

4 A.M.

by
Jonathan Dorf

Cast of Characters

4 A.M. is designed to be an ensemble piece. With multiple casting, it can make use of a minimum of roughly 6-8 performers, with a maximum of 30 or more (8+ is optimal). All are teenage characters but the Officers and the Monster/Nightmares, which are meant to be played somewhat expressionistically.

FRANKIE 4 A.M., male or female, teen short-wave radio DJ
JAKE (or JANE), male or female, a smart but isolated teen
JOGGING TEEN, male or female
ANNE, a high school girl
MONICA, Anne's friend
ROMEO, a teen in love with Juliet
JULIET, a teen in love with Romeo
SLEEPER KID, a teenager who has nightmares
MONSTER UNDER THE BED, the manifestation of the Sleeper's fears and dreams, or perhaps a real entity
NIGHTMARES, dancing manifestations of teenage fears...and dreams
SIMON, male high school student
HALE, Simon's friend
FIRE KID
FIRST OFFICER, a caricature of an FBI-like special agent
SECOND OFFICER, the First Officer's overly enthusiastic counterpart
SECOND JOGGER, the opposite gender of the Jogging Teen

Members of the ensemble also play the teens from Scene 2 and the Nightmares. If you have a larger cast, as the script notes, you may use multiple Sleepers and Nightmares in Fear Dance.

All characters, with the exception of Anne/Monica, Romeo/Juliet, Hale/Simon, may be cast with either male or female actors. Stage directions may refer to characters as one gender or the other, but this is only for convenience.

Settings

The play takes place in the bedrooms of its various teen characters, as well as on the street, but the settings and production design can be as suggested or non-realistic as desired.

Author's Note

The play should move from one scene to the other as fluidly as possibly--blackouts are deadly. Area staging may be a good way to avoid having any.

SCENE 1: ANYBODY OUT THERE?

4 A.M. Spotlight on FRANKIE, male or female, broadcasting into a microphone. The rest of the stage should be as dark as possible.

FRANKIE

This is Frankie, your 4 A.M. connection, your 4 A.M. force, and a horse is a horse is a horse, of course. No idea why I just said that, but come what may, I am here to light your way in the darkness, broadcasting to you live on 777.7-- that's seven hundred seventy-seven and seven-tenths, the luckiest frequency on your A.M. dial--comin' at you old school in the magic hour, when your world is asleep and there's no one but me and maybe a zombie or three to keep you company.

(beat)

And speaking of the magic hour, don't you dare disappear, don't you go, because I've got a magical mystery show for you. It's true. So keep your radio tuned just right, 'cause Frankie's gonna get you through the night.

(beat)

Is anybody out there? Can anybody hear me? Come out, come out, wherever you are. Hello? Hello?

Lights slowly fade on Frankie and gradually come up on the rest of the stage, revealing other TEENS, all in their own little 4 A.M. worlds.

SCENE 2: HERE I AM, 4 A.M. AGAIN

The teens might be in or out of bed, in all sorts of sleepwear, or not in sleepwear at all. While many might already be on stage, additional TEENS could enter as the scene continues. The lines in the scene should rotate through the ensemble, with no one delivering two lines in a row unless specified.

ENSEMBLE MEMBERS

4 A.M. again. Go back to sleep.
 I want to go to the bathroom, but I don't feel like getting out of bed.
 What's that sound?
 Are there really vampires?
 Did I ever turn the webcam off?
 Can I get back to sleep if I have to go to the bathroom?
 If I just lie on this side, there's no way I can fall out of bed...again.
 I want a big juicy hamburger.
 What will it feel like to be dead?
 A squared plus B squared equals C squared.
 I shouldn't be on this website.
 Stop thinking. Stop thinking.
 (The speaker should say his name.)
 Yes, I am the famous artist, _____.
 One two three. One two three. One two three.

A JOGGING TEEN, male or female, in sweats or shorts depending on the season, jogs onto the stage. It's as if the jogging teen is outside. All others on stage freeze.

JOGGING TEEN

(jogging in place)

Sometimes I feel the urge to do something radical. Like run at 4 A.M. Run through the frozen world, where everything's still but me.

ENSEMBLE MEMBERS

Why is green green? Why isn't it red? Or yellow?
 What if I just walked up to him and punched him in the--
 A big juicy hamburger, with blue cheese melted on top, dripping onto my tongue...
 I never heard my Dad come home.
 Did aliens land in Roswell?

JOGGING TEEN

Sometimes I can run for an hour, and never see another person.

The Jogging Teen jogs off.

ENSEMBLE MEMBERS

I don't think I studied enough for history.
Why was Michelle looking at me and whispering to Jen?

(with eyes closed)

The sun is shining. There's a slight breeze. The water is blue and perfect, and I have the entire beach in Port Douglass, Australia to myself. I'm in my happy place. I am in my happy place.

I have to wake up in 86 minutes.

FIRST ENSEMBLE KID

Is there anyone out there?

SECOND ENSEMBLE KID

There's a monster under the bed.

FIRST ENSEMBLE KID

Anyone--

SECOND ENSEMBLE KID

He talks to me.

FIRST ENSEMBLE KID

(finishing the thought)

--who's thinking this thought--

SECOND ENSEMBLE KID

He's scared--

FIRST ENSEMBLE KID

--too?

SECOND ENSEMBLE KID

--too.

Lights down on the ensemble, who might exit, or hang around the stage.

SCENE 3: LETTER TO A KNIFE COMPANY, PART I

4 A.M. JAKE (or Jane if your production uses a female actor) is in his bedroom, writing a letter.

JAKE

To whom it may concern. I recently purchased your four-inch peeling knife. It was on sale, but just because it was on sale doesn't mean it should be worse than a knife that's not on sale. Right?

(beat)

You advertise it as--and I quote--"the chef's ultimate weapon. The ergonomically designed handle offers maximum comfort, giving way to a razor sharp carbon steel blade." You also note that it cuts through fruits and vegetables like hot butter, standing up to the demands of the busiest professional kitchens, with no need for sharpening for three to five years. Three to five years. Not weeks. Not months. Years!

(beat)

I've had the knife for six days. And in these six days, I've cut a half-dozen tomatoes, two onions, one each red, yellow and orange peppers, and two cloves of garlic. Not bunches--cloves, and not even big ones--and kind of goin' soft.

(beat)

And therein lies our problem. Last night, I took your knife, your knife that doesn't need to be sharpened for three to five years, and thirteen vegetables later, it punks out. When it comes to two puny wrists, your razor sharp carbon steel isn't up to the job. It cuts like a butter knife, and the blood is dripping so slow it could be hours before I even lose consciousness. But my parents are the only parents I know that don't have a lethal pharmacy in their medicine cabinet, and they're out with the car, so that's not an option either, which means that now, because of your carbon-steel disappointment I have to sit around and wait and hurt. The whole point of your knife is so I don't have to hurt anymore.

(beat)

Do you know what it's like to have people smear egg yolks on your lunch table just before you get there, so you don't have anywhere to sit? Don't worry--they didn't waste the egg whites: those went into my lunch. And both of those were better than the dead mouse in my locker.

(beat)

I used to cry about it. I stopped. What's the point, unless you're too busy crying to think. That might be something.

Jake freezes at the desk as the lights dim.

SCENE 4: SLEEPOVER: THE GIRLS

ANNE and MONICA, her guest, both mid-teens, lie in a dark room. Anne is awake, but Monica sleeps. Anne stands over her, trying to decide if she's awake.

ANNE
Monica, are you awake?

(beat)
Monica?

(beat)
Monica!

MONICA
What?

ANNE
Are you awake?

Monica groans.

MONICA
What are you doing?

ANNE
What are you doing?

MONICA
Sleeping.

ANNE
You can't.

Monica turns over and tries to ignore her. Beat. Anne turns on the lights. Monica groans.

ANNE (cont'd)
This isn't working for me.

MONICA
What? Turn off the lights.

ANNE
This is supposed to be a sleepover, but you're just...sleeping.

MONICA
It's...what time is it?

ANNE

Four. And we should be up, talking about guys and dyeing each other's hair purple, text messaging our friends to tell them what an awesome time we're having--

MONICA

Sleepover. Sleep.

Monica tries to cover her head with a pillow, but Anne pulls it off.

ANNE

It has nothing to do with sleep. If you wanted to sleep, you should have stayed home.

MONICA

What's wrong with you?

ANNE

Me?! Did we cross over into an alternate universe where up is down?

MONICA

What time did you say it was?

ANNE

Four.

MONICA

Everybody's asleep at four.

ANNE

Not at a sleepover. By four we should be confiding our deepest, darkest secrets, secrets so secret that we have to swear on the grave of an A-list celebrity never to tell.

Monica tries to hide under the covers, but Anne starts to pull them off.

MONICA

Hey!

ANNE

(as they struggle)

What if people found out that we...slept?!

Monica, with a forceful pull, comes up with the blanket.

MONICA

(beat)

I won't tell anyone.

ANNE

Once you're on the list, do you know how hard it is to get off?

MONICA

I promise.

ANNE

It's like a big black lipstick smudge of Cain on your forehead. No one's gotten it off in the history of
 (Anne should say the name of
 her school)

_____.

MONICA

I promise I won't tell. What if I got up extra early--

ANNE

It *is* extra early.

(beat--starting to pack
 Monica's things)

I never would've invited you if I'd known you'd be like this.

MONICA

Wait--I want to swap secrets and talk about guys...

ANNE

(stops packing)

Yeah...? I'm listening.

MONICA

We could set a time--eight. Nobody's gonna' be up at eight on a Saturday. We could do all that, and they'd never know.

ANNE

I'd know, and what if it just slips out? I see how you look at Ryan Carver. Your mouth opens--you look like a whale from science class feeding on plankton. Yeah--you get all whale mouthy, and something might just slip out.

MONICA

Four hours. That's all I ask.

ANNE

You ask too much.

(beat)

I could maybe do it, if I had some kind of proof that you won't say anything.

MONICA

Proof?

ANNE

Like a hostage.

(beat)

Yeah. If I had a hostage, maybe we could make this work.

MONICA

But I promised--

ANNE

Just cause you're on honor roll doesn't mean you don't lie. I mean, it's not like I know you.

MONICA

But we've been best friends since kindergarten.

ANNE

I thought I did, but then this, and now you're like some stranger from off the street. Speaking Russian.

MONICA

Come on--we were green tea goddesses. You can't tell me you don't remember the Green Tea Goddess Green Tea Tickle?

(singing--sort of)

Green Tea Goddesses forever...

It's the Camp Teatotem way--

ANNE

Your cat.

MONICA

What?

ANNE

If I had Captain Snuffles as a hostage, I'd feel better.

MONICA

You want my cat?

(beat)

You can't take my cat.

ANNE

Not take. Just take for a little while. Until I'm sure.

MONICA

Of what?

ANNE

That these four hours aren't going to blow up in my face.

MONICA

I'm not giving you Captain Snuffles.

ANNE

Then stay up.

MONICA

I can't. Even if I wanted to, he's at my house.

ANNE

(pointing at the box)

Actually...

MONICA

You psycho! You kidnapped--

ANNE

He chases after Eddie.

MONICA

Oh yeah--he chases your little brother for two miles right into a box in your room.

ANNE

It helps when Eddie rubs himself with tuna fish and stands outside your window.

MONICA

(getting up)

I'm coming, Captain Snuffles...

Anne blocks her way.

ANNE

You don't look so tired now.

MONICA

Give me my cat.

ANNE

Give me a secret first.

MONICA

You're not being a good goddess.

(beat)

I'm not in love with Ryan. I don't even like him that much. I like Jerome, and since they're always standing next to each other, it looks like I'm in love with Ryan. Now give me my--

ANNE

I still have nightmares about that clown.

MONICA

(beat)

The one holding the cotton candy?

ANNE

He won't stop chasing me.

MONICA

But that's--

ANNE

Don't laugh at me. I should've never told you I--

MONICA

Did you know Captain Snuffles was specially trained as a clown-fighting cat?

ANNE

(beat)

Really?

MONICA

No.

ANNE

Oh. You're making fun of--

MONICA

But I'm not so bad at clown-fighting.

ANNE

Yeah?

MONICA

Yeah.

(beat)

My turn for another secret?

The lights dim on Anne and
Monica, as the lights come up on
Frankie.

SCENE 5: FRANKIE INTERLUDE, INTERVIEW AND COMMERCIAL

Frankie, broadcasting in his
"studio," aka his bedroom.

FRANKIE

This is Frankie 4 A.M. in the studio, so don't be rudio. I am live with a special guest. You all think about him when you're lying there alone: he's the merchant of death, he'll take your breath away--literally. Put your hands together and give it up for the man who'll make you a permanent sleeper--it's the big guy in the hood, the Grim Reaper.

(sound of AUDIENCE APPLAUSE)

Hey Grim--may I call you Grim?--thanks for coming by. I know you're a busy man...er, entity. And you're very tall. The pictures do not do you justice.

(beat)

So, uh...Mr. Reaper, how does it feel to be the taker of lives, the stealer of souls, the harbinger of doom?

(long pause)

The silence is really scary--and I mean *really* scary, but...

(beat)

Uh--the finger wagging in my direction is about to make me wet my pants, but nobody can see it.

(beat)

This is radio! You can't gesture silently on the radio!

(beat)

We're going to go to a commercial, and hope we can get a word, any word, after the break.

There's a MUSICAL INTERLUDE, one of Frankie's cheesy radio fill-ins.

FRANKIE (cont'd)

(trying to disguise his
voice)

It's been called ergonomic. The chef's ultimate weapon. Four inches of drop dead sexy. But don't take our word for it that this four inch tower of chopping and peeling power will give your knife life the edge it's been missing. Ask our customers.

(as the First Customer)

I love this knife. It couldn't peel a boiled potato, but it looks so beautiful.

(as the Second Customer)

If I had a kid that was as bad as this knife, I'd kick his lazy butt out of the house and change the locks.

(as the Third Customer)

Thank you. Thank you so much. Thank you...for making such crappy knives.

Want more? Hit the back button for instructions on how to order a non-printable perusal copy!