mildred, don't do that.

ANNA. Mildred, I wish you wouldn't do that.

MILDRED. Mildred, I wish you wouldn't do that.

ANNA. Please don't.

MILDRED. Please don't.

ANNA. Please stop.

MILDRED. Please stop.

ANNA (*hands over her ears*). Stop it!

MILDRED. Stop it!

ANNA. Please!

MILDRED. Please!

ANNA. Don't!

MILDRED. Don't!

ANNA. Mildred!

MILDRED. Mildred!

ANNA. Stop!

MILDRED. Stop! (*ANNA screams. MILDRED does the same. After a good long scream, they stop, exhausted, and collapse back on their pillows. ANNA curls up, her back to MILDRED, who, after a moment, sits up and stares at her.*) Well? Aren't you going to say something? (*No response.*) The former occupant of that bed asked to have her room changed, have I mentioned that? On her way out, she announced that I did not belong in a psychiatric ward with decent people. (*Looks at ANNA expectantly.*) Are you just

going to lie there? I was really hoping for a more colorful response. *(Pause.)* Anna! Say something!

ANNA. Why do you do it?

MILDRED. It amuses me, like a game.

ANNA. What's the point of it?

MILDRED. The point? The point is to see how long you can take it.

ANNA. Take what?

MILDRED. Me. At the top of my form. Your predecessor lasted through lunch on the second day, at which time she developed an eating disorder. You're doing much better. When did you check in? Thursday?

ANNA. Wednesday night.

MILDRED *(counts on her fingers)*. This is your fourth full day of competition. You are holding the current record.

ANNA. I wish you'd play with somebody else.

MILDRED. You're the only one here.

ANNA *(indicating third bed)*. Not anymore.

MILDRED. Oh, her. I don't know if she wants to play.

ANNA. Well. I certainly don't.

MILDRED. Oh, yes. Yes, you do.

ANNA. No, I don't.

MILDRED. You do. Not only that, you're good at it.

ANNA. How can you say that?

MILDRED. Just a hunch. Go to play my hunches.

ANNA. When the nurse comes in, I'll ask for a different room, too.

MILDRED. She won't come in.

ANNA. After a scream like that?

MILDRED. Doesn't matter. We stopped. Maybe if we hadn't stopped. But we did. This is it. The finals. We're playing for keeps. She won't come in.

ANNA. How do you know?

MILDRED. Because it's Sunday. Skeleton staff. Skeleton staff for a dead day. Probably no one out there with the authority to change your room anyway. God, I hate Sundays. I have always hated Sundays. Such nothingness. Such unrelenting nothingness. And in *here*. In this...this *tomb*. How am I going to get through another one? I ask you, Anna, how am I going to get through it?

ANNA. How do you get through any other day?

MILDRED. Other days are chock full of busy work. Psychiatric therapy. Occupational therapy. Recreational therapy. On Sunday, there's nothing—*nothing*. Time and space. .and us. Deprivation therapy *Boredom* therapy.

ANNA. Some people think Sundays are peaceful.

MILDRED. So are cemeteries. Especially if you're dead.

ANNA. It's a time to think, to remember.

MILDRED. I do not want to think! And I've got nothing worth remembering. (*Glances toward SLEEPING BEAUTY.*) You know what? She never moved.

ANNA. Not at all?

MILDRED. Not a muscle. We screamed. We stopped screaming. She never moved.

ANNA. Are you sure?

MILDRED. Well, come and look at her.

ANNA. I...don't want to.

MILDRED. You scared?

ANNA. I just don't want to.

MILDRED. Anna, how can you be scared of her already? You haven't even been introduced.

ANNA. I can't go over there and stare at somebody who's just lying there like that!

MILDRED. She isn't naked.

ANNA. It's not polite.

MILDRED. She isn't just any old body, you know. She's our new roommate. She's all we've got. Our family away from home: you, me, and...Sleeping Beauty. We must welcome her in.

ANNA. This isn't a college dormitory, Mildred. It isn't overnight camp.

MILDRED. I know that, Anna. I know what it is. I know exactly what it is. Your average American hospital room. In your average American psychiatric ward. In your average American general hospital. Which your average American patient upstairs, suffering from something socially acceptable—like gallstones—doesn't know he is sharing with your average American whacko down here. (*Inspecting herself in the "fourth-wall mirror."*) Did you think I was losing my bearings, Anna?

ANNA. No, I—

MILDRED. Then why are you telling me this isn't a college dormitory? Did you think I thought it was? (*Terrified, ANNA says nothing.*) Where are the books, Anna? Where are the teachers? The chalk, the blackboard, the ivy-covered walls? What do we get for our tuition around here, Anna? One doctor. Except it's Sunday, and on Sunday, we don't even get that. (*Peers at her own reflection.*) Come here a minute. (*ANNA hesitates.*) Oh, come on. I'm not going to dismember you. Just stand here next to me for a second. (*ANNA does. Shoulder to shoulder, they gaze at themselves in mirror.*) Did you ever think, when you were "out there," that the people in *here* would look exactly like us?

ANNA (*with a small laugh of recognition*). No.

MILDRED. You were expecting something more...Neanderthal, weren't you?

ANNA. Yes. I guess so.

MILDRED. Stephen King-ish, maybe?

ANNA. Uh-huh.

MILDRED. Me, too. It was a real shock when they first wheeled me in and I took a look around the day room, you know? Nobody writhing in chains. Nobody drooling or howling or speaking in tongues. Not even one head revolving on a neck.

ANNA. Just people.

MILDRED. Just plain folks—hangin' out, watching TV, playing cards, knitting.

ANNA. I was relieved.

MILDRED. I was disappointed. (*ANNA smiles. They regard themselves thoughtfully in the mirror for a moment.*) Look at us. American gothic. (*Something else in the mirror catches her eye. She glances at it, then back over her shoulder at SLEEPING BEAUTY, then back at the mirror.*) You know what? I think she's dead.

ANNA (*nearly jumps out of her skin*). What?

MILDRED. Keep your pants on. I'll check it out. (*She moves closer to SLEEPING BEAUTY and cautiously looks her over.*) Ah. Ah, ha. Oh, ho! (*She comes D and motions for ANNA to join her.*) Psssst.

ANNA (*approaching nervously*). What?

MILDRED (*a finger to her lips*). Shhhhh. (*She points toward SLEEPING BEAUTY, then mimes sawing at her own wrist.*)

ANNA. Huh? (*MILDRED repeats mime slowly, as if to a child. ANNA suddenly catches on and speaks in a hushed tone.*) Oh, my God! Is she...?

MILDRED. No. Her eyes are open. She even blinked.

ANNA. Then why doesn't she look at us?

MILDRED. Beats me.

ANNA. Could...could she be blind? Maybe she's a blind, deaf-mute like Helen Keller. Maybe she doesn't even know we're out here.

MILDRED. Nobody has ever not known I was out here. They may have regretted it, but they knew. *(She goes back up to SLEEPING BEAUTY and waves a hand in front of her face. She waits a moment, then repeats action. Finally she returns D to ANNA.)*

ANNA. Well?

MILDRED. She blinked. She's an excellent blinker. *(She and ANNA take a long look back at SLEEPING BEAUTY.)*

ANNA. She's going to go blind, staring into the sun like that.

MILDRED. Maybe she's catatonic. Maybe she can't help it.

ANNA. Aren't you supposed to roll them over on their sides or something?

MILDRED. That's epileptic.

ANNA. Oh.

MILDRED *(giving it one more try)*. Ah, good morning! *(Waits for a reaction, which she doesn't get.)* Bon jour! Buenos dias? Guten tag? *(No reaction, a pause.)* Well. I'll be damned.

ANNA *(in amazement)*. Yeah. Me, too. *(The lights fade.)*

SCENE TWO

AT RISE: *About an hour has passed. MILDRED and ANNA enter R. MILDRED wears tight jeans and a sweater; ANNA, earnestly drab slacks and blouse. As they talk, MILDRED slaps her bedclothes into a semblance of order while ANNA neatly makes her bed.*

ANNA. Oh, we should have straightened up before we went to breakfast.

MILDRED. Why? It's all right here where we left it.

ANNA. I *know*. What if someone had come in and seen it?

MILDRED. They could have cleaned up and saved us the trouble. Anyway, I was hungry. I'm still hungry. The eggs were watery.

ANNA. I didn't think so. I liked them.

MILDRED. You'd probably say that if they were served raw.

ANNA. Raw?

MILDRED. Some people like them raw. They punch holes in the ends and suck out the middle.

ANNA. Oh, they do not!

MILDRED. Do, too.

ANNA. Well, I wouldn't like that.

MILDRED. How do you know if you've never tried it?

ANNA. I don't have to try it.

MILDRED. I think you do. Tomorrow morning you march into that dining room and ask for a raw egg. And then, suck it out.

ANNA. No.

MILDRED. Yes.

ANNA. No.

MILDRED. Yes.

ANNA. I don't want to, Mildred.

MILDRED (*mimicking her*). I don't want to, Mildred.

ANNA. Oooooohh! (*She flops down on her bed and covers her head with the pillow.*)

MILDRED. An ostrich egg! You could ask for an ostrich egg. Very large and especially juicy. What do you say, Anna? (*ANNA doesn't respond. MILDRED turns her attention to SLEEPING BEAUTY.*) So, Sleeping Beauty, how's it going? You missed breakfast, you know. (*No response.*) I

say, you missed breakfast. Raw ostrich eggs. Quite a delicacy. *(No response.)* Are you planning to starve yourself to death? Is that it? You really shouldn't do that here, you know. *(Confidentially.)* It will disturb Anna. She's very high-strung. Just one anxiety attack after another. Constant fear and trepidation. Right, Anna? Anna? *(No response there, either.)* Oh, great! Now I've got two of them. *(She lights a cigarette, seems restless.)* Well, maybe you don't like watery eggs, Sleeping Beauty. I can understand that. Don't care for them myself. Now, Anna over there, she likes them just fine. But then, Anna over there likes everything just fine. Don't you, Anna? Absolutely no complaints, right? *(No response. MILDRED's tension grows. She returns to SLEEPING BEAUTY.)* Well, don't miss too many meals. Not that you're burning a lot of calories or anything, but the staff will not approve. What they will probably do after a while is force-feed you. It's just like when they pump out your stomach— only backward? They stuff this tube up your nose and down your throat, straight into the ol' tum-tum. *(She inserts a finger into her own nose and pretends to gag.)* Arghhhhhh. Then they pour it all down. Gah-lunk. Gah-lunk. *(Waits for a reaction. There is none.)* Gah-lunk? *(Removes her finger from her nose.)* That's probably why they make the eggs so watery.

ANNA *(from beneath pillow)*. Oh, Mildred, you shouldn't say those things to her.

MILDRED. Well, I was perfectly happy saying them to you before you burrowed into your hidey-hole there. What time is it?

ANNA. I don't know.

MILDRED. You are wearing a watch.

ANNA *(comes out from under pillow, consults watch)*. Eight thirty-three.