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HOT AND HOLY: SEX IN A COMA

by

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CHARACTERS:

BENITO:

Eighteen. Lean muscled, jittery, a street tough kid, but a kid nonetheless.

COROLLA:

Eighteen. Ethereal, in a coma.

NURSE:

Late forties. Strong in body and mind she believes in miracles and keeping your nails clean.

DR. QUIGLEY:

Fifties. Once a rising star and a distinguished neuroscience researcher, now chief of a long-term care facility. He is still charismatic and he knows it.

PROSECUTOR:

Late thirties. Pretty with a repressed sexuality.

MOTHER:

Fifties. A handsome woman, she has let herself go since the accident that left her daughter in a coma.

SETTING:

A courtroom space, suggested by a wooden table and two chairs, a hospital room suggested by a bed, a single chair and a bedside table. A curtain on a track runs around the bed. The curtain is open. At rear of stage is a large screen. Sounds of machines, steady dull beat and staccato beeping. The sound is continuous throughout play with varying intensity.

TIME:

The year 2000.

ACT 1 SCENE 1

COROLLA motionless in hospital bed wearing johnny gown tied at back.

She rises electric crackly around her head on screen we see a motorcycle crash. We hear the wooshing of blood in her arteries.

COROLLA

Change the movie! Change the movie! Please—no, please—Oh! My God I'm on fire! I'm falling! My bones are cracking – HELP ME! MAKE IT STOP! There's splinters in my eyes—I can't see—where're my legs? I can't move my legs, please, GET ME OUT. I can't move—oh, am I dead already? But I feel something. Reverberations—someone, anyone—

We hear muffled sounds and staccato clicking of approaching prosecutor's high heels

COROLLA lies still

PROSECUTOR walks on to stage/court. She carries a small briefcase, sets it down on table, takes out hand mirror and lipstick, holds up mirror, puts on lipstick. She replaces lipsticks and removes lip pencil from bag. She slowly traces her lips.

Turns to the audience.

PROSECUTOR

Ladies and gentleman of the jury— my opening statement— Corolla, her name is Corolla. From the Latin, for crown.

(gestures to girl in bed)

Don't be confused by her silence. She's not a fortune cookie, or a sealed box, something less than human. She's the daughter you never had, your sister who died at sixteen—special to someone, as she should be to you. Because you are her guardians, ladies and gentleman of the jury, that's who you are today. And she deserves your protection.

(walking)

Corolla has been in a coma since she slammed into a tree trunk so hard she left a small gold earring embedded in the bark—She can't speak but there are things we can know—Listen, that's her heart,

We hear single heart beat, COROLLA'S.

PROSECUTOR (CONT'D)

And— there's another one,

We hear a baby's heartbeat, quick.

Another heart ticking away like a tiny clock tightly wound or a time bomb that you can't detonate--life quickens in all its inestimable glory—  
Corolla has been raped. I will prove this to you today beyond a reasonable doubt, and I will ask you for a conviction. For it was not an angel, not a shower of light, not a broom handle jammed up her vagina--a man did this. A man so excited by her helplessness that he took the last shreds of dignity this girl had left, without remorse, devoid of empathy. Ladies and gentlemen, I submit to you that even if all she has left now are her dreams and respiration; as long as she is breathing we owe her some kind of dignity.

(turning toward audience)

Oh-- but why don't I trust you? Do you too notice the softness of her breasts, the roundness of her belly, are you too excited by her helplessness, enticed by the complicity of her silence? I can already hear the whispers. Maybe she's not a virgin. Another slice off a cut loaf. See how her nightgown strap slips off her shoulder, the curve of the clavicle exposed like a crescent tea cookie, no skin under her nails, no broken teeth--this can't be rape—rape is a rhapsody and this girl didn't sing—she didn't scream, she didn't even wake up. It's the fear that's forbidden, without fear it doesn't count and she snoozed right through it. Oh, but to be opened like a cabbage— this girl is worthy of our protection, if only to keep us human. Return a verdict of guilty. He took off her diaper, for Christ's sake.

PROSECUTOR turns as NURSE enters.

NURSE takes her place at the table, hand in the air to take oath.

NURSE

The bible the whole bible and nothing but the bible. That's how I swear because I witness for Jehovah. I am in the truth.

PROSECUTOR

You are a Jehovah's Witness.

NURSE

I am. I am ruled by the kingdom of heaven.

PROSECUTOR

Well, we welcome witnesses, no matter who's in charge.

NURSE

Don't I get some lawyer?

PROSECUTOR

No, this is an investigation. Grand jury. LOOKING AT AUDIENCE They will decide if an indictment will issue.

NURSE

Them? It doesn't seem right.

PRESECUTOR

You will answer or you will be found in contempt.

NURSE

If I got contempt I got to tell it.

PROSECUTOR

Let the record reflect that the witness has expressed her comprehension. So, how long have you been a nurse?

NURSE

I've been a certified progressive care nurse for thirty-two years, the last sixteen at Silverglade Long-term Hospital, that's where I'm working now.

PROSECUTOR

And you're the nurse responsible for Corolla's care?

NURSE

I've been her primary from the day she came in. That's just over a year.

PROSECUTOR

And what does that involve?

NURSE

You take care of your patient, body and soul. Corolla she had the healing from the accident. And after that there's the feeding, keeping her clean, keeping her pretty. Not one bedsore on my girl ever. Jehovah commands that you love your fellow man and follow in the steps of Jesus, and that's how I do.

PROSECUTOR

Changes in her condition?

NURSE

Not a lot of change. Except the one you already know.

PROSECUTOR

And, when did you meet the boy, Benito?

NURSE

It was January of 2000, that's a century leap year, who could forget that?

BENITO enters with a mop and pail. He is scared and jittery, on something speedy. HE puts on his headphones. He mops sloppily, jumps around to face COROLLA then rapidly backs away. He dances with his back to her. We hear what he hears. Lights change on COROLLA.. She sits up looks at him. COROLLA lies down

BENITO turns suddenly, pulling off headphones.

BENITO

What?

(he approaches, leaning over her)

You looking at me? You giving me the mal de ojo?

(whispers)

Zafa.

(he reaches to close eyes, withdraws his hands, backing away)

Your eyes they're open. I mean, what the fuck? That's so weird , that's a weird ass thing-- go back to sleep, stay asleep just keep on breathing—

(backs away then approaches)

All these fuckin' machines-- -You really alive?

(whacks the mop handles on the bed, comes close and looks for reaction.)

Hey! Shut your eyes! Come on. So's-- maybe you don't want me here? So's I don't want to be here. I got sentenced here by some fat judge so's I could think about stuff. And yeah, I've been thinking. I been thinking it sucks here, I been thinking it stinks like piss and old people with rotten organs and shit.

(turns away and starts to mop)

I'm gonna listen to some tunes.

Puts on his headphones, slopping water moving to the music. He begins to dance with his back turned. COROLLA sits up on one elbow holding a feather out. She traces a small curve in the air; it is the side of BENITO'S neck on the other side of the room. He feels it.

BENITO stops. COROLLA lies down as he turns and slaps his neck.

BENITO

What? What the fuck?

COROLLA laughs. He goes to COROLLA. Pulls up sheets and covers COROLLA'S face.

NURSE gets down from the stand and enters hospital room.

NURSE

Hey!

(peeling sheet back)

What did I just see you do?

BENITO

You? You weren't even here.

NURSE

Speak to me politely, boy. I'm your boss. I can send you to jail faster than you can tell me your name.

BENITO

Benito.

NURSE

Benito. The Father Almighty alone will come to judge the quick and the dead. Don't you dare disrespect this girl.

BENITO

All these tubes with stuff coming in, and stuff going out— I got to go get more soap.

NURSE

Use what you've got. Just add bleach, it's in the closet.

BENITO

Nah, I got crap to do—

NURSE

Now!

BENITO  
(getting bleach)

Fuck all. All right. This stuff?

NURSE

That's it, read the label.

BENITO reads it, slowly.

NURSE (CONT'D)

You got to memorize it? Bleach. Mop.

BENITO  
(poors in bleach and mops sloppily)

So, what happened to her?

NURSE

Corolla? Motorcycle. What happened to you?

BENITO?

Me? I killed my fucking stepfather.

NURSE  
(snorts)

Honey, we don't get killers we get losers and the lost. How old are you?

BENITO

Eighteen.

NURSE

You drink?

BENITO

Beers, mostly I do drugs.

NURSE  
(ticking them off with her fingers)

No drinking, no drugs, no betting no cursing, no spitting and never use the Lord's name in vain. And tuck in your shirt, we don't have hooligans here.

BENITO

Can I finish now?

NURSE

Sure, Killer. But not like that. Ring it out proper. You're just spreading the dirt around.

BENITO

It's not dirty.

NURSE

Just do it. ?Sweet Jesus! SHE takes his hands

BENITO?

What'd I do?

NURSE

Look at your hands. Wash your hands, scrub them and get those nails clean.

BENITO pulls his hands away.

NURSE

Let me show you! What you do is get a nailbrush and some soap, there's plenty around here and you go like this.

(she demonstrates nail brushing - he pulls away)

Don't pull away from me. I'll get you a brush and nail clipper myself— you just do it.

BENITO

Who do you think you are-- my fuckin' mother?

BENITO puts on headphone goes back to moping. NURSE goes over and pulls them off.

NURSE

Whatever your right hand stretches out to do, do with all your might.

BENITO

Huh?

NURSE

Do it right.

She demonstrates mopping the floor.

BENITO

Like she cares.

(indicating COROLLA)

NURSE

Corolla. Call her by her name. And don't be smart with me; it's this job or jail.

BENITO

Jail's OK by me. You can lift weights and you don't have to do floors or clean up some old guy whose piss bag broke.

NURSE

A good-looking boy like you wouldn't last a week.

BENITO

I can take care of myself.

NURSE

(handing him mop)

Then you do what I tell you, and mop under the bed--you scared to go close?

BENITO

Nah.

NURSE

Then look at her.

BENITO

All right.

(looks)

It's so fucked up, she looks kinda asleep, and kinda dead.

NURSE

She's plenty alive, could be she's listening, just doesn't have anything to add to the conversation.

BENITO

You think she's listening?

NURSE

You don't know. I don't know. But you better be careful what you say in front of her.

BENITO

(looking)

That tube? It's like some ugly ass snake, like some python crawling around's gonna swallow her up—I can't even look.

(he mops sloppily)

NURSE

(watching)

You have some imagination but you do not have a personal aptitude for cleaning. You finish up, then you read to her

BENITO

Read, like a book?

NURSE

Like the Bible.

BENITO

Nah, I'm gonna mop.

NURSE

You gonna read.

(open drawer and takes out Bible)

The lord Jehovah sent you here to learn.

Come on now.

(holding out Bible)

BENITO

(does not take it)

I don't know fuck all about the Bible.

NURSE

Can you read?

BENITO

Yeah, I can read.

NURSE

You lying about that too?

BENITO

(takes book reading haltingly)

"Trust in the lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding."

NURSE

(snorts)

Got that right. Go on now.

BENITO

More?

NURSE nods.

BENITO

“My spirit exults in God my savior,” God my savior? Like he’s got me covered?

NURSE

That’s right.

BENITO

Yeah? What about her, that one.

NURSE

Corolla.

BENITO

You think that girl’s exulting?

NURSE

Yes, her spirit is exulting.

BENITO

Well, she’s alive, I guess that counts. “Holy is his name and his mercy reaches from age to age for those who fear him.” What’s all this fear bullshit? Fear don’t get you mercy.

NURSE

Mercy’s like the rain, you get it whether you deserve it or not.

BENITO

You don’t get no mercy if you got fear, you get your teeth kicked in.

NURSE

You get “undeserved kindness” from Jehovah. You think on that.

BENITO

Jehovah— that’s your God?

NURSE

That’s right.

BENITO

So’s I can be any kind of fuck up and your God’s got me?

NURSE

You better be praying for undeserved kindness, and you better be earning it too.