

SLEEPER CELL

Written by

Andrew Anthony

432 Westmount Ave
Toronto, Ontario
M6E 3N5

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ACT ONE

BLACK TITLE CARD

TEXT

1:55 AM

EXT. URBAN OFFICE BUILDING - NIGHT

A quiet, bare city street; the wee hours. A single car is parked crooked on the sidewalk; MOTOR RUNNING, headlights on and the driver's side door open.

A pregnant WOMAN walks toward the glass doors and reaches into the pocket of her pink bathrobe; it lazily flaps open from a breeze, she's in her pajamas and bare foot.

She pulls out a key card and we hear a CHIME as the doors UNLOCK and she pushes through, staring blankly forward.

EXT. ROOFTOP - CONTINUOUS

The metal door BANGS open as the same WOMAN stumbles onto the rooftop. We hear the CRUNCHING of small rocks under her feet as she approaches the edge.

She is not alone: Across the street and adjacent are two other people on their own separate buildings/ledges. A TEENAGE girl in a hospital gown, and a POLICE WOMAN.

EXT. CITY - CONTINUOUS

The silhouettes of the three women. They simultaneously jump from the buildings as we

CUT TO BLACK

TEXT

2:00 AM

MARY (V.O.)

(private/aside)

It's either nightmares, or I don't sleep at all...

FADE IN:

INT. CAFE - RAINY AFTERNOON

Everyone in the cafe is looking up at the ceiling-mounted television news.

Sat apart from the crowd on barstools by the window is MARY and CHEKHOV. MARY is in business casual, CHEKHOV has scrubs visible from under his coat.

CHEKHOV

Are you staying awake intentionally?

MARY

Don't doctor me.

CHEKHOV

I'm a nurse.

MARY is weary. She rubs her dark, tired eyes.

The **TV** in the background:

TV (O.S.)

(male/female voice)

Heavy hearts go out to their families and to the officers of the 87th precinct who are working diligently to better understand this senseless tragedy.

There is footage of emergency vehicles arriving to the scene.

CHEKHOV

(staring at the TV)

That one girl wasn't from our hospital, luckily-

(catching himself)

I don't mean it like that. I just mean: they're taking a lot of heat we'd obviously prefer not to have.

MARY

Are things easing up for you at work?

People are crowding around the TV in the background.

CHEKHOV

I'm changing schedules again. I wish I could still be doing house calls with Father Henry. You wanna come with me for that?

MARY

What? Why?

CHEKHOV

You're complaining about nothing to do.

MARY

No, I've been complaining about being nothing, and having nothing. I work at a radio station, and you heal lives. I don't have a purpose in life, like you.

CHEKHOV

That's what I'm talking about. Make a house call with me, you'll feel good and charitable. Father Henry and I visit three bed-cases a week.

MARY

You've been making your house calls with a priest.

CHEKHOV

Yeah?

MARY

Yeah, so how sick are these people? So sick, you need a priest ready to give last rites? I mean, I don't want to make an effort to go and stare at death. That's why I can't friggin' sleep right now.

CHEKHOV

Father Henry is an MD - he takes temperatures more often than confession.

(beat)

That's why you're forcing yourself to stay up? You're dreaming of...what you did?

MARY

(annoyed)

No. I'm dreaming of other people dying. Not me.

CHEKHOV

Well you should sleep as much as you can tonight.

(MORE)

CHEKHOV (CONT'D)

You're gonna have the apartment to yourself while I'm pulling an all-nighter in the coma ward - I'm back in the hospital for the next week.

MARY

Paid to stay up all night - not a bad gig.

CHEKHOV

Yeah! Instead of at home for free.

MARY

Shit - Do I keep you up?

CHEKHOV

Not a big deal. I can hear you bustle in your room, so it takes longer to pass out. I'm otherwise a deep sleeper when I don't have to be up at 2am every day.

MARY

I - just - don't - want - to sleep. I can't go through those dreams again.

CHEKHOV

This is day three, lady. I feel like you don't have a choice at this point.

MARY

Yeah...I'm sure I'll go down tonight, whether I like it or not. I've been dozing all day.

CHEKHOV

(distracted, clocking the crowd)

You've been what?

MARY's gaze out the window is soft focus; we hear RAIN pounding the glass along with

CHEKHOV (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Mary. Mary-

INT. RADIO STATION - AFTERNOON

Cubicles - the backend pencil pushing side of the station adjacent to a hall of studios and recording booths.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

Mary.

MARY sits up at her desk with a short GASP, startled.

INT. BUS - NIGHT

SCREECHING from the brakes makes MARY JOLT awake upright as the bus HISSES and sways. She zips her jacket up.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

MARY's head nods; she snaps fully awake in her pajamas, stirring hot tea.

CHEKHOV

Mary.

MARY

-What?

CHEKHOV

I said: "are you still dozing off"

MARY

...Yeah, just a b-

CHEKHOV

-bit, yeah, noticed. I've been here for a couple nods by now.

MARY

Sorry.

CHEKHOV

Still tea?

MARY

Yeah, more caffeine than coffee.

CHEKHOV

You - need - sleep. Did you buy the aids?

MARY

Yes.

CHEKHOV

Like an adult?

MARY
(sips her tea)
Yep. I'd rather not sleep, though.

CHEKHOV
Your brain is gonna shut down
anyhow. You buy over the counter
variety?

MARY
(cold)
Obviously.

CHEKHOV
You stick to the list I texted?

MARY
(holds up small bag)
The pharmacist approved. As natural
as it gets.

CHEKHOV
I'm glad he approved, my massive
med school debt has meaning all of
a sudden.

MARY
My debt makes me want to take the
whole bottle.

CHEKHOV
(beat)
I don't mind pretending you're not
thinking about it, but-

MARY
I'm not thinking about it until you
do that-

CHEKHOV
Come on-

MARY
No-

CHEKHOV
I think it's a little soon to joke,
then. Especially with all the
bullshit on TV. Can we not joke in
addition to not talking about it?
Can that happen?

MARY

Joking can help, too - stop letting it bother you.

CHEKHOV

It'll bother me if it's my hospital they roll your body into again.

MARY

(beat)

If we're gonna keep living together, I can't feel like you're my warden.

CHEKHOV

We started living together because we were best friends; That's where my care is coming from - as a friend, not a nurse.

MARY

It seems like your concern right now comes from wanting to chaperone me, all things considered-

CHEKHOV

-all things you put into motion. Nobody's changed the nature of our relationship, just the shit in between - and we're still good-

MARY

I'm not gonna do it again! Okay? I'm exhausted.

CHEKHOV

Well, I wonder why...

MARY

No, emotionally - everything. Exhausted on this topic, exhausted from going out the front door every morning - Just exhausted. Dreams are what tormented me to the edge last time. I don't want to dream about what I've been dreaming about.

CHEKHOV

You need sleep and exercise, or you'll get depressed and...wanna do it again.

MARY

I feel like my dreams are hurting more than just me. It's cosmic, or something. They feel so real. It's like I'm not done killing myself, you know? So I do it in my sleep, and t spills over to others.

CHEKHOV

(half listening)

It's a chicken/egg issue. You need to sleep, and you'll stop hallucinating.

MARY

I really don't think it's...

CHEKHOV slings his bag over his shoulder.

CHEKHOV

I have to go...

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

MARY follows CHEKHOV into the living room as he readies to head out.

MARY

Have fun with the coma patients

CHEKHOV

(zipping up)

Yup - always.

CHEKHOV closes the door behind him as he leaves.

We show MARY leaning in the kitchen doorway, spacing out with her steaming mug of tea. We linger with her for a moment before we

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER

Same room, same night, same composition. The lights are off, it is cold and dark looking - many hours have passed.

We slowly move into

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

MARY is in bed, fast asleep. The digital clock next to the bed shines: "1:45 AM"

CUT TO:

I/E. DREAM SEQUENCE - ???

After a series of abstract visuals that warp sense of time and place: We sometimes are, and other times simply follow MARY until we end up:

Falling. Falling...

Falling down a black void with the WHOOSHING power of WIND at high speed.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - SAME NIGHT

The quiet coma ward is narrow. There are twelve patients, six lined up along either opposing wall.

A NURSE collects her personal items and hands the desk over to CHEKHOV, who's only just arriving. He sits down and we see the analog clock on the wall display: **1:55 AM**

I/E. DREAM SEQUENCE - CONTINUOUS

MARY sees a young WOMAN falling down the void along with her. She's calling out.

Their trajectory brings them closer - The WIND unnaturally cancels out enough for us to clearly hear:

WOMAN

(calm, reassuring)

It's okay. I've had this dream before. I always wake up before the bottom. Always! I always wake up before the bottom.

INT. APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

CHEKHOV's alarm clock radio turns on at **2:00 AM** - It plays "Mr. Sandman"

I/E. DREAM SEQUENCE - CONTINUOUS

MARY and the young WOMAN fall less chaotic, no longer flailing but sitting and laying into their descent. The MUSIC echoes through the dream.

DISTANT MUSIC

"...Then tell him that his lonesome nights - are - over! Sandman...."

MARY reaches out and they clasp fingers.

WOMAN

You need to be brave.

MARY

Brave for what?

WOMAN

To help the dreamers.

MARY

But this is my dream.

WOMAN

And you've had it before?

MARY nods.

BOTH

I always wake up before the botto-

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

No MUSIC - it's quiet.

No filters, no dream sequence: cold reality. The young WOMAN from the dream is on the ground with her eyes open and the pavement beneath her cracked and cratered.

She COUGHS and splutters blood - coming to, waking up.

She can't move; we only see terror on her face before the apparent pain overwhelms her and she dies.

INT. COMA WARD, HOSPITAL - MOMENTS LATER

At the end of the wing, CHEKHOV is reading a book and begins to doze off until-

VOICES (O.S.)

(singing)

Bum, bum, bum, bum bum bum bum bum,
bum bum bum, bum bum bum...

The 12 coma patients simultaneously sit up and are lazily squeezing enough air out of their atrophied bodies to sing along to:

INT. MARY' ROOM - SAME

DISTANT RADIO (O.S.)

"Mr. Sandman! Bring me a dream!
Make him the cutest that..."

MARY wakes up as if having almost hit the ground. She lies back flat, panting and staring at the ceiling as we

CUT TO BLACK

END OF ACT ONE