

Atonia

By Kevin Broccoli

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Characters

Amanda, 30's

Crystal, 60's

Matt/Shadowy Figure, 30's

Setting: A House in Newport, Rhode Island, The Off-Season

The play takes place between 12am and 1am.

“Atonia”

(AMANDA’s small apartment. CRYSTAL has just arrived. She’s still taking in the place. It’s not dirty, but it seems trapped in time. Most of the furniture seems to be at least ten years old--if not older. AMANDA is sitting in her recliner. CRYSTAL is dressed for work, whereas AMANDA has on a bathrobe.)

AMANDA

I want to apologize for the mess.

CRYSTAL

Oh no need.

AMANDA

And you weren’t supposed to start tonight. I’m sorry for that too.

CRYSTAL

I wasn’t doing anything.

AMANDA

But still--

CRYSTAL

Happy to get a jump-start.

AMANDA

Have you done this kind of--?

CRYSTAL

I was a nanny for many years. Nice family. You know the Porters?

AMANDA

The--?

CRYSTAL

John and Elizabeth?

AMANDA

No, I--

CRYSTAL

Nice family.

AMANDA

And you were their nanny?

CRYSTAL

Yes. Until the last child turned fourteen. That was two years ago.

AMANDA

What have you been doing since then?

CRYSTAL

I thought I was retired. I guess I was wrong.

AMANDA

Where did, uh, Matt find you?

CRYSTAL

I'm friendly with his mother.

AMANDA

Linda?

CRYSTAL

Yes.

AMANDA

She's so nice.

CRYSTAL

She's good people.

AMANDA

She's been--her and Dan both--

CRYSTAL

Dan is just great.

AMANDA

They're like--Well, they're my family. Only family I've got, really. Them and Matt. They're all--Yeah.

(A beat.)

CRYSTAL

Are you all doing Thanksgiving together next week?

AMANDA

Yup. Linda's going to cook, and I'm--

CRYSTAL

Will Matt be back by then?

AMANDA

Oh yeah. He'll be--He only goes for a day at a time.

CRYSTAL

Linda was telling me that sometimes he has to leave without any--

AMANDA

Yeah. When they call, he has to go. That's how it is.

CRYSTAL

Must be good money, huh?

AMANDA

Yeah.

CRYSTAL

That's good.

AMANDA

Thank god. I can't really--I'm not able to work.

CRYSTAL

Oh.

AMANDA

I used to do some data entry. Remote work. I haven't done that for--I guess four years now.

CRYSTAL

Do you mostly just--

AMANDA

Oh, I'm not a shut-in. I go out. I go out with Matt.

CRYSTAL

That's nice.

AMANDA

We like to go out.

CRYSTAL

That's nice.

AMANDA

We like the restaurants downtown. On the wharf. We go to all of those. A new one every week. We try them all and when we're done we go back and do it all over again. Like, a--a rotation.

CRYSTAL

That's expensive, isn't it?

AMANDA

Well. We don't have kids. Might as well spend money on food, right?

CRYSTAL

You cook?

AMANDA

Not really.

CRYSTAL

Good for you.

AMANDA

Just easier to eat out.

CRYSTAL

Oh, sure.

AMANDA

It's tough, because I get tired. I get tired easily.

CRYSTAL

Right.

AMANDA

But I don't want it to--I'm trying not to let my, uh, circumstances--get in the way of--I still want to have a life, you know?

CRYSTAL

I understand.

AMANDA

It's just been tough lately, because Matt gets called away more and more, and I can't be by myself, so--

CRYSTAL

Yes.

AMANDA

Linda and Dan even offered to have me come stay with them on the nights Matt is away, but I don't want to put that on them.

CRYSTAL

Right.

AMANDA

Because it's really just--It's just having somebody with me when I sleep.

CRYSTAL

Your husband explained it all to me.

AMANDA

As long as I know someone's here, I'm fine.

CRYSTAL

Do you wake up often in the night?

AMANDA

It's not so much that I wake up a lot. It's that I--I tend to freeze up when I sleep. Sometimes. Not all the time.

CRYSTAL

When you say 'freeze up' do you--?

AMANDA

My body goes stiff. I wake up, but I can't move. I can breathe all right, but I'm just--It's sort of a paralysis?

CRYSTAL

I've heard of that. It sounds scary.

AMANDA

It can be. You don't really--You can't get used to it.

CRYSTAL

And it's--every night?

AMANDA

No. Not every night. Some nights. A lot of nights.

CRYSTAL

I'm sorry.

AMANDA

Oh, you know. It's taught me--It's taught me that you can get used to just about anything if you--You know.

CRYSTAL

I'm glad I can help.

AMANDA

You're a huge help. You're--It's a *huge* help that you're here.

CRYSTAL

Okay.

AMANDA

Okay.

(A beat.)

Sorry. I must seem a little--

CRYSTAL

You're fine. Don't forget I used to watch children. Lots of energy.

AMANDA

I admire you. I have a hard time with children. They make me nervous. That's why I was so glad when I met Matt. Because he didn't want children and neither did I. It's hard to find someone who doesn't want kids. For awhile, I was worried he would change his mind, but he never did. Lucky me, I guess.

CRYSTAL

Children can be a lot to handle.

AMANDA

I know!

(A beat.)

I should warn you that sometimes I have to talk myself to sleep.

CRYSTAL

Do you--

AMANDA

I get worked up. I think it's nerves, because I know--I know that it might be a night where I have--Where I have some *trouble*, and so--It's like how a toddler doesn't want to go to bed, because they're scared they're going to have a nightmare. I want to sleep, but I also worry about it, because--

CRYSTAL

Have you seen a doctor about any of--

AMANDA

Mhmm. Yeah. A few, actually. I even did a sleep study a year ago. They gave me some techniques and exercises for stress management, but it didn't really do much good.

CRYSTAL

You must have been frustrated.

AMANDA

To be honest, I've never had much faith in doctors. My mom was sick a lot when I was kid, and they never helped her. When she--I mean, I wouldn't expect them to be able to--Sorry. You don't want to hear all this.

CRYSTAL

When did you lose your mother?

(A moment.)

AMANDA

I was fifteen.

CRYSTAL

That must have been--

AMANDA

She had a very tough life--my mother. When she finally--It was one of those moments where you're just--you're just glad to see someone at peace.

CRYSTAL

But fifteen is--

AMANDA

I practically raised myself. I had to. She really couldn't, uh--

CRYSTAL

That's hard.

AMANDA

She was very loving. She just--When you're sick like that--

CRYSTAL

I can't imagine.

(A beat.)

AMANDA

You can sit.

CRYSTAL

I wasn't sure where you wanted me.

AMANDA

Wanted you?

CRYSTAL

Matt didn't say exactly where I would--

AMANDA

Oh, I was going to sleep out here.

CRYSTAL

Here?

AMANDA

I've slept in the recliner before when I--

CRYSTAL

Oh no. I don't want you to--

AMANDA

To be honest, it's more comfortable than the bed. The recliner is brand new. I pass out here even when Matt is home. I actually like when he's away because it

means I can sleep out here and not feel guilty. Really. It's not a big deal. I promise.

CRYSTAL

So I would--

AMANDA

You can just sit.

(A beat. CRYSTAL sits on the couch.)

Or if you want to, you can sleep in my room on the--

CRYSTAL

Oh, no.

AMANDA

I know I made it sound like the bed is uncomfortable, but I promise, it's fine. It's just that I'm--

CRYSTAL

No, it's just that I don't plan on sleeping.

(A beat.)

AMANDA

I don't know if Matt told you that you needed to stay up with me, but--

CRYSTAL

No.

AMANDA

You don't have to. It's not about having someone awake while I sleep. It's just having someone *here*. If I have one of my episodes, it's good for me to have someone nearby just so I can know that they're there.

CRYSTAL

I understand.

AMANDA

Okay.

CRYSTAL

But I won't be sleeping.

AMANDA

It's really--

CRYSTAL

I don't sleep.

(A beat.)

AMANDA

You don't--?

CRYSTAL

No.

AMANDA

I mean... You sleep.

CRYSTAL

I don't.

AMANDA

You must.

CRYSTAL

I do not.

(A beat.)

AMANDA

But how--

CRYSTAL

I never have.

AMANDA

Slept?

CRYSTAL

Yes.

AMANDA

But that's impossible.

CRYSTAL

Not--No. There have been cases of it.

AMANDA

Of people who don't sleep?

CRYSTAL

Yes.

AMANDA

There can't be that many--

CRYSTAL

No. Not many.

AMANDA

But you're one of the--

CRYSTAL

I believe so, yes.

(A beat.)

AMANDA

I--That's--I'm not sure I believe you.

CRYSTAL

I don't have any reason to lie about it, do I?

AMANDA

No. I--I shouldn't have said that. That was rude.

CRYSTAL

It was a *little* rude.

AMANDA

I'm sorry.

CRYSTAL

It's strange. I know it's strange.

AMANDA

Have you ever--You asked me about doctors--

CRYSTAL

However much you may distrust doctors, I promise, I trust them even less. Besides, we don't actually know why human beings need sleep. We just know that if you don't sleep, eventually, you die. I've never slept, but I'm not dead. I'm sure one day I'll die of something, but it won't be lack of sleep. That's what I know.

AMANDA

Do you ever feel tired?

CRYSTAL

Yes. And when I do, I rest.

AMANDA

What does that mean to you? Resting?

CRYSTAL

It means to me what it means to most people. Laying down. Closing my eyes. Letting my mind go dark.

AMANDA

I have trouble with that. Letting my mind--

CRYSTAL

So I might be more rested than you?

AMANDA

Honestly? You probably are.

(AMANDA laughs a bit, but it's a sad laugh.)

CRYSTAL

You'll sleep well tonight.

AMANDA

What makes you say that?

CRYSTAL

When I was working for the Porters, all the children slept well. No nightmares. Nothing but sound sleep.

AMANDA

That can't be true.

CRYSTAL

Ask the kids. They'll tell you.

AMANDA

They might not have remembered, but--

CRYSTAL

No nightmares.

(A beat.)

AMANDA

So are you saying you're some sort of magic, sleep angel?

CRYSTAL

No. I don't believe in anything out of the ordinary. I just know that I don't sleep and everybody around me sleeps very well.

AMANDA

Then I just got lucky, I guess? Having you here?

CRYSTAL

I don't believe in luck, but yes. You did.

(A beat.)

AMANDA

So do you just have...hours of...memories of...you with your eyes closed? Mind blank?

CRYSTAL

I don't think you can remember something like that. It's more like a state you're in. Until you're no longer in it.

AMANDA

How do you wake up?

CRYSTAL

I open my eyes.

AMANDA

I think I'm going to make some tea.

CRYSTAL

Is that wise? Before bed?

AMANDA

I'm not a child.

CRYSTAL

I know. I wasn't trying to--

AMANDA

Decaffeinated. It'll help me sleep. Do you want any?

CRYSTAL

No, thank you.

(AMANDA gets up and walks over to the kitchen. She gets a mug from the cupboard, fills it with water from the kitchen sink, then puts it in the microwave to heat it up.)

Is that how you boil water?

AMANDA

It's faster than--

CRYSTAL

I don't mind making it for you.

AMANDA

I don't have a kettle.

CRYSTAL

Oh.

(A beat. The microwave beeps. AMANDA takes the mug out, pulls out a box of tea from the cupboard, takes a bag, drops it into the mug, and returns to the recliner. She blows on the tea, takes a sip, and then puts it on the table beside the recliner.)

I'm worried that I may have--unnerved you. With what I said. I didn't mean to give you anything to think about. Clearing your head is better.

AMANDA

It would just be so nice. To either not need sleep or to--sleep and know that tonight I won't have any problems.

(A moment.)

CRYSTAL

Tonight you won't have any problems.

AMANDA

But that feels like jinxing it. Like--like now I *know* it's going to be--

CRYSTAL

You'll be fine tonight.

AMANDA

You see? You say you don't believe in anything magical or--or--but then you say something like--

CRYSTAL

Is this very emotional for you?

AMANDA

Yes! I'm terrified.

(A beat.)

I'm terrified to try and--

(A beat.)

It's a horrible thing. To be scared of something you have to do. It's like--It's like if I were scared of eating. Like if--every time I tried to eat, I choked. That's what it's like.

CRYSTAL

Some people do have that problem.

AMANDA

I know.

CRYSTAL

It's psychological, isn't it? They're not really choking.

AMANDA

That doesn't make any sense. If you're choking, you're choking. Why would you think you're choking if you're--

CRYSTAL

But that's the whole point. Your body is--It's working against itself.

AMANDA

I know that.

(A beat.)

I'm sorry. I feel like--Like I've brought this angry, uh, *bad* energy into the room now, and I--

CRYSTAL

It's all right.

AMANDA

No, it's not. You're here. You're doing me a great favor by being here.

CRYSTAL

Well, I'm being *paid*.

AMANDA

Yes, I know, but--

CRYSTAL

Your husband *is* paying me.

AMANDA

I know.

CRYSTAL

So, it's really not a favor.

AMANDA

Yes.

(A beat. BOTH laugh. A real laugh.)

CRYSTAL

How is your tea?

AMANDA

It's--

(She takes a sip.)

It's horrible. I hate tea.

CRYSTAL

Then why did you--

AMANDA

Sometimes I drink tea and then I don't have any problems. Of course, sometimes I drink tea and I *do* have problems. I don't know why I try things knowing it doesn't make a difference if I--

CRYSTAL

Have you tried a Christmas place?

(A beat.)

AMANDA

A what?

CRYSTAL

A Christmas place? It doesn't matter if you believe in Christmas or not. It doesn't have to be Christmas. It can be--

AMANDA

I don't--

CRYSTAL

I took this class once. This meditation class. I was having some trouble resting at the time. When you don't sleep, you need to make sure you can rest. So I took this class. In the class, they told us we could help ourselves out--in terms of resting--by imagining ourselves on a nice, sandy beach on a beautiful summer day. Waves crashing. All of that. The problem is--I don't like the beach. I don't like sand. I don't even like summer. I hate all of it.

AMANDA

And you live here?

CRYSTAL

I know. I don't know how I wound up here. But I like it when it's not summer. It feels so sad and haunted everywhere you go. That's the kind of feeling I like.

AMANDA

Really? I get so depressed. I was telling Matt we need to move somewhere that doesn't feel so empty nine months out of the year.

CRYSTAL

Every place feels empty. There's a plague of emptiness now.

AMANDA

You sound like a preacher.

CRYSTAL

That religious upbringing is hard to kick.

AMANDA

You had a--

CRYSTAL

Oh yes. Baptist. But I'm a long way from there now.

AMANDA

I didn't know they had Baptists in this part of the country.

CRYSTAL

My mother was from the South. She moved up here when she was five months pregnant with me. She was looking for my father. He came through her town with some of his military friends. I don't know what they were doing there. There wasn't much to my mother's town--at least, according to her. They spent the night together, and when she realized she was going to have me, she had to haul out. Couldn't be an unwed mother when your parents make you kneel down and pray for an hour just because you sneezed in church. So she came up here. Well, she came up to Providence. That's where we lived. I moved here when I was--I think I was forty. Forty or forty-two. I don't remember. It was a long time ago.

AMANDA

Did she ever find him?

CRYSTAL

Who?

AMANDA

Your father.

CRYSTAL

Oh. No.

AMANDA

Oh.

(A moment.)

CRYSTAL

Anyway--the beach--

AMANDA

Right. The beach. Sorry.

CRYSTAL

I was taking this meditation class and everything was the *beach* and the *summer* and the *ocean* and I asked if I *had* to picture all that, and the woman running the class--nice woman, very nice--she told me I could picture whatever I wanted. Nobody had ever told me that before. Whenever I'd be thinking about doing meditation, it always seemed like it had to be a *beach* or a *field* or a *hilltop* or something. She told me I could pick whatever I wanted. So I picked one of those towns you see in a Christmas movie where there's snow on the ground, and a town square, and a bakery, and a big Christmas tree in front of a clock tower, and everybody is walking around with scarves and gloves and--

AMANDA

Like a Hallmark movie.

CRYSTAL

Yes. Just like that.

AMANDA

And that's what you meditate to?

CRYSTAL

Yes. I close my eyes and I go to my Christmas place.

AMANDA

I think I'd prefer the beach.

CRYSTAL

Is that how you wound up here? You got lured in thinking about how nice it was going to be to live in Newport in the summer--only to find out it's crowded and noisy and expensive and then when summer's over you forget about all that and wish June would come back around again?

(A beat.)

AMANDA

I wound up here, because--

(A moment.)

I don't know.

CRYSTAL

It's very quiet tonight. Even for the off-season.

AMANDA

I can see how the woman down the street lost her mind.

CRYSTAL

Excuse me?

AMANDA

Went running up and down the street saying somebody was chasing her.

CRYSTAL

Was somebody chasing her?

AMANDA

No. She was crazy. *Is*. I don't know. I haven't seen her in--

CRYSTAL

People are having a tough time these days.

AMANDA

I just want to keep my sanity. That's all I want. When my grandmother passed, her mind had already gone years before, and it was like--It was like my family was just taking care of this--this *body* that *resembled* this--this person we used to love and--and--

CRYSTAL

That must have been hard.

AMANDA

Do you do any--Are you like--Do you dabble in therapy at all?

CRYSTAL

Dabble in--

AMANDA

Because you seem so--

CRYSTAL

I'm not a therapist.

AMANDA

No, I know, but--

CRYSTAL

Not by any stretch of--

AMANDA

I'm sorry.

CRYSTAL

I'm just here to watch you sleep.

AMANDA

If I sleep.

CRYSTAL

Oh, you'll sleep.

(A moment.)

AMANDA

I tried drugs once.

(A beat.)

To help me.

(A beat.)

Not the legal kind either. The--

CRYSTAL

Why are you telling me this?

AMANDA

Because I don't know what else to say.

CRYSTAL

You don't have to say anything.

AMANDA

It helps.

CRYSTAL

All right, well if it--

AMANDA

The talking does. The drugs didn't. Help, I mean.

CRYSTAL

Maybe you needed better drugs.

(AMANDA laughs.)

AMANDA

One time I didn't--I didn't sleep for three days. I thought I was going to have to be hospitalized.

CRYSTAL

Have you ever been in a hospital for your--

AMANDA

No. I won't go to a hospital.

CRYSTAL

I don't blame you.

AMANDA

The day I have to go to a hospital just put a pillow over my--

CRYSTAL

Let's not talk like--

AMANDA

I never want to be in a hospital.

(A beat.)

CRYSTAL

What happened on the third day?

AMANDA

What?

CRYSTAL

You said you didn't sleep for three days. What happened on the third day?

AMANDA

Oh. I--I cried. I cried and cried and--

CRYSTAL

You cried yourself to sleep?

AMANDA

No, I had cried before that. I--I think I--I might have cried myself *into* sleep, but not *to* sleep.

CRYSTAL

There's a--

AMANDA

Yeah, I think I needed to--I don't know. Sometimes I feel like I'm full of all this--this panic and worry and--I have to get it out. Sometimes crying works. Sometimes shouting. Sometimes I scream until I have no voice left. Then, I can sleep. Sometimes.

CRYSTAL

You can scream now if you'd like--

(AMANDA screams. CRYSTAL doesn't even flinch.)

Well.

AMANDA

I won't sleep tonight.

CRYSTAL

You will.

AMANDA

How do you know?

CRYSTAL

Because I'm here and I'm getting paid to watch you sleep. If you don't sleep, I'm not doing my job.

AMANDA

You'll be paid either way.

CRYSTAL

Do you like this neighborhood?

AMANDA

What?

CRYSTAL

This neighborhood. Do you like it?

AMANDA

Why do you--

CRYSTAL

I'm thinking of moving. This seems like a nice neighborhood.

(A beat.)

AMANDA

Um. Well. Yes. It's nice.

CRYSTAL

But you're close to the cemetery.

AMANDA

That doesn't bother me.

CRYSTAL

And the highway is right there.

AMANDA

It's not like you can--

CRYSTAL

I'll be honest. The cemetery bothers me.

AMANDA

Are you bothered right now? Just being here?

CRYSTAL

No, but if I lived here--

AMANDA

Then, don't live here.

(A beat.)

CRYSTAL

There was a murder in my neighborhood.

AMANDA

A murder?

CRYSTAL

Nothing serious.

AMANDA

A murder but nothing serious?

CRYSTAL

Even murder has its--levels.

AMANDA

What kind of--

CRYSTAL

It was a domestic type of thing.

AMANDA

Here in Newport?

CRYSTAL

Yes.

AMANDA

I didn't hear anything about that.

CRYSTAL

Do you watch the news?

AMANDA

No.

CRYSTAL

Do you read the papers?

AMANDA

No.

CRYSTAL

Then how would you find out about it? The town crier?

AMANDA

I go online.

CRYSTAL

An excellent method for receiving information.

AMANDA

I didn't--

CRYSTAL

Like I said, it wasn't much of a murder--from what I can tell.

AMANDA

Do you know what--

CRYSTAL

This man had been beating up on his wife. They'd been together ten or eleven years. She got sick of it. Bought a gun. That was that.

AMANDA

That's horrible.

CRYSTAL

That she--

AMANDA

That she didn't buy the gun sooner.

CRYSTAL

Poor thing'll probably wind up in jail.

AMANDA

But it's self-defense.

CRYSTAL

Well, I don't know.

AMANDA

So--Wait. Why do you want to move?

CRYSTAL

What?

AMANDA

Why do you want to--

CRYSTAL

There was a *murder* in my *neighborhood*.

AMANDA

But it doesn't have anything to do with you. It wasn't a--

CRYSTAL

But the area will have that *feeling* to it for awhile. I don't want to be around that feeling. It's not good for me.

AMANDA

So you're an empath?

CRYSTAL

If I said I was an empath, I wouldn't be an empath. People who say they're empaths never are. Empaths don't announce themselves like that.

AMANDA

So you're saying you're *not* an empath?

CRYSTAL

Yes.

AMANDA

But by your own logic, that means you're an empath.

CRYSTAL

I'm a person who doesn't want to live across the street from a house where a woman was tortured for years until she was driven to commit homicide. Plus, the new owners painted the house green. It's hideous. I can't look at it anymore.

AMANDA

Did you know the woman? Or the man?

CRYSTAL

No. I used to know my neighbors, but over time--

AMANDA

I don't know any of my neighbors.

CRYSTAL

It's very isolating these days. Being--Well. Just being.

AMANDA

I don't know what I would do if I needed help or--

CRYSTAL

You'd call someone.

AMANDA

Who?

CRYSTAL

Your husband. His family. Me.

AMANDA

I could call you?

CRYSTAL

No. I don't know why I said that.

AMANDA

Who would *you* call if you needed help?

CRYSTAL

I wouldn't need to call anyone.

AMANDA

But what if you had an emergency or--

CRYSTAL

I've always been able to take care of myself.

AMANDA

That's--Everybody needs a little bit of help every now and--

CRYSTAL

Do you have any milk?

AMANDA

Why?

CRYSTAL

I think you should drink some milk. Some warm milk.

AMANDA

I've tried that. It never helps.

CRYSTAL

You haven't had it the way I make it.

AMANDA

Do you have some sort of special procedure for warming the milk?

CRYSTAL

Is it in the fridge?

AMANDA

We don't have any milk.

CRYSTAL

You should always have milk.

AMANDA

We don't drink it. I tried it that one time and--

CRYSTAL

What if somebody wants milk in their tea?

AMANDA

Who puts *milk* in *tea*?

CRYSTAL

People do.

AMANDA

I don't.

CRYSTAL

It's not about you. It's about your guests.

AMANDA

Do you want to run out and grab milk?

CRYSTAL

No.

AMANDA

I'll give you the money.

CRYSTAL

I'm fine.

AMANDA

I could go.

CRYSTAL

You're not going anywhere. You need to sleep.

AMANDA

I'm wide awake.

CRYSTAL

You won't be for long.

AMANDA

You say that with such certainty.

CRYSTAL

I just haven't put my hand on your forehead yet.

(A beat.)

AMANDA

What happens when you--

CRYSTAL

That's when you fall asleep.

(A beat.)

AMANDA

So you're a faith healer?

CRYSTAL

You don't need to be healed.

AMANDA

So it's a magic trick?

CRYSTAL

As I said, I'm not a magician.

AMANDA

Then what--

CRYSTAL

I don't know. It just works. I put my hand on your forehead and you'll fall asleep. I have no doubt it will work.

AMANDA

Have you done it before?

CRYSTAL

You mean--

AMANDA

Like with the--

CRYSTAL

Oh, the children. No, they preferred backrubs before bed. A backrub for each of them, and one by one, they'd pass right out.

AMANDA

But they were children.

CRYSTAL

Sleep is sleep, Amanda.

AMANDA

I know that, but--

CRYSTAL

There isn't sleep for children and sleep for--

AMANDA

It just seems--How does it work?

CRYSTAL

I don't know. If I knew--

AMANDA

I'm not comfortable with this.

CRYSTAL

With--

AMANDA

First you tell me that you don't sleep--

CRYSTAL

I don't.

AMANDA

Now you're telling me you're some kind of sleep guru or--

CRYSTAL

I'm not a guru.

AMANDA

But you have magic powers.

CRYSTAL

It's not magic. It's not. I just put my hand on you and--

AMANDA

And it'll be good?

CRYSTAL

What?

AMANDA

I can get to sleep, but then what? Then, the next thing I know, I'm awake. Or I'm sort of awake, but it doesn't feel that way. My legs won't move. My hands. Even my fingers. Nothing but my eyes are working, and I can't even move them. And if Matt isn't here, I don't even try to make a sound, because what good would it do? Who would hear me? And usually, in the dream, or the nightmare, or---whatever--the very moment when I realize there's no point in calling out, I feel somebody standing behind me. Somebody who wants to do me harm. Somebody who isn't human. I can feel them. I can't see them, but I can feel them. That's when I want to scream even if nobody can hear me, but I can't. I can't feel the breath in my lungs. I can't feel my throat. The part of me that

creates sound. A voice. I have nothing. No way to protect myself. No way to even protest whatever it is that's going to happen to me. Sometimes I'll feel tears going down the side of my face, but that's it. That's the only thing I can feel. By the time I wake up, I don't even know what was real about what I experienced and what I should try and write off as a creation of my subconscious. When Matt's here, it isn't much better. The only difference is I can feel him next to me and the--the--and somebody behind me. Somebody or something. I don't know. I just know that every time it happens, as it's happening, I want to die. It's the only time I feel that way. I'm such a happy person otherwise. I go to dinner with my husband and it's the most amazing thing. That we can afford to live somewhere nice and eat out at nice restaurants and that--even though I don't feel well--it doesn't matter, because I don't have to work. I have someone who loves me, who can support me, and that makes me very lucky. But when I'm laying here and I can't move and I know that it's only a matter of time before whatever is standing behind me slits my throat, I just want to die. I just want to die or wake up. And on the nights when I believe I'm already awake and all of it is really happening for real, then all that's left to me is death. Just--and how much different would it be? How much different would it be than going to sleep? To just--to just--Wouldn't it be just sleeping but without all the bad dreams? Wouldn't that be it?

(A beat.)

CRYSTAL

That's--

AMANDA

So what kind of sleep am I going to have after you put your hand on my forehead, Crystal? Because sleeping, I can do. It's sleeping without all of that that's the hard part.

CRYSTAL

It's sleep.

AMANDA

I know it's sleep.

CRYSTAL

The part you're talking about isn't. That's not--

AMANDA

So you're saying I'll sleep without all that?

CRYSTAL

Yes.

AMANDA

Then that's magic.

CRYSTAL

No. It's just cause and effect.

AMANDA

What?

CRYSTAL

I do something and you sleep. Cause and effect.

AMANDA

You're trivializing it.

CRYSTAL

No, I think you're trivializing it by continuing to call it magic.

AMANDA

Then, what is it?

CRYSTAL

I don't know what it is.

AMANDA

You don't wonder?

CRYSTAL

No.

AMANDA

And you don't wonder why you don't sleep?

CRYSTAL

No.

AMANDA

Why not?

CRYSTAL

Why don't I wonder?

AMANA

Yes.

CYRSTAL

You don't wonder.

AMANDA

Don't wonder about--

CRYSTAL

About why that thing is standing behind you in your dreams.

(A beat.)

AMANDA

Are you serious?

CRYSTAL

I was--

AMANDA

I wonder about it constantly. I--I think about it *constantly*. I've sought help for it. I've prayed about it. I've--

CRYSTAL

What do you say?

AMANDA

I--what?

CRYSTAL

When you pray? What do you say?

AMANDA

I say--I say a prayer.

CRYSTAL

There are lots of prayers.

AMANDA

I just--I don't pray that often.

CRYSTAL

My mother used to make me pray every night before bed.

AMANDA

I--She--

CRYSTAL

On my knees until they went numb.

AMANDA

That's--

CRYSTAL

Reciting the same vacant prayers over and over--

AMANDA

SHUT UP!

(A moment.)

CRYSTAL

Have I upset you?

AMANDA

No.

CRYSTAL

Because if I have--

AMANDA

I'm sorry for shouting.

CRYSTAL

You don't have to--

AMANDA

But I am. I am sorry.

CRYSTAL

You were upset.

AMANDA

I'm always upset. I'm always upset so it doesn't really--That was a joke. Sort of. I'm not always upset. I'm--But I'm not sensitive. It takes--It takes a lot to--Don't worry about me.

(A beat.)

CRYSTAL
Blackout curtains.

AMANDA
What?

CRYSTAL
You should buy them.

AMANDA
I like my curtains.

CRYSTAL
They might help.

AMANDA
There's no light coming in.

CRYSTAL
You'd be surprised how much light is sneaking in that you don't even know about.

AMANDA
So you're an expert on light now?

CRYSTAL
Yes, I'm an expert on light.

AMANDA
This might have been a bad idea.

CRYSTAL
What is?

AMANDA
This. You. Watching me.

CRYSTAL
I think we're getting along very well.

(A beat.)

Don't you?

AMANDA

I--Yes.

CRYSTAL

People think getting along is about smiling at each other. But I don't think so. I think a little antagonizing is what lets you know there's a certain-- *comfort level*. Do you feel comfortable?

AMANDA

With you? Yes. In general? No.

CRYSTAL

Well--

AMANDA

I don't know why I feel comfortable with you.

CRYSTAL

Take the small wins where you can get them.

AMANDA

I feel comfortable, but awake. I trust you--I don't know why, but I do--I trust you, but I'm awake. I'm scared. I'm scared it's going to be three days again. Or more. Matt says more than three days, and it's the hospital. I can't--

CRYSTAL

You should wear pajamas.

AMANDA

What?

CRYSTAL

You're trying to sleep in a t-shirt and your husband's sweatpants. Those aren't clothes for sleeping. You should have pajamas.

AMANDA

I can't wear pajamas.

CRYSTAL

Why not?

AMANDA

I get too warm.

CRYSTAL

Open up the windows.

AMANDA

It's raining out.

CRYSTAL

I didn't mean--

AMANDA

There's a storm outside. Don't you--

CRYSTAL

I didn't mean right now, but--

AMANDA

And I'd be terrified with the windows open.

(A beat.)

CRYSTAL

Maybe a white noise machine then.

AMANDA

I wouldn't need one tonight, would I?

CRYSTAL

Why not?

AMANDA

White noise machines are to give you the sound of a storm. We already have a storm. Even with the windows closed, I can hear it.

CRYSTAL

And you like that sound?

AMANDA

Yes.

CRYSTAL

Then focus on that. The sound of the storm.

(A moment. There is the SOUND OF A STORM, but it sounds distant.
As though it's approaching, but not here yet.)

AMANDA

Can I ask you something?

CRYSTAL

Yes.

AMANDA

Do you feel safe here?

CRYSTAL

Here with you?

AMANDA

Yes. Or. Yes. At this moment. I guess. Do you feel--?

CRYSTAL

No.

(A beat.)

AMANDA

Because of the cemetery or the highway or--

CRYSTAL

I haven't felt safe in a very long time.

AMANDA

Why is that?

CRYSTAL

I had a dream once. That someone was looking for me. That I was living in this old apartment I used to live in back when I lived in Providence. With my mother. Until she. Hm. That was when the person started looking for me. The person isn't real. I've never had anybody looking for me. But in the dream, I'm leading a different life. There's a person looking for me and they won't stop until they find me. So I move here. And that's what happened in my real life. I moved here from Providence. But not because anybody was looking for me. In the dream I moved here, and I knew I had bought myself some time, because I was so far from this person looking for me. It's not a long drive, but this person wasn't driving. They were walking. They were walking and they knew exactly where I was. And I was

here. And I couldn't leave here. I couldn't go somewhere else. If I could go somewhere--like an island--not like this one--but an island without a bridge. Without any way to get to it aside from a boat or a plane--I knew I'd be safe. But I can't get to a place like that. I just have to wait here. I know they're coming. I run through the streets. I beg people to blow it up. The bridge. To destroy the bridge. Not just to protect me, but to protect all of us. Because I know once the person trying to get to me gets to me, they won't stop. They'll just keep going. They'll destroy another person and another person and another person until there's nobody left. I know the threat, but nobody believes me. Nobody will destroy the bridge. At the end of the dream, I see them coming. Walking. Right over the bridge. Right past all the cars. And I. I can't move.

(A beat.)

I can't move.

(A beat.)

I haven't felt safe since then. Since I had that dream.

(A moment.)

AMANDA

Well, now I *know* I'm not going to sleep tonight.

CRYSTAL

Nobody's looking for *you*, Amanda. I promise.

AMANDA

Did you really dream that you were running through the streets?

(A beat.)

CRYSTAL

What?

AMANDA

You said in your dream--

CRYSTAL

Oh. Yes, I--

AMANDA

Like that woman I told you about?

CRYSTAL

Oh. I didn't think of that, but--

AMANDA

Are you mocking me?

CRYSTAL

No.

AMANDA

Is this reverse psychology? Tell me a scary story before bed and maybe it'll cancel out whatever scary story my mind wants me to live through and replace it with yours?

CRYSTAL

No.

AMANDA

So it was true then? The part about you running through the--

CRYSTAL

Yes.

AMANDA

Are we all just losing our minds then?

CRYSTAL

We might be.

AMANDA

Warm milk isn't going to help with that.

CRYSTAL

You sound exhausted.

AMANDA

I felt safe here. Until you--until just now. I felt safe.

CRYSTAL

Until now?

AMANDA

Until you told me that story, because--you're right. The dream is right. It's--I

think I'm safe here because I feel--I feel far away from anything that could hurt me, because there's water. There's an ocean. But--Yes, there's also a bridge. There's a bridge and people can come over the bridge if they want to. They can come here and hurt me if they want to. I know that. I know that, but I shove that down--that *knowledge*. I tell myself I'm safe here, but I'm not, am I? I'm not--I'm not safe anywhere. If people start setting off bombs, nowhere is safe. Except a bunker. Maybe I could--Maybe I could sleep in a bunker. Do you know of any bunkers?

CRYSTAL

I don't.

AMANDA

Is the door locked?

CRYSTAL

What?

AMANDA

The door. My door. Is it locked?

CRYSTAL

I think so.

AMANDA

Can you check?

(A beat.)

CRYSTAL

Of course.

(CRYSTAL gets up and goes to the door. AMANDA tries to get her breathing under control. CRYSTAL comes back into the room.)

It was locked.

AMANDA

Crystal?

CRYSTAL

Yes?

AMANDA

I think I might need to go to the hospital.

CRYSTAL

What? Why?

AMANDA

I can't breathe.

CRYSTAL

Is it a panic attack?

AMANDA

No, it's not a panic attack.

CRYSTAL

Have you ever had a panic attack?

AMANDA

No.

CRYSTAL

It's a panic attack.

AMANDA

I can't breathe.

CRYSTAL

It's a panic attack.

AMANDA

STOP SAYING IT'S A PANIC ATTACK.

CRYSTAL

Look around the room. Find five things that start with the letter 'o.'

AMANDA

Nothing in this room starts with the letter 'o.'

CRYSTAL

Try to find some things.

AMANDA

Please don't try to trick me out of this panic attack.

CRYSTAL

So you agree it's a panic attack?

AMANDA

STOP.

CRYSTAL

Five things.

AMANDA

Ostrich.

CRYSTAL

Is there an ostrich in--

AMANDA

On the tv earlier. I was watching--I was watching something about an ostrich. It was on the tv.

CRYSTAL

All right.

AMANDA

It was on the tv.

CRYSTAL

All right, all right.

AMANDA

Orange earrings. I have orange earrings. I don't know why. I hate them. I should throw them out.

CRYSTAL

That's one.

AMANDA

What about the ostrich?

CRYSTAL

I can't give you that one.

AMANDA

Are you kidding me?

CRYSTAL

Something else.

(A beat.)

AMANDA

We have olives in the fridge. Stuffed olives. My husband eats them.

CRYSTAL

Two.

AMANDA

Uh. Uh. See now I'm panicking that I can't name anything.

CRYSTAL

You're doing very well, Amanda.

AMANDA

Outside. There's this house and then there's--outside.

CRYSTAL

Okay.

AMANDA

And things are 'okay.' They're not, but--

CRYSTAL

Yes, they are.

AMANDA

Oh, and uh--I have Olay body wash in the bathroom.

CRYSTAL

Very creative.

AMANDA

I cheated.

CRYSTAL

Yes, you cheated at the game designed to stop you from having a panic attack. You should be ashamed.

AMANDA

I'm--It's a little better.

CRYSTAL

The game works.

AMANDA

Give me another letter.

CRYSTAL

Sounds.

AMANDA

What?

CRYSTAL

After sights, you do sounds.

AMANDA

But I just got the hang of sight.

CRYSTAL

Four sounds.

(A moment.)

AMANDA

I--All I can hear is the storm.

CRYSTAL

There are sounds within the storm.

AMANDA

The rain.

CRYSTAL

One.

AMANDA

The wind.

CRYSTAL

Two.

(A beat.)

AMANDA

There's a car alarm going off.

CRYSTAL

I don't hear that.

AMANDA

You don't?

CRYSTAL

Are you trying to cheat again?

AMANDA

No, you don't hear that?

CRYSTAL

No.

AMANDA

Are you messing with me?

CRYSTAL

Amanda--

AMANDA

I can hear the--

(A beat.)

Sorry. It stopped.

(A beat.)

CRYSTAL

My hearing isn't--

AMANDA

Don't humor me.

CRYSTAL

I'm not. You might have heard--

(AMANDA slams her fist against the chair.)

AMANDA

That was my mother.

CRYSTAL

What was?

AMANDA

Car alarms. With her, it was always car alarms. *Do you hear that? Do you hear that? Car alarms.* Mom, there aren't any car alarms. *I can hear them, Amanda. I can hear them.* Every night. And either she had to go out looking for them or I did. To find the car that was making all the noise. And then what? What do you do even if you find a car with its alarm going off? Break the window? Cut the wiring? What do you do? I used to say, *Mom, can't we just call the police?* But there was no point. They'd just call her crazy. *Stop calling us, lady, you're crazy.* Then she'd spiral. You couldn't call her crazy. You couldn't tell her there weren't any alarms.

CRYSTAL

And you can hear--

AMANDA

Only just now. But I don't--I don't hear it anymore.

CRYSTAL

That's good.

AMANDA

Yeah.

(She steadies her breathing a bit.)

Anyway. I'm breathing at least.

(A beat.)

At least there's that.

CRYSTAL

If you can breathe, you can sleep.

AMANDA

More science, huh?

CRYSTAL

Close your eyes for me.

AMANDA

I--

CRYSTAL

People talk and talk and talk about not being able to sleep, and the whole time, their eyes are wide open and they wonder why they're not asleep.

(A beat. AMANDA closes her eyes.)

AMANDA

What now?

CRYSTAL

Now, I'll put my hand on you. If that's okay?

(A beat. AMANDA nods. CRYSTAL reaches over and puts her hand on AMANDA's arm. Then, slowly, she takes it back. A moment. The STORM gets closer.)

AMANDA

I'm sorry.

CRYSTAL

What for?

AMANDA

I feel like I've been difficult.

CRYSTAL

You're not being difficult. You're having a difficult time.

AMANDA

So what? Everyone is.

CRYSTAL

I'm not in charge of everyone. I'm in charge of you.

AMANDA

Oh, are you?

CRYSTAL

I meant--

AMANDA

No, I like it. I like having someone in charge of me.

CRYSTAL

Then, that's me.

AMANDA

I screamed at you.

CRYSTAL

Which time?

AMANDA

I'm not a bad person.

CRYSTAL

Who said you were?

AMANDA

I used to lie to her. My mother. I used to tell her the alarms were a warning. That she had to get down to the basement. She'd go down there and stay down there all night, and I'd be so happy. So happy to be done with her for the night. Even when I could hear her crying down there. She'd tell me to come down so that we could die down there together, and I'd tell her that I had to stay upstairs and stand guard, and she felt so guilty. She felt so guilty making me stay upstairs and the whole time I was watching tv and eating junk food and grateful for a few hours where I wouldn't have to listen to her raving like a lunatic about things that didn't exist.

CRYSTAL

Amanda.

AMANDA

And she couldn't sleep. She never slept.

CRYSTAL

That isn't you.

AMANDA

You were a stranger an hour ago. Now you're sitting here waiting for someone to fall asleep who's never going to--

CRYSTAL

I was asked to sit. I'm sitting. This is what was supposed to happen.

AMANDA

And I was supposed to--

CRYSTAL

Do you feel safe now?

AMANDA

I told you I don't.

CRYSTAL

Check now.

AMANDA

Check?

CRYSTAL

Check in with yourself. See if you feel any different.

AMANDA

Why would I--

CRYSTAL

The storm's almost here.

AMANDA

Why would that make me feel--

CRYSTAL

Nobody can get to you in a storm. Nobody that isn't already here.

AMANDA

That's--Yes.

CRYSTAL

So it's just you and me.

AMANDA

Yes.

CRYSTAL

How do you feel?

(A beat.)

AMANDA

Safe.

CRYSTAL

Good. That's where we begin.

AMANDA

How do we--

(The STORM arrives. The LIGHTS go out.)

Crystal?

CRYSTAL

You're all right, Amanda.

AMANDA

What's happening?

CRYSTAL

Don't open your eyes.

AMANDA

Why does it matter? The lights are out.

CRYSTAL

It's the weather.

AMANDA

We have a generator.

CRYSTAL

Keep your eyes closed.

AMANDA

I should check the fuse box.

CRYSTAL

Eyes closed, Amanda.

AMANDA

It's so loud.

CRYSTAL

What do you hear?

AMANDA

The storm.

CRYSTAL

The sounds inside the storm. What are they?

AMANDA

Rain.

CRYSTAL

And?

AMANDA

Wind.

CRYSTAL

And?

(A beat.)

AMANDA

I hear them.

CRYSTAL

Who?

AMANDA

The one from your dream.

(A beat.)

CRYSTAL

Where are they?

(SOUND of AMANDA laughing.)

Amanda?

(LIGHTS FLASH. The room is gone. It's just AMANDA and CRYSTAL. Behind AMANDA stands a SHADOWY FIGURE.)

AMANDA

I'm so tired.

CRYSTAL

You're almost there, Amanda.

AMANDA

No.

CRYSTAL

It's so close.

AMANDA

I can't.

CRYSTAL

Do you hear how loud it is?

AMANDA

It's so loud.

CRYSTAL

You can't hear anything, can you?

AMANDA

No.

CRYSTAL

It's drowning you, isn't it?

AMANDA

Yes.

CRYSTAL

That's because I tore it down.

AMANDA

Tore what down?

(The LIGHTS FLASH. CRYSTAL is alone onstage. Even the furniture is gone. It's just her. Back in the darkness--)

CRYSTAL

The bridge. I tore it down.

AMANDA

Is it behind me?

CRYSTAL

It doesn't matter.

AMANDA

I can't feel my body.

CRYSTAL

You don't need to.

AMANDA

Take my hand.

CRYSTAL

I have your hand.

AMANDA

I can't feel it.

CRYSTAL

You have to trust that I'm here, Amanda.

AMANDA

But it's behind me.

CRYSTAL

And it'll stay behind you.

AMANDA

I can feel it there, but I can't feel my arms. I can't feel my legs.

CRYSTAL

But you're talking. You can hear yourself, can't you?

AMANDA

Yes.

CRYSTAL

So you have your voice, Amanda.

AMANDA

Yes.

CRYSTAL

You never had that before, did you?

AMANDA

No.

CRYSTAL

And now--

AMANDA

Crystal?

CRYSTAL

Yes?

AMANDA

Whatever it is behind me?

CRYSTAL

Yes?

AMANDA

Let it stay there.

(THUNDER. Slowly, the lights come up. AMANDA is asleep. CRYSTAL is sitting--watching her. A moment passes. Then, someone unlocks the door. A MAN enters.)

MAN

Hi.

(CRYSTAL tries not to appear startled.)

CRYSTAL

Hello.

MAN

It's pouring out there.

CRYSTAL

Sounds like it.

MAN

How is she?

CRYSTAL

She's asleep.

MAN

How long did--

CRYSTAL

A little longer than I thought it would.

MAN

I'm sorry.

CRYSTAL

Don't be, Matt. Some take longer than others. She has--She was struggling, but now look at her. She's out for the night. Poor thing really went through it. But she had some tea and we talked a bit, and now--Now look at her.

MAN/MATT

And is she--fixed?

(A moment.)

CRYSTAL

She thinks you won't be back until tomorrow.

MATT

I know. That's what we agreed to--

CRYSTAL

Come back in the morning.

(A beat.)

MATT

What?

CRYSTAL

Do what you told her you'd do.

MATT

But it was just a--I was always going to come back as soon as she fell asleep. I wasn't really going to--You told me you might be able to help with the night terrors. You said--

CRYSTAL

This isn't going to work if you lie to her, Matt.

MATT

I wasn't--I don't--

CRYSTAL

Go to your parents' house. Stay there tonight.

MATT

But she's asleep.

CRYSTAL

I need you to do what you said you'd do.

MATT

Who's going to stay here with her?

CRYSTAL

What are you talking about?

MATT

Who's going to--

CRYSTAL

Me. You paid me to stay here and watch her. That's what I'm going to do.

MATT

But if she has an attack--

CRYSTAL

She won't.

(A beat.)

Go. Please.

(MATT looks at her. He looks at AMANDA. Then, he exits. CRYSTAL exhales.)

CRYSTAL

Orange earrings.

(A second.)

Olives. Stuffed olives.

(A second.)

And what was the next one?

(THUNDER.)

What was the next one?

(LIGHTS flash--then Blackout.)

End of Play