

SCREAM

a one act suspense thriller

by Jean Blasiar

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SCREAM

A One Act Play by Jean Blasiar

TIME: Tomorrow

PLACE: Home of Mary and Doug Jones, specifically the kitchen/office.
Office is set up with a FAX, computer, monitor, wireless phone, (2) lap tops, a partner's desk, chairs with knee holes facing each other
Kitchen is very modern, all electric: stove, ovens, dishwasher, microwave, coffee pot, toaster
Small color TV on counter
Small round table and four chairs
Door stage left to rest of house
Door upstage center to driveway with window, top half
Window over sink looking out onto the driveway and house next door

MARY JONES, in nightgown, robe and slippers ENTERS stage left, turns on the overhead lights at the wall switch. Mary is yawning, quite sleepy, so sleepy that she hasn't noticed that the overhead lights have not come on.

Mary turns on the electric coffee pot, which she obviously prepared the evening before, plugs in the toaster, turns on the TV with the remote, picks up the phone, realizes that the TV has not come on.

She hangs up the phone, hits the remote several times as DOUG JONES, Mary's husband, ENTERS in his pajamas.

MARY

Something's wrong with the TV, honey.

DOUG

(turns on his computer)

Well, thank God, it's one I can carry into the shop.
This computer gets slower every day.
It's ridiculous, the time I waste. Was the cleaning lady here yesterday? I bet she knocked out the plugs again.

Doug gets under the desk to check the plugs.

MARY

Always blaming the cleaning lady.

DOUG

She's careless. What happened to the coffee?

Mary takes two cups out of the cabinet and starts to pour from the coffee pot, but only water comes out. She checks the plug.

MARY

Not the coffee pot, too.
We've lost power.

Getting up, Doug bangs his head on the desk. He groans. Comes up holding his head.

DOUG

Great! I have a meeting at three o'clock at Universal
this afternoon. Do something, Mary.

MARY

What would you like me to do?

DOUG

Call somebody. You know I'm no good at
electrical.

(a beat)

Wait a minute. You didn't... like not pay the bill?

Mary gives him a look, picks up the portable phone.

MARY

I'm obsessive, Douglas. I admit it.
Me not pay a bill?

(looks at the phone in her hand)

There's no dial tone.

DOUG

I'm getting itchy. I don't do well with
these things.

MARY

Well, welcome to coping without electricity.
You're usually at the Times when there's a
brownout with your alternate generator
running while I'm stuck here with no
electricity for hours.

DOUG

Hours? Don't say hours, Mary.

MARY

Hours! It was eight hours during the last brownout. But you were in an air conditioned office then, with everything working.

DOUG

(becoming irritated)

Including ME! While you were here...

MARY

Excuse me. Were you about to say... "I was here... NOT working? I hope not. Because that day I had to wash dishes by hand, scrub floors by hand because the broom and the vacuum cleaner and the waxer are all ELECTRIC! And I had to wash clothes BY HAND. I stayed here in 90 plus degrees with no air conditioning, no coffee pot, no dishwasher, no TV, no computer, no...

DOUG

Okay. I'm sympathetic. God! Not the air conditioner!

(suddenly realizes)

The computer? My column's in the computer.

MARY

Don't you have a typewriter?

DOUG

It's electric. And I already have ten pages in the computer.

Mary reaches into a drawer, searches until she finds a pencil.

MARY

Here. It's a bit blunt. The sharpener's electric.

DOUG

Long hand?

MARY

You remember my father's stories...

DOUG

Please. Not cracking the books by candlelight again.

MARY

You have a deadline? I'll make some...

(looks around at the electric stove,
toaster, coffee pot)

cereal.

(opens the refrigerator, takes the milk
out quickly and closes the door quickly)

I've forgotten how long it takes before food
without refrigeration begins to spoil.

Mary takes two bowls out of the cabinet and pours cereal into them. She adds milk.

MARY

Sugar?

DOUG

What?

MARY

Do you want sugar?

DOUG

In my coffee?

MARY

For the last time, Douglas, there's no coffee.
Do you want sugar on your cereal?

DOUG

Cereal?

MARY

(checks the label on the box)

Never mind, it already has sugar. I bought it
when Timmy and Jack were here last month.
Frosted... pokemons.

DOUG

Come on. We're going out to breakfast.
Just let me shower and shave.

Mary smiles as Doug leaves the kitchen and returns almost immediately.

DOUG

Do you have one of those disposable razors?

MARY

I do. Wait a minute. I wonder what time the power
went off during the night. We might not have any
hot water.

She runs the hot water tap in the sink, holds her hand under it quite awhile.

MARY

How do you feel about a slightly warm shower?

DOUG

You know... about the only thing humanly
possible around here right now is sex.

(exits, returns immediately again)

Wait a minute! That gives me a great idea for
a first hand account of what's happening.

MARY

Sex?

DOUG

(hurries back to the desk and
begins to write)

This is beautiful. Tell me something
else that doesn't work.

MARY

Are we still talking about sex?

DOUG

Mary!

MARY

Sorry.

DOUG

There's a deadline, Mary.

MARY

Ah, yes. Deadlines. Always deadlines.

DOUG

Deadlines pay the bills, Mary.

MARY

Of course, they do. So... sugar on your cereal? Or you want it just... frosted.

A knock on the door and SALLY SMITH – the next door neighbor ENTERS in her robe, nightie and slippers.

SALLY

(nearly hysterical)

Oh, my God, Mary...

(sees Doug at the computer)

Doug... you too, huh?

DOUG

Me, too, what?

SALLY

Staring at a blank computer screen. I haven't been able to budge Herb from the screen since the market was supposed to open. Herb doesn't know what to do. He can't exist without his stocks on-line. He just sits there like a zombie in front of a black screen.

MARY

It's probably only temporary.

SALLY

Oh, no. No, no. This isn't like the brown-out last month. It's not just electrical this time. Nothing with a battery is working. I tried my cell phone...

Doug picks up his cell phone lying on the counter and checks it.

SALLY (CONT'D)

Am I right? And my flashlight, my portable CD player. AND... this is the scariest part of all. It's why I've been up all night. Carlton Nash left his house at one thirty this morning in a big hurry.

Mary and Doug look at each other, not knowing what that means.

MARY

Who is Carlton Nash?

SALLY

Our neighbor. Across the street? Don't tell me you didn't know that the famous Carlton Nash from Cal Tech moved in across the street.

MARY

Uh... no, I didn't. Did we miss a welcoming party or something?

SALLY

Herb and I are having a cocktail party the end of the month. The invitations should be in the mail today... IF the mail's delivered.

DOUG

Why wouldn't the mail be delivered?

SALLY

They have all that electronic sorting going on now, you know. You think they'll call in PEOPLE to replace machines? And... if batteries aren't working... neither are cars.

MARY

Are you sure batteries aren't working?

DOUG

Wait a minute! Back up. Why were you concerned that this guy from Cal Tech ran out of his house at one thirty this morning?

SALLY

Because Carlton Nash is an astronomer. A very famous astronomer. He's treated like some God at school.

Both Mary and Doug look at each other.

SALLY (CONT'D)

And there was a full moon last night. I never sleep when there's a full moon. At one thirty this morning I saw Carlton Nash run out of his house, get in his car, and tear down the street. I've been expecting a seven point earthquake ever since.

DOUG

Oh, please.

SALLY

And what do we have? An electrical failure. It's too early in the morning for a brownout, right Mary?

MARY

Well, usually they hit later in the afternoon when air conditioners are running all over town.

SALLY

Exactly. But never at three thirty in the morning when electrical demand is at its lowest. Two hours after Carlton Nash backed out of his driveway, the TV in my bedroom and my clock radio went off. And I'm telling you... I knew.

DOUG

You knew what?

SALLY

I knew... that something astronomical had happened.

Again, Mary and Doug look at each other.

SALLY (CONT'D)

Maybe we've been invaded

DOUG

(rubs his hands together,
starts writing furiously)

This is wonderful stuff!

SALLY

(looks at Mary)

What's he doing?

MARY

Douglas is covering this for the Times.
Sex with an Alien.

SALLY

Laugh if you want to, but how are we going to
know what's happening? That's what I want to
know. The Today Show? Gone. Talk Radio?

ENTER HERB SMITH, in pajamas, bathrobe and slippers, without knocking.

HERB

Doug... the Net's down.

DOUG

I know, Herb.

MARY

Sit down, Herb. Can I get you some... water?

HERB

You'd think one of us would have thought to
invest in that generator after the last earthquake.
Wonder who in the neighborhood has one?

SALLY

I'll bet the Morton's have one. s. They were pushing
it, weren't they, that night we went to their house for
the demonstration. Should I go down with four empty
cups and beg for coffee?

MARY

Oh, Sally... please. It's only been...

SALLY

Five hours. What if it's some sort of cosmic collapse?
I'd bet my life that Carlton Nash knew what was
happening. I sat in on one of his lectures at Cal...

HERB

Sally, stop it. You don't know anything about what this
is. You work in Public Relations. You're not some frickin'
scientist. I gotta check my car.

Herb exits. In a few seconds, we hear a car engine that won't turn over because of a dead battery.

MARY

I wonder how much of California's out.
Doug! The children!

SALLY

What if the entire United States is dark?
What if North Korea...

DOUG

(eagerly writing)

This keeps getting better. Keep talking,
Sally.

SALLY

Well... I was just wondering... what if North
Korea's dark... you know, because of the cosmic
thing, and they think that it's something we're
responsible for. Kim what's his name might start
sending ballistic missiles this way.

MARY

Do ballistic missiles run on batteries?

Herb re-enters looking miserable.

HERB

Dead as a doornail. What if it...?

SALLY

What?

HERB

What if it can't be re-charged when whatever this is is over? My Honda's only three months old.

DOUG

Herb, do you have a typewriter that isn't electric?

HERB

I think there's an old one in the garage.

DOUG

May I use it? I want to get this to the paper. The first great story I've had in three years.

MARY

Douglas... why don't you just write a review of the play we saw last night.

DOUG

Mary, this is exciting. Pulitzer stuff. I want to be first in line when the wire services come back up. A first hand account from a city that exists on lights. Neon. Come on, Herb.

MARY

You're going to walk to a restaurant in your pajamas?

DOUG

Herb, go home and change. It'll only take me a minute. I want to go out and look around. Maybe it's an attack by voluptuous creatures from Mars searching the cosmos for older male consorts? Think wild, Herb. I'll get my recorder.

Herb exits door center upstage leading to the driveway and Herb and Sally's house.

Doug walks over and picks up the tape recorder off his desk. He turns it on, can't get it to work, looks over at Mary and Sally, who are trying not to smile.

DOUG

I'm getting desperate. I'll be back.
(exits to change his clothes)

MARY

My sprinklers. The garden in this heat!

SALLY

It makes you think, doesn't it. We're really energy guzzlers, aren't we. What the whole world says about us is true.

(sighs)

Mary, I've got a really bad feeling about this. You know, Herb and I have been looking to move.

MARY

What? Oh, Sally. Why?

SALLY

That project for low income people. It's one mile from here. One mile! It's full of gangs. There's a shooting every month. I won't even go that way any more. I drive miles out of my way just to avoid it. They'll come here, Mary. They'll come into this neighborhood...

(starts to cry)

MARY

(goes to Sally and embraces her)

Sally. Don't. This'll be over soon. There's police, law enforcement... don't let Herb make you paranoid about the people who live in the project.. There are good people.

SALLY

And gangs. They'll come here.

MARY

Stop that. Don't think like that.

SALLY

(wipes her eyes)

We were here in the riots, Mary. We watched it on television. It was miles from here. Now...

SALLY (CONT'D)

one mile. When this is over, we're moving.
I just wanted you to know.
(braces herself)
I'm okay. We just have to keep our heads.

MARY

That's good, Sally. Things will get back to normal soon.
(looks around)
Meanwhile, I can't even make a cup of tea.
How did the pioneers make tea?

SALLY

In a pot over a fire in the fireplace.
I'm telling you, Mary... it's astronomical.
Have you seen the light outside? It's different. Whatever is going on is cosmic.

MARY

You have to be wrong. *Have* to be wrong.

SALLY

What If I'm not?

MARY

It's too scary... but kind of exciting at the same time.
(suddenly realizes)
The kids must be scared to death.

SALLY

I think they're having a ball right now. Can't call home. Can't receive messages from home. Can't text. My God you're right. They'll go crazy!

MARY

You think it's just local?

Doug comes in as Herb re-enters. Doug is zipping his pants.

Sally senses something about Herb, walks over and checks his pocket.

SALLY

Herb! You're taking your gun?

HERB

Leave me alone. You don't know what's out there.

DOUG

Herb, don't be ridiculous. A gun?

HERB

You don't know what's out there. The sky's lookin' weird. It's got like crystals Billions of 'em.

All four hurry outside and can be seen from the open door looking up, shielding their eyes. They stand there in awe. (Eerie moment)

MARY

Now I'm spooked.

SALLY

See? I told you, it's astronomical.

MARY

What is it, Doug?

DOUG

I don't know. It looks like a meteor shower, or something.

MARY

How are we going to find out? No radio, TV...

HERB

No papers. How 'bout those guys across the street runnin' out? Nice neighbors, huh.

SALLY

What did you want them to do at one thirty in the morning, Herb, run up and down the street yelling, "The sky's falling, the sky's falling?" Would anyone believe them? We'd call them lunatics.

MARY

I think I'd believe an astronomer if he said the sky's falling, no matter what time of day or night it was.

DOUG

I hate to bring this up... but if we have to start cooking freezer food before it all goes bad... where are we with ice?

SALLY

Oh, God. Ice!

HERB

I think we should dig a pit and bury the food with all the ice we have on top of it. It'll stay cool underground.

Mary looks at the refrigerator.

MARY

I've been afraid to open the door. It's all going to spoil in another eight hours.

DOUG

Maybe we should smoke it. It'll last longer.

SALLY

We have a smoker. Herb... we forgot about the smoker.

MARY

Is it electric?

HERB

Fortunately not.

Herb starts to leave.

DOUG

Wait, Herb. We have to thaw the meat first. I think we have a turkey and some chickens...

MARY

All that fish you caught.

DOUG

Yeah, the fish! Smoked trout.

HERB

I hate to bring this up... but smells could be a problem.

DOUG

I see what you mean.

MARY

What? Of course we'll share.

DOUG

With the neighborhood?

MARY

Douglas! Everyone can bring something to the table. It'll be like the first Thanksgiving. We can hold it in the middle of the street with tables and chairs and no cars.

DOUG

That's a sweet thought, Mary, but the reality is that people other than neighbors are going to be out scouting for food... especially cooked, ready-to-eat food. By smoking, we'll bring them to our door.

HERB

And that's a very bad idea.

MARY

Let's canvass the neighborhood, honey. At least, this street. We'll find out what everyone else is doing.

DOUG

Why don't you and Sally each take one side of the street and knock on doors.

MARY

Come on, Sally.

SALLY

Should we take something?

MARY

We're not the welcome wagon. Wait a minute. I've got a huge box of chocolates that was supposed to go on the Silent Auction next week at the Club. I'll get it. Kids in the neighborhood will love it.

DOUG

Honey... we may need that.

HERB

Don't go giving away food.

MARY

(adamantly)

We'll share what we have with neighbors and friends.

DOUG

Of course, we will. Go ahead.

Mary exits stage left. Sally, Herb and Doug exchange glances.

HERB

I hope she doesn't carry that good neighbor thing too far.

DOUG

I'll talk to her. You know Mary.

Sally and Herb exchange glances. They are obviously concerned.

Mary returns with the box of chocolates.

MARY

Okay. Let's go.

DOUG

You might ask if the men in the neighborhood would like to get together and discuss a plan for looting. Wait. Never mind, honey. Herb and I will do that when you and Sally get back. But if you see anyone suspicious, you come home immediately. Understand?

MARY

You know... I admit that I'm scared, but you two...you're expecting the worst in people. These are our neighbors. They brought in dinner every night when Doug had his hernia operation.

DOUG

You girls stay here. Herb and I will go.

MARY

You and Herb with guns? Or Sally and I with candy?

DOUG

You be back soon.

Mary and Sally exit.

HERB

You have to rein her in, Doug. She's gonna be a problem.

DOUG

What do you want me to do, chloroform her until the power comes back on?

HERB

You know what I mean. You have to tell her the seriousness of our situation here. Like my apple trees and your grapefruit trees. Those are ours. You got a gun?

DOUG

My hunting rifle and a thirty eight special I forced Mary to learn to shoot a couple of years ago when I was traveling so much. She's still scared to death of it, but she knows how to use it. I wonder how many times whatever this is orbits the earth.

HERB

Ahmadinjad and that little North Korean bastard. You gotta wonder what they're up to.

HERB (CONT'D)

Shit, I knew I should've put in those solar panels when I put on the new roof. I wanted to. Sally didn't. All the signs pointed to an energy shortage one day.

DOUG

Right now we need to think about our next meal... and candles... and...

BOOM!

Herb and Doug run to the door and look out.

Seconds later, Sally and Mary come running back inside.

MARY

What was that?

DOUG

I don't know. Sounded like a gas explosion. There are chemical plants south of here. If I remember my high school chemistry, they have to be shut down orderly or they can blow up.

MARY

Guess what we discovered.

SALLY

(near hysterical)

Herb... the Nash house across the street. The front door must have blown open. We looked inside. There were clothes and things and suitcases all over the place. They got out of there in a big hurry.

HERB

Sure. Save themselves.

MARY

I'm dying for a cup of coffee.

DOUG

I can make a charcoal fire in the Weber.

MARY

Our coffee pot's electric.

HERB

Wait a minute. I've got an old tin one I use for hunting.

MARY

Oh, Herb... go get it.

DOUG

I'll start the grill. Might as well throw some bacon and eggs in a frying pan while we've got a fire. Okay?

MARY

(smiling)

Okay.

Herb, Sally and Doug exit.

Mary gets bacon and eggs out of the refrigerator.

MARY

Candles. What did I...? And my old manual can opener.

Doug re-enters.

DOUG

Fire's lit. What are you looking for?

MARY

Candles and that old can opener.

DOUG

Honey... don't get hysterical. Everything we need for an emergency is in the garage in that big carton. Remember when we were worried about Y2K?

MARY

Oh, that's right. I'm glad I didn't dig into those canned goods. Do we have enough charcoal? And matches?

DOUG

Plenty. Everything's going to be fine.

MARY

Sally and Herb are going to move.

DOUG

That's Sally's hysteria talking.

MARY

No. Yeah, some. But they've been looking. Because of the housing project so close.

DOUG

NIMBY again.

MARY

What?

DOUG

Not In My Back Yard. I knew Herb would talk about moving after that project went in. And maybe he should. All he does is rant and rave about gangs and tats and kids hanging out on street corners. That's one of the things the project was supposed to address. There's a child care center and state of the art gymnasium on the premises. Basketball courts, volleyball, fitness. It's all good.

MARY

Sally said there's a shooting every month.

DOUG

That is such an exaggeration. I covered the grand opening. They're people looking for a safe place to raise children, just like us.

MARY

Sally is scared to death that the gangs'll come here looking for... whatever. I don't think she's ever gotten over the riots.

DOUG

I got no patience with that, Mary. Herb is making her crazy with his rantings about race. I hope they do move.

MARY

Doug...

Another loud EXPLOSION.

Mary and Doug cling to each other.

BLACKOUT

Scene Two

Later that day. Both couples are in the kitchen, drinking coffee, eating bacon and eggs which were cooked on the grill.

SALLY

Remember when an explosion would be headline news. Now... we don't even know what they are. It's so damn quiet.

DOUG

I think everyone's hiding in their house.

MARY

What about the police?

Herb is sitting at the table eating, not saying a word and not looking at anyone. The subject of law and order is off the table.

LOUD CLAP OF THUNDER

Mary and Sally scream.

MARY

What was that?

DOUG

Sounded like thunder to me.

MARY

Thunder?

Sudden BRIGHT FLASH OF LIGHT, followed by a LONG, ROLLING THUNDER.

Mary runs to Doug.

MARY

Oh, Doug.

DOUG

It's okay, honey. We're safe here and we're together.

HERB

A good rain will help keep people inside and not running around.

DOUG

Herb...

MARY

You think there's going to be rioting, don't you, Herb. That's why you carry that gun.

DOUG

Everyone's scared. Honey. You know what happens during catastrophes like this... people who don't have jobs and don't have...

HERB

Food.

DOUG

(glares at Herb)

They behave badly. They don't have anything, so they...

MARY

Riot.

HERB

And loot.

SALLY

Stop it, Herb. I'm scared to death.

HERB

Somebody's gotta say it. There's gonna be trouble if this thing lasts till nightfall.

MARY

We don't even know what's happening. How will we know?

HERB

When it reaches your doorstep... you'll know. I'm going home and lock up a few things. You coming, Sally?

Another BOLT OF LIGHTNING, followed almost immediately by THUNDER.

Sally runs to Herb and clings to him.

MARY

It's only been six hours, Sally.

Sally is in tears, hanging on Herb.

HERB

Keep your eye on those grapefruit trees, Doug. I'm watchin' for anyone who steps on my property for my apples.

Herb and Sally exit.

MARY

You think he'd shoot anyone who tried to steal his apples?

DOUG

I'd bet on it.