

CRYSTAL CLEAR

A Short Play

by

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CRYSTAL CLEAR

CHARACTERS:

JOSIE - 20s to 30s - A composer of New Age, therapeutic music.

MADELINE - 40s to 50s - A Colonel in the U.S. Army

SETTING:

An office in the Pentagon.

TIME:

During the Iraq War.

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In the blackout we hear music slowly rise. It's a kind of music that's called "anxiolytic" -- spacey, New-Age music composed and designed to have a therapeutic and calming effect on the human body and psyche, characterized by long, sustained chords. Lights rise on two WOMEN in an office, MADELINE and JOSIE, sitting on either side of a military-issue desk, listening to the music on a portable CD player or boom box. MADELINE wears the uniform of a Colonel in the U.S. Army. JOSIE wears the uniform of an artist. JOSIE is very into the music, swaying slightly to its movements and changes. MADELINE listens politely, smiling back when JOSIE looks at HER, but it is clear that she is not much taken with the music. SHE looks at HER watch.

MADELINE

Okay, well I think we can ...

JOSIE

Shhhhh! Wait.

(JOSIE "conducts" the music with HER arms as it rises and changes key.)

JOSIE (CONT'D)

And now we're into F -- the key of the heart chakra. You see, the music moves up the chakras to ...

MADELINE

Yes. Could we please ...?

(SHE indicates that the music should be turned off.)

JOSIE

There's another twenty-two minutes.

MADELINE

I don't need to hear anymore.

JOSIE

I think maybe you do.

MADELINE

Excuse me?

JOSIE

I sense a great deal of anger inside of you. This music can be very effective in dealing with anger.

(MADELINE turns off the CD.)

MADELINE

What you sense in me, Ms. Craig, is fatigue. And I'm afraid your music will be so effective in dealing with that as to put me to sleep before we've had a chance to discuss your ... your unusual proposal.

(JOSIE picks up a framed photo from the desk.)

JOSIE

Who's this?

MADELINE

My son.

JOSIE

He's so cute!

MADELINE

Thank you. He's in Iraq.

JOSIE

Bummer.

MADLINE

He'll be home in two weeks.

JOSIE

I'll bet you worry about him.

MADLINE

Every single minute of every day, awake or asleep. Not that I sleep much since he's been there.

JOSIE

How do you stand it?

MADLINE

Well ... I won't have to much longer, thankfully. He'll be home soon.

JOSIE

I mean working in this place every day? The goddamn Pentagon! The heart of freakin' darkness, no?!

MADLINE

Oh it's just a boring old office building, really.

JOSIE

The five-sided pentagon is a devil-worshipping shape, you know. I think we should leave the music on.

(SHE turns the music on, turns it up and yells over it.)

JOSIE (CONT'D)

And what's with all the freakin' bathrooms in this place? What's that about!?

(MADLINE switches the music off.)

MADLINE

I'm sorry. You need the rest room?

JOSIE

Well if I did I wouldn't have far to go, would I? There's one every twenty feet out there. Don't get me wrong. Usually there are never enough women's rooms. But this is ridiculous.

MADELINE

Well it's, um, it's a remnant ... a somewhat painful and embarrassing reminder of ... of segregation.

JOSIE

What?

MADELINE

Jim Crow.

(JOSIE looks at HER, uncomprehending.)

MADELINE (CONT'D)

When the Pentagon was built, there were still separate facilities for blacks and whites.

JOSIE

That is so retro!

MADELINE

Well it was a long time ago.

JOSIE

This whole building must be a goddamn Superfund site of toxic karma!

MADELINE

Those policies were changed more than fifty years ago.

JOSIE

That kind of anger doesn't just go away!

MADELINE

Anger?

MADLINE

Yes! Residual toxic vibe. Every time an African-American had to use the bathroom here back then, they had it rubbed in their face that they were officially second-class citizens. That made them angry. Right? Wouldn't it make you angry?

MADLINE

I ... I suppose. Yes. It certainly would.

JOSIE

And that anger is still here. It dribbled out of them along with their pee, went into the pipes and walls and ceilings, seeped into the furniture. And now it's infecting everyone who works here! Ugggggh!

(SHE shudders, turns the music back on and turns it way up, then takes a handful of crystals out of a pocket. MADLINE turns the music off again.)

MADLINE

Ms. Craig! Please!

JOSIE

I'm only trying to protect you!

MADLINE

I don't need any protection!

JOSIE

I've got my crystals, see? They protect me. But poor you!

MADLINE

Can we get down to the matter at hand, please!

JOSIE

Only if you'll take a crystal. Please! Please take it!

(MADLINE hesitates, then takes a crystal.)

MADLINE

It's very pretty.

JOSIE

Don't put it down! Keep it in your hand.

MADELINE

I will. Now. You and I have some business to discuss, don't we?

JOSIE

Oh, yes, Ma'am, we certainly do.

MADELINE

Colonel.

(Slight pause)

MADELINE (CONT'D)

You should address me as "Colonel."

JOSIE

Wow. That's almost a general, isn't it

MADELINE

Hardly

JOSIE

Still, I think that's so cool!

MADELINE

I'm pleased to hear you say that. I was beginning to think you had some some antipathy towards the men and women of the armed forces.

JOSIE

Well, y'know, I did. And I didn't think I was going to be able to hack it, being around all these Gestapo military types? But after meeting Dick and spending so much time with him ...

MADELINE

Dick?

JOSIE

General Peterson. You know him?

MADLINE

Not personally. He's my boss. Sort of. My boss's boss's boss.

JOSIE

Well after spending so much time with Dick lately -- on Army bases and Navy planes and like that -- I have to say that everybody I've met so far in the military has been really, really nice to me.

MADLINE

I'm sure they have. General Peterson is a four-star general.

JOSIE

Well to me he's just Dick. But some of these young guys that travel with him? Goddess! They are so damn fine in those uniforms! I thought it would turn me off, y'know. But actually it's kinda .. you know ... kinda hot.

MADLINE

Indeed. Ms. Craig ...

JOSIE

Especially the guys who fly the fighter planes. One of them was telling me about making a bombing run over Baghdad, and in my head I'm going "Jeeze Louise, Josie! This guy kills people!" But in my lower chakras, y'know, all I'm thinking about is how much I'd like to rip this guys clothes off and ...

MADLINE

I'm glad you like the men and women of the armed forces of the armed forces. Really.

JOSIE

Especially the men!

MADLINE

However, ...

JOSIE

Does being a Colonel mean that these cute guys have to do everything you tell them to do? That must be fun, huh? Boy! I wish I could give orders to men! There are a few guys I wouldn't mind ordering to jump off a freakin' cliff!

MADLINE

Ms. Craig! Please! You have proposed selling the U.S. Army three hundred thousand of your your so-called stress-reducing musical CDs.

JOSIE

It's a set. The Karma Suite. Each set has eight CDs.

MADLINE

At a cost to the U.S. Taxpayer of approximately fifteen million dollars.

JOSIE

Representing a substantial savings, I'd like to point out. The Karma Suite normally retails for a hundred bucks a pop. I'm letting the Army have them at half-price because I really want to do something for these guys.

MADLINE

Do what, exactly?

JOSIE

Provide them with the benefit of my psychically healing music, of course. Look -- I explained this all to Dick. You've got three hundred thousand troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. Most of them are going to come home.

MADLINE

Thankfully, yes.

JOSIE

Some of them are going to be wounded. All of them are going to be psychically scarred, unbalanced by all the bad shit they've had to do and see over there, right? My music can heal them.

(MADLINE turns the music back on, listens for a few seconds and turns it off again.)

MADLINE

That's going to heal them?

JOSIE

Yep.

MADLINE

Listening to spooky music is going to make all of their demons go away?

JOSIE

Listening to my spooky music will, yes.

MADLINE

And do you have any ... any data or evidence to back up the claims you're making for this ... this alternative therapy?

JOSIE

What? Like science stuff?

MADLINE

Science stuff would be good.

JOSIE

Just listen to it yourself! See if it doesn't ...

MADLINE

I have listened to it.

JOSIE

Not all of it! And let me tell you something, Honey, you could really use it. You got a poker stuck so far up your

MADLINE

Ms. Craig, I am a senior medical procurement officer in the U.S. Army. I have to justify to my superiors every purchase I approve.

JOSIE

Dick says don't worry about that. Just sign the goddamn requisition order. Here.

MADLINE

Where did you get this? My office generates these.

JOSIE

Dick thought it best to save you the trouble. All you have to do is sign.

MADLINE

Why doesn't General Peterson make the requisition himself if he's so anxious for it?

(Pause. THEY look at each other.)

MADLINE (CONT'D)

Of course. He doesn't want anything to do with this, does he? Officially.

JOSIE

So you're in the clear, right? Your boss's boss's boss wants this. So ... sign!

MADLINE

I suppose you're right.

(MADLINE picks up a pen and begins to sign. Stops.)

JOSIE

What's the matter?

MADLINE

I was just thinking about ... tax cuts.

JOSIE

Tax cuts?

MADLINE

We're having trouble finding the money to pay for real therapies for these men and women. They need counseling. Aggressive therapy. Some of them need expensive medications.

JOSIE

Sure, that's the answer. Give them pills. Keep them all doped up.

MADLINE

Sometimes that is the answer.

JOSIE

My music heals them naturally.

MADLINE

Your music, Ms. Craig, can't even heal you.

JOSIE

What's that supposed to mean, bitch?

MADLINE

You can leave.

JOSIE

You'd better sign that.

MADLINE

I'm sorry. I can't.

JOSIE

Dick is going to be very, very angry.

MADLINE

Good. Then you can play your music for him. See if it calms him down. You'll have your first shred of empirical evidence. Now please leave.

JOSIE

You want your son home or not?

(Pause)

MADLINE

What's that supposed to mean?

JOSIE

Dick says there's a shortage of battle-trained officers over there. They're asking some guys to do extra tours. Well ... Ordering them, really. It sucks but, what are you gonna do?

(Pause. The two WOMEN stare at each other.)

JOSIE (CONT'D)

You're holding your crystal way too tight. It's going to cut your hand.

(MADELINE opens HER left hand, looks at, lets the crystal drop to the desk. It's red with blood.)

MADELINE

Blood.

JOSIE

So you going to sign that requisition order? Or not?

MADELINE

Yes. I am.

(MADELINE picks up the crystal, puts fresh blood on it from HER left hand, and signs the paper with the blood on the crystal.)

JOSIE

Oooh! Nice touch! You are such a cool lady! No hard feelings, huh?

(MADELINE hands HER the requisition form, takes a tissue and begins to wipe the blood from the palm of HER left hand.)

MADELINE

Don't forget your music.

(JOSIE turns the CD on. The music fades in.)

JOSIE

Oh, I think you should keep it. 'Bye now.

(JOSIE exits. MADELINE sits and stares off into space as the music rises. SHE closes HER eyes and breathes deeply with the music as the lights fade.)

THE END