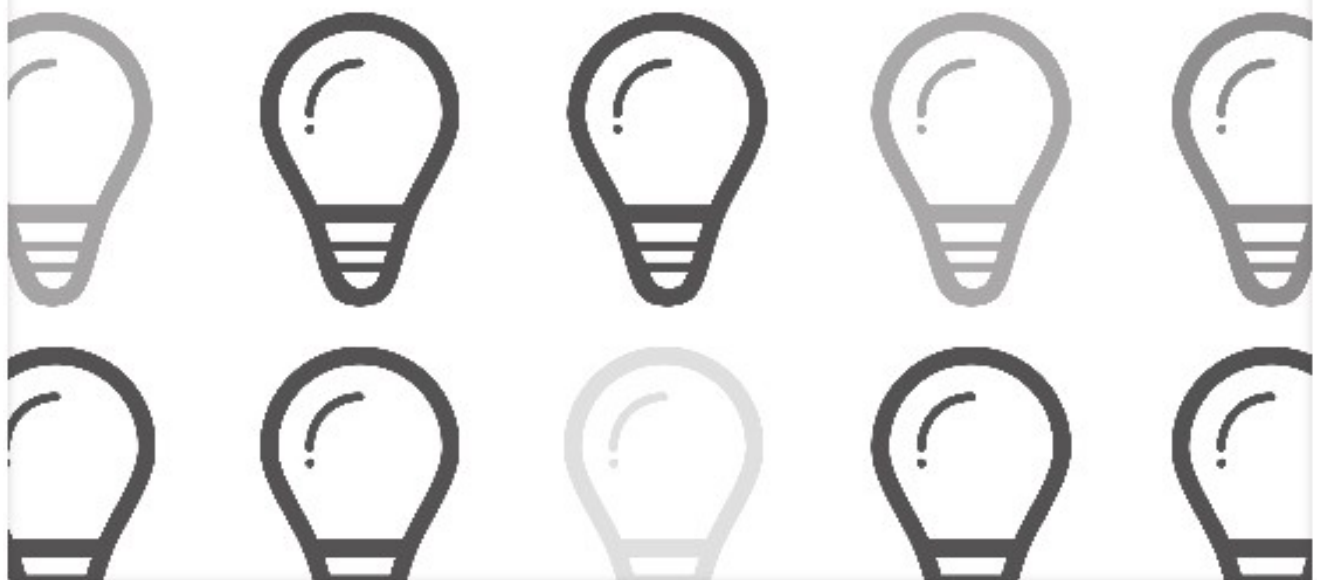


# SINDICATION

a play

by

T.K. LEE



## **SINDICATION**

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**By**

**T.K. Lee**



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## Characters

Old Man.....	80s
Middle-Aged Woman.....	50s
Middle-Aged Man.....	50s
Young Woman.....	20s
Voice of Old Woman.....	70s*
Voice of Small Girl.....	3-5*
Voice of News Reporter.....	open*

## Setting

A den with couch, recliner, and rocking chair. Dressed as any typical, southern, middle-class household might appear. Though we do not see an actual TV, the lighting should have the effect of a flashing TV screen of any nondescript channels across their faces.

## Time

Any given Sunday afternoon.

NOTE: In keeping with **the intended timelessness\*\*** of this play, the playwright has attempted to broadly paint pictures of those politicians and/or political references mentioned in the content. He asks that all internal references be kept as is, but would consider granting, in extreme cases and only if necessary and relevant in some way to a specific audience, substitutions of certain references at the discretion of the director and cast, as long as final approval is given to the playwright. Such temporary updates should not work against the structure and context of the play as a whole (i.e., this is not a farce anymore than it is a serious drama – in fact, it's a study of that stereotypical sad humor of inherited pathos that infects many small town families) so it is strongly recommended that the humor present in the script stay consistent and be reflected in any such substitutions to keep the intent of the play's purpose intact.

Further, **an important physical effect** of the action, as intended by the playwright, of this piece should take the form of people in the story who are meant to be puppet-like (or perhaps a blend of puppet-actor) OR perhaps, it's children playing dress-up, aping the behavior of stereotypical adults, stripped away towards the end to reveal young people, rising as the “next generation,” in which case the Young Woman at the end of the play would “step out” of the character of Middle-Aged Woman (the same for the two men, as well, with other younger actors) to affect the shift in tone. Each one on stage should have the mimicking behavior of a dipping (or drinking) bird nodding in growing ferocity as the news stirs their respective characters—a herd mentality until the Young Woman enters at the end – except when they break from the generic dialogue and speak about their personal lives, or when that rare moment occurs where they start to think for themselves...but to no avail.

FX: A blinking TV filter over the stage indicating channel changes and content—**the fourth wall is the frame of the TV**, making the audience the channel content; a TV voice\* that may be prerecorded or live (offstage: Young Woman). **In this time of COVID-19, this effect may be easily modified and translated via Zoom, etc. with the equal efficacy.**

\*NOTE: The use of the — / indicates an overlap. Also: This play technically has a cast of four if these marked characters are double-cast or prerecorded.

ACT I: Scene 1

At rise: OLD MAN is sitting in the rocking chair; MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN is on couch. They are watching the news. In general, all will have the effect of nodding in their consensus of how “bad the world’s become” as they address random news items except for items related to the “world they live in” (marked by “sipping” in the stage directions). When discussing those items, they will sip their drinks, speaking more familiarly if as distant or disconnected. Everything outside their home is a threat to them. In the background, inaudible hums of a newscaster as they flip through channels just beneath their conversation is suggested, unless otherwise noted. It is assumed that the fourth wall is the television screen and they will react accordingly, pointing at people in the audience as they would the television, especially during the start of the play.

Shame. OLD MAN

A shame. MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

Terrorist, that one. OLD MAN

No. MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

Yes. OLD MAN

Yes. No. MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

Muslim. Or what they call it? How many now’s that make. OLD MAN

Muslim. Another Muslim. Where this time. MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

They all got something. DC or Paris or New York or London, now. Shame. But, shame on them, too. These Sleeper Cells. All of them! Everything Must Go! OLD MAN

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

Not here! Not here!

A flash from the screen. A strange, hard-to-place reverence.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

Oh. There. The President.

OLD MAN

The President. A real President.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

They don't listen to what he's meaning.

OLD MAN

Say he's full of blame and bluff.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

Look at that face.

OLD MAN

That hard a face has got to be honest.—/

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

Honestly, they don't look long enough!

OLD MAN

Hard is good!

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

Fat off it! —/ They call him a fool!

OLD MAN

To his face. He ain't behind no mask! —/

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

He said no. Wasn't putting one on.

OLD MAN

He's the President! Not a fool. They don't listen.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

They won't, not possible. They want it easy.

OLD MAN

Well that starts at hard.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

This world, today, possible's possible.

OLD MAN

He's the President, isn't he!

Flash from the TV. Reporter:  
"The CDC today reiterated..."  
From an open doorway to the  
Kitchen, we may see time to  
time MIDDLE-AGED MAN  
pass by and liner in doorway,  
and YOUNG WOMAN, as  
well, and perhaps they, time to  
time, have an inaudible  
conversation, their faces  
carrying expressions of  
disagreement with each other in  
that uncomfortable loving way  
of family.

OLD MAN

Aaannh. They say, then they don't say!

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

Keep us in circles!

OLD MAN

Change their mind worse than a woman!

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN  
agrees but we may start to notice  
a small crack in her "Yes Man"  
attitude begin showing.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

Worse than.

OLD MAN

Korea! Russia! Iran! China!

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

Six feet! Six thousand miles!

OLD MAN

Ain't made much difference!

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

It doesn't make sense.

OLD MAN

That's how you make a lie stick!

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

That's how you make a lie work!

OLD MAN

I don't know the first person with it. You?

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN shakes head.

OLD MAN

Just like that, another 9-11.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

It got us once.

OLD MAN

Once before twice.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

Kept on. Coming coming coming.

OLD MAN

Trust nothing but suspicion. Everything could be something.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

Everything could be something.

Flash from TV.

OLD MAN

Him.

Flash from the TV.

OLD MAN

Her. Guilty guilty guilty.

OLD MAN snaps his fingers and MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN responds to his sing-song call and response.

OLD MAN

Every day is 9-10. Til tomorrow—

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

Til tomorrow—makes it—

9-11. TOGETHER

A flash from the TV screen.

Then her. MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

There's that one, her, they say. OLD MAN

Head case! MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

She ought to go away. OLD MAN  
(sips)

You hear what happened to Margaret Alice, last Sunday, coming out— /

I did, bless her, coming down those steps— / MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

Of the church —/ OLD MAN

Forgot we can't have church anymore!—/ MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

At that age —/ OLD MAN

By herself, on those brick steps, she caught her shoe— / MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

Them dumb shoes—/ OLD MAN

She wears them every Sunday—/ MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

Dumb or not, it's the foot you gotta watch for— / OLD MAN

She couldn't see nobody was there? MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

Preacher was. But: She didn't care! OLD MAN

Lucky the preacher was there. MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN



OLD MAN

She bled on them Russian cypress we just planted.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

(sips)

She shouldn't wear kitten heels at that age, too little height, too much weight. Mama hates kitten heels, she should have told her. And on that brick.

OLD MAN

(sips)

And on her head. Never knew it'd make a sound like that, Brother Robert said. Went down hard.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

Lot of blood for her age.

OLD MAN

Gonna dry right up on the brick. In this heat.

(beat)

We just planted them Russian cypress.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

Like somebody'd come painted that brick, it'll look like.

A flash of the screen again.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

Look at them. Look.

OLD MAN

(sips)

Gotta watch your step.

A flash from the screen; OLD MAN looks.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

Senator This and That. —/

OLD MAN

With Old So and So. I could spit. —/

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

And What's Her Face —/

OLD MAN

With all the Blah Blah Blah.

(beat)

They should all be shot.

Is that crack in her worldview getting wider? She repeats the last word of his line, but is it an echo or a realization?

Shot.  
MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

By the right people.  
OLD MAN

By the right people.  
MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

It's the wrong people get shot. But it makes the news!  
OLD MAN

Every headline!  
MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

The Anxious Age! The See-It, Say-It Era!  
OLD MAN

She resists and doubles up her efforts not to change. Flash across the screen.

Yeah! That's it. That's what it is! !  
MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

The Dark Ages. Better if they keep their Eyes open more than their Mouths.  
OLD MAN

Flash.

Trying to take America right out of American. Leave nothing but an "N."  
OLD MAN

For now, she resorts to her old ways.

Oh, we all American now?? Come on in, everybody! —/ America to the Rescue.  
MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

One and all! —/ Cause they sure don't stay at home!  
OLD MAN

But they sure the hell stay!  
MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

Would with a fence!  
OLD MAN

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

Would with a fence! That's a good one.

Another flash from the screen.

OLD MAN

Guns, guns, guns, I'm getting sick of these guns.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

Those guns!

OLD MAN

Their guns!

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

Have a gun, shoot a gun, they say.

OLD MAN

All the wrong people.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

Right.

OLD MAN

They say: It's not the guns, it's the people!

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

They say: Guns are people. People are bullets.

OLD MAN

That don't make sense. —/

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

Yeah. No. —/

OLD MAN

They can't be the gun and the bullet. —/

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

No.Yeah. —/

OLD MAN

They always saying...but they ain't never doing.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

Bullets are big business!

OLD MAN

When your finger is on the trigger!

They find that funny.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN  
And your bullseye's America!

OLD MAN  
Save America!

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN  
Same America.

OLD MAN  
And still paying for it.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN  
Me too.

OLD MAN  
Me too. Already paid for it.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN  
Me too.  
(beat)  
Still praying for it.

OLD MAN  
Me too.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN  
Me too. Already prayed for it.

OLD MAN  
With both hands.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN  
Had a bible in this one!

OLD MAN  
And a fist in the other one.

They laugh again. Harder, meaner.

OLD MAN  
That's the way! That's how! You have to!

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN  
Give up. They don't listen unless you get loud.

OLD GUN

Loud as a bullet! Everybody hears that!

Another flash; she leans in.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN  
Protests.

OLD MAN  
No such thing.

NEWS REPORTER: "Protests  
erupted this week..."

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN  
Third one this week.

OLD MAN  
What you looking at is war.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN  
Protest.

OLD MAN  
Protest ain't nothing but War in a diaper.  
(beat)  
Where's that, anyhow. Here?

Another flash. She points.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN  
Who's who! With all them masks on.

OLD MAN  
But they ain't all the same kinda mask. That's Who's Who.

Another flash. .

OLD MAN  
War is raw, I heard them say on the news.

He leans in.

OLD MAN  
Say it again.

He leans in further. The volume  
has gradually increased by this  
time. We hear the NEWS  
REPORTER say, "**War is robbing**  
the Amer—" (Let the rest of this

sentence trail but leave enough audibly to note that he is misquoting. Like in the others).

They said it!  
MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

Told you.  
OLD MAN

This time we hear the NEWS REPORTER say, “The President said today that the situation continues to...”

MIDDLE-AGED MAN enters this time.

It was already bad.  
OLD MAN

It was bad.  
(to MIDDLE-AGED MAN)  
All ready?  
MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

MIDDLE-AGED MAN shakes his head No, as he holds sweet tea in hand. The TV volume returns to an inaudible hum.

Fools.  
OLD MAN

Full up with them, huh?  
MIDDLE-AGED MAN

Idiots.  
OLD MAN

And loud. Listen at them.  
MIDDLE-AGED MAN

You're too loud! Where is that?  
OLD MAN

Might as well be in the front yard.  
MIDDLE-AGED MAN

Might as well.  
OLD MAN

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

Might as well. Or in the backyard.

OLD MAN

Might as well. Or in this room.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

If it's on the TV.

OLD MAN

If it's on the TV.

Another flash. NOTE: I haven't marked exact places in the script, but it is important that the MIDDLE-AGED MAN volley his "support" (literally: back and forth except where otherwise defined, by which I mean, physically, when he moves and where he chooses to stand — sometimes, by MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN sometimes, by the OLD MAN) and that he never makes a firm decision. The irony is, of course, that they're all wrong but his indecision is the metaphor here.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN

You get too loud you're an animal.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

An animal.

OLD MAN

Wild animals.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN

Some are tame.

OLD MAN

Ha. Some are tame.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

Tame animals still got teeth.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN finds this flirty and funny; he bites at the air in her

direction, smiling. Perhaps they start to kiss, but then the TV interrupts.

They may stay engaged though throughout the next few lines, or not. This time we hear the NEWS REPORTER say, “The President said, It’s a mating call for another 9-11... Coming up, Cutting corners...”.

OLD MAN becomes loud, energized and points fervently at the TV.

A mating call! Hear that?  
OLD MAN

Another mating call...  
MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

That’s the sound that makes.  
OLD MAN

Tame teeth.  
MIDDLE-AGED MAN

That’s that sound! It’s coming, they said, it’s coming! Soon!  
OLD MAN

MIDDLE-AGED MAN pulls at her shirt.

Soon! Isn’t it?  
OLD MAN

Around the corner.  
MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

Around a corner.  
MIDDLE-AGED MAN

All this that’s happening. Somebody’s done it. It ain’t natural. What’s here already. Worse is yet to come.  
OLD MAN

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN pulls way from MIDDLE-AGED MAN and is stricken with the seriousness of the situation.

Around any corner!  
MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN



Any corner!  
OLD MAN

Around any corners!  
MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

MIDDLE-AGED MAN tries a new tactic, sips, inhales, smelling the food cooking, smiles widely.

That meatloaf. Mmm. .  
MIDDLE-AGED MAN

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN is torn between her need to reach with OLD MAN and her need to be comforted by MIDDLE-AGED MAN. She struggles but eventually gives in to the comfort of food, and sips, recognizing she's almost out of tea. She playfully shakes her glass at him, and MIDDLE-AGED MAN obliges by pouring some of his into her glass.

And the zipper peas.  
MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

And a plate of sliced tomato.  
MIDDLE-AGED MAN

And the mashed potatoes.  
MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

OLD MAN  
Around the corner. Around the corner. What corner? Cut corners? Tell us! They don't tell us!  
It's a conspiracy. Any corner!  
(to the TV)  
We all live in a corner now.

OLD MAN turns to MIDDLE-AGED MAN and nods as if to encourage agreement. MIDDLE-AGED MAN starts to make fun of OLD MAN but he, too, is now unsure and angry. MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN, also, joins in again, growing upset, conforming.

OLD MAN