

Tap into your dreams... and put them on stage.  
I expect the unexpected. Or do I?  
I want to see things that can not make sense.  
I want hallucinatory experiences.  
I want a distruption of conventional notions of form.

...

Oh, and make the production huge. Try to make the budget sky rocket (maybe literally) - spend as much money as you can - but make the whole experience feel like a dream.

"IN DREAMS"

By

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FADE IN:

## ACT I – INTRODUCTION TO THE NIGHTMARE

### SCENE ONE

A black box theatre configured with the two short walls and back wall all blank. Audience is seated in chairs on risers against the fourth wall (the remaining long wall) On stage there is a bed (upstage right) and a library table (downstage center) with a chair behind it (think Spalding Gray's "Swimming to Cambodia") slightly upstage left of the table is a chalkboard. Chalk and a pointer should be on the attached tray.

There are escapes – curtained doors – in the upstage corners of each side wall.

We OPEN with a slide projected on the back wall, with the text "INTRODUCTION TO THE NIGHTMARE"

An overhead spotlight directly above the bed comes up slowly as the text fades out. The side walls are showing clips from horror movies – classic monster films – modern horror. The projection on the back wall is of more mundane common fears – sharks, swarms of ants and bees, spiders, snakes – with an inset of the DREAMER in the bed. Focus should be on her eyes, which are exhibiting REM.

The spotlight is soft at first, but builds in illumination as the clips play, faster and faster.

At the same time, classic nightmare sounds are heard, first the soft dripping of water, then the *ca-ca-ca-ca-che-che-che-che* echo sound used in scary movies, then low, menacing laughter. The sounds build and overlap, in a slow crescendo, until a heartbeat and finally a human hyperventilating join the cacophony until...

DREAMER

No. No! NOOOOO!

(sits up in bed screaming wordlessly)

BLACKOUT

### SCENE TWO

LIGHTS UP ON THE TABLE DOWNSTAGE CENTER.

This is another directly-overhead spotlight. The rest of the stage is in darkness.

The DREAMER enters wearing an open bathrobe over whimsical pajamas. Her feet are bare, her hair in a messy bun. She has dark circles under her eyes – not quite as exaggerated as a Tim Burton character, but visible.

She stops just behind the chair, in the center of the spot.

DREAMER

(smiling at AUDIENCE)

Oh! You're here! Sorry I'm late; I'm glad you're here.

(Stage left of DREAMER a blue spotlight illuminates DRACULA)

DRACULA

(off an off-stage wolf-howl)

Listen to them—the children of the night. What music they make!

(strikes classic vampire pose; blue light dims)

(new blue spot illuminates FREDDY KRUEGER, stage right of DREAMER who holds up his glove (the one with the finger-knives) and wiggles the fingers)

I'm your boyfriend now, Nancy.

DREAMER

(to FREDDY KRUEGER)

I'm *not* Nancy!

(FREDDY KRUEGER lunges at DREAMER, who side-steps him, then swipes the air with his glove before freezing; blue light dims.)

(blue spot illuminates HAMLET who is just left of DRACULA)

HAMLET

To die, to sleep – to sleep, perchance to dream – ay, there's the rub, for in this sleep of death what dreams may come...

DREAMER

Dude, we're talking dreams, not death. You are *so* melodramatic.

(HAMLET gives her a LOOK then pulls a skull out of his pocket, and holds it up as if speaking to it, then freezes in that pose. His blue light fades as another blue light comes up

on....)

RICHARD III

(he is right of FREDDY KRUEGER)

Dream on, dream on, of bloody deeds and death:  
Fainting, despair; despairing, yield thy breath!

(strikes a pose)

DREAMER

(to audience)

Seriously, Shakespeare's characters are all obsessed with death.

CHILD

(walks onto the stage from the audience. She's clearly a younger version of the DREAMER, and is wearing similar pajamas, and carrying a stuffed animal of some kind. She tops on the downstage side of the desk, facing the DREAMER. Her face is projected onto the back wall)

You're scaring me. It's past my bedtime, and I should be sleeping.

DREAMER

There's a bed over there. Why don't you go get some sleep while we continue?

CHILD

But, what if I have a bad dream?

DREAMER

Dreams can't actually hurt you, and there are all these people here to keep you safe.

CHILD

If they can't hurt you, why do we have bad dreams?

DREAMER

Actually, I'm glad you asked that. Nightmares are stimulated by...

MOTHER

(entering from audience, interrupting,  
addressing CHILD)

Darling, what are you doing up so late? Come on, let's get you  
back to bed.

(MOTHER and CHILD walk off upstage  
right toward the bed.)

DREAMER

(wry, snarky)

Welcome to my nightmare.

BLACKOUT

### SCENE THREE

The DREAMER is sitting at the table, and this scene is essentially a monologue, but visual representations of her words are projected on the walls, either as movie clips or animations. She's eating a sandwich (liverwurst if you must know, not that it matters) and sipping from a mug of coffee throughout this scene.

DREAMER

Welcome to my nightmare. Or yours. Maybe both. It doesn't  
really matter. So, as I was saying before I was rudely  
interrupted...

(turns and glares toward the bed)

... nightmares are stimulated by a variety of things. Sometimes  
they're caused by things that you see on television or in films –  
violent crimes in police procedures, or monsters like Dracula or  
Freddy Krueger.

Sometimes, nightmares are a representation of our fears and  
phobias, even the silly ones.

(looks down at the table, appears to see  
something crawling on it, mashes it with her  
thumb and then wipes her thumb on a  
napkin.

She shudders visibly.)

Ants. Horrible little creatures. And they're *everywhere*.

(gives herself a shake to get back on track)

### DREAMER

Anyway, some nightmares are exaggerations of things like ants and spiders that we find creepy.

Other reasons for bad dreams include sorting through problems and worries from our waking lives – though they don't always offer solutions – or even just random chemical reactions inside our brains.

The point is, everyone has them. *Everyone*. Eight percent of adults have frequent nightmares, but up to seventy percent of adults have the occasional bad dream, and in children, especially between the ages of seven and nine, that number soars to almost ninety percent.

(pushes empty plate away)

Right, I almost forgot. Some people think that eating before bed or eating the wrong thing can also trigger nightmares.

I'm suddenly re-thinking the liverwurst I just ate.

Does anyone need a nap?

(DREAMER kicks her feet up on the desk (still barefoot) and leans back in her chair. She pulls an iPod or iPhone out of her bathrobe pocket and puts the earbuds in her ears.)

THE LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK AS AEROSMITH'S "DREAM ON" PLAYS OVER THE SPEAKERS.

### ACT II – A CHILD'S RULES FOR SAFE SLEEP

LIGHTS COME UP AS AN INSTRUMENTAL VERSION OF "BRAHM'S LULLABY" PLAYS OVER SPEAKERS

The bed from before is now at center stage and white curtains hung from rigging in the ceiling form the walls of a CHILD's bedroom. A row of stuffed animals is across the foot of the bed, and the CHILD is resting in it, propped against pillows, leaning against the headboard (may be just a brass frame). There is a nightstand next to the bed. A rocking chair is further stage left of the bed, canted toward it so the audience can see that MOTHER is in the chair, holding a book.

## MOTHER

(reading – she does the voices accordingly)

"Tracks," said Piglet. "Paw-marks." He gave a little squeak of excitement. "Oh, Pooh! Do you think it's a – a – a Woozle?"

"It may be," said Pooh. "Sometimes it is, and sometimes it isn't. You never can tell with paw-marks."

With these few words he went on tracking and Piglet, after watching him for a minute or two, ran after him. Winnie-the-Pooh had come to a sudden stop and was bending over the tracks in a puzzled sort of way.

(During the last paragraph the MOTHER's words fade into a soft hum, and a follow-spot starting from the Audience shows us the DREAMER entering the scene, though she pauses on the downstage fringe of it. Turning toward the audience, we see that she's still wearing pajamas, though the bathrobe is gone, and she has bunny slippers on her feet. She turns to address the Audience.)

## DREAMER

I used to love it when my mother read to me before bed. She stopped when I was five or six. I could read on my own by then, and she was taking too long to finish...

(She turns slightly toward the MOTHER and CHILD)

## DREAMER

Keeping nightmares at bay is so much easier for children. Belief in magic may make you more receptive to the things that go bump in the night, but it also gives you a kind of power.

We think of bedtime rituals as a hokey routine, but if you pay attention, and follow all the Rules for Safe Sleep, you'll see why childhood nightmares are so easily beaten.

Step one: Story time. In this step it's essential that you...

## DREAMER AND CHILD

(as one)

... finish the story!

(The spot on DREAMER fades out putting the focus back on the MOTHER and CHILD.)

CHILD

Please, Mom? It's not that long, and it's important.

MOTHER

It's very late, sweetie, and we're only half-way through the book.

CHILD

But I have to know what happens, so I won't dream it wrong.

MOTHER

I'll finish the *chapter*. That will take us to the end of this adventure.

(resumes reading)

"I have been foolish and deluded," said he, "and I am a bear of no brain at all."

"You're the best bear in all the world," said Christopher Robin soothingly.

"Am I?" said Pooh, hopefully. And then he brightened up suddenly.

"Anyhow," he said, it is nearly luncheon time."

So, he went home for it.

(in her normal voice)

Alright, sweetie, time for sleep now.

CHILD

You have to check for monsters, first.

(DREAMER has used this time to go around the outer perimeter of the curtains and sneak under the bed. As the MOTHER makes a show of searching all the corners of the room, DREAMER rolls out from under the bed, and sits up in the middle of the floor. Neither MOTHER nor CHILD react to her



presence.)

DREAMER

Checking for monsters before bedtime is just as crucial as a magician showing that there's nothing up his sleeves.

(aside, while demonstrating)

There's nothing up my sleeves.

(continues narrating)

There are three places that must always be checked: behind the curtains, under the bed, and in the closet.

CHILD

Don't forget to leave the closet light on, Mommy. Monsters hate light.

(MOTHER pulls the curtain back in the corner of the room, and Dracula pokes his head out. Neither MOTHER nor CHILD react to him.)

DRACULA

It's true. We hate the light. Darkness is our friend.

(MOTHER mimes pulling the chain on a closet light. DRACULA retreats behind the curtain. A soft light will glow behind that corner for the duration of the scene.)

DREAMER

Leaving the closet light on is vital. The door should be closed though. You just want a crack of light around the perimeter of the door. After all, too much light could keep you awake.

Step three. Arrange the stuffed animals.

(MOTHER and CHILD pick up each stuffed animal, a white tiger, a rag doll, a plush seal, a ragged-looking Snoopy, and a turquoise teddy bear. All but the teddy bear are lined up across the foot of the bed, with the tiger facing downstage. The teddy bear is given to

the CHILD to hold.)

MOTHER

I thought you'd like to sleep with this one in your arms tonight.

CHILD

Yes, please.

DREAMER

To adults, stuffed animals are nostalgic, remnants of past innocence, but to a child, they're the best defense against nightmares.

MOTHER

Alright now, your water is on the night stand –

DREAMER

(interrupting)

Hydrate, hydrate, hydrate!

MOTHER

- so, let's get you all tucked in.

(MOTHER helps CHILD slide lower in the bed and places the teddy bear in the crook of her arm. Then she tucks the blankets around CHILD up to her chin, ensuring that CHILD is completely cocooned, except for her head.)

DREAMER

Step four – keep your hands and feet inside the ride – er – blankets... Keep your hands and feet inside the *blankets* at all times.

It's a little-known fact – though commonly held instinct – that monsters cannot penetrate a child's covers.

(FREDDY KRUEGER pops up from behind the headboard. As with DRACULA and the DREAMER, neither MOTHER nor CHILD react to his presence. He leans over the bedframe and brings his bladed fingers closer

and closer to the CHILD's throat)

FREDDY KRUEGER

Alright, my little piggy it's time to di – WHAT! BLANKETS!  
Noooooooo!

(He tumbles backward away from the bed)

DREAMER

The last protection against nightmares is the simplest. It's the goodnight kiss. It can come from Daddy or Grandmom or Grandpop, or even a babysitter, but the most powerful ones come from Mommy...

MOTHER

(leans over CHILD and kisses her forehead)

Time for sleep now, my little love. Good night, sleep tight, and...

DREAMER, DRACULA, FREDDY KRUEGER  
AND MOTHER

(The monsters popping in from the 'closet'  
corner and behind the bed, as before.)

Don't let the bed bugs bite!

(MOTHER, DRACULA, and DREAMER all  
exit in various directions. FREDDY sits in the  
rocker. As the light softens into the blue light  
from Act I, he whispers...)

FREDDY KRUEGER

Sweet dreams!

THE LIGHT STAYS BLUE BUT DIMS TO ALMOST NOTHING.

## SCENE TWO

THE BLUE LIGHT BRIGHTENS...

...revealing that the rocking chair is gone, as are the white curtains that had defined the bedroom. CHILD is still sleeping, but, first on the side walls and then flowing into the back wall are depictions of beetles.

CHILD

(whimpers and moans in her bed)

No... no bugs. Stomp. Squish.

(The rag doll falls off the bed, and a dancer representing the doll appears on the stage. Images on the walls change to reflect and enhance the actions on stage, but what we see is a ballet sequence set to Saint-Saens' *Danse Macabre* in which each of the stuffed animals appear, represented by dancers, and attack different nightmare creatures, also represented by dancers.)

(The RAGDOLL stomps the BUGS, the SNOOPY chases a FERAL PANTHER, the TIGER attacks a KILLER CLOWN, and the PLUSH SEAL goes after a pair of WHITE SHARKS. The dance swirls and escalates with armies of BARBIES and GI JOES facing off against RATS and SPIDERS, and everything swirls closer and closer around the bed where CHILD is tossing and turning until she sits up in bed and holds out her TEDDY BEAR like a shield. The dancer-version of TEDDY BEAR appears and apparently just his presence is enough to make everything move away from the bed, and then stop just as the CHILD screams....)

CHILD

MOMMY!!!!

There is the sound of running feet, and then...

BLACKOUT

SCENE THREE

FROM BLACKOUT TO EXTREME BRIGHT LIGHTS...

... which then soften to the normal soft lighting over the original white-curtained setup from the beginning of this Act. CHILD is sitting up in bed still holding her teddy bear in front of her, but the rest of the animals are in their original places. MOTHER comes rushing in.

MOTHER

Are you alright? What happened, sweetie? Did you have a nightmare?

CHILD

(still a bit breathless)

It was a bad dream, and the animals tried but they couldn't stop the monsters.

(clutching the teddy bear close to her)

Teddy saved me.

MOTHER

Well, it's good you have him then. Here, has a sip of water, and let me fix your covers, and then you can go back to sleep, and Teddy won't let any more bad dreams come.

CHILD

(after drinking water and getting comfortable in bed again)

I love you, Mommy.

MOTHER

I love you, too, darling.

(She kisses CHILD on the forehead and leaves the room, as the light fades to blue.)

CHILD

You're the best bear in all the world.

BRAHM'S LULLABY BEGINS TO PLAY AGAIN AS WE FADE TO BLACK

ACT III – MEET YOUR AMYGDALAE

SCENE ONE

LIGHTS UP ON THE TABLE...

DREAMER is sitting cross-legged on the table; her bunny slippers are visible underneath it. The bathrobe is hanging on the corner of the blackboard. It's essentially the same set as Act I, except the bed is no longer on stage.

As before, projections and digital displays on the back wall – animations, really – illustrate her thoughts.

### DREAMER

Oh, you're back! Good. In today's lesson, we'll learn about the Amygdalae – that's A-Myg-Dal-Ae. Lots of people think you only have one, but the truth is there are two.

(Right and Left Amygdala -basically dancers with hats presenting the right or left hemisphere of a human brain – peak out from either side of the chalk board, then disappear.)

But we'll get to that later. Right now, I want to share with you a quirk of human nature: are you ready?

*We like to be scared.*

No, really, it's true. Consider all the things we do that cause our hearts to pump and our pulse to race and our adrenaline to get wild and crazy – everything from skiing to sky diving to bungee jumping to – my personal favorite – roller coasters – trigger our fight or flight response.

However, since we know we're not really in danger, that fear response does something a little warped.

It triggers a pleasure response as well.

Yeah, the human brain is evil that way.

(The two Amygdalae creep out from behind the chalk board again, this time coming to stand on either side of DREAMER, who looks a little wary.)

### DREAMER

All this pleasure and pain and fear – and actually, every other emotion you experience – is centered in the Amygdalae, these two almond-sized clusters on either side of your hippocampus. Mostly they work together, but they each have their specialties.

(She gestures to each of the amygdala as she introduces them.)

### DREAMER

Your right amygdala handles -

LEFT AMYGDALA

(interrupting...)

Boooo-rrrrring. Come on. This is YOUR nightmare, or dream, or... whatever... and the best you can do is this stupid professor act? You don't even have glasses... or a lab coat... or shoes.

DREAMER

Well, how would *you* present this information?

LEFT AMYGDALA

Well, I'd do something more festive, more interesting, more....

DREAMER

... Musical?

AMYGDALAE

(together)

Exactly.

LIGHTS FADE OUT.

SCENE TWO

FADE IN...

The lighting has changed to red tone and the chalk board is gone. DREAMER is sitting at the upstage side of the table, but it's now downstage right, and canted toward center stage. She has a glass of wine and an open bottle of it in front of her. There is an empty seat next to hers with an empty glass.

DRACULA enters and hovers behind her.

DRACULA

May I join you?

(he sits down)

DREAMER

Sure, why not. Care for a drink?

DRACULA

My dear... you know how this works. I never drink... wine.

DREAMER

Well, I never donate blood without a dance.

(Music rises, a tango this time. Astor Piazzola's "Libertango" as played by Yo-Yo Ma. DRACULA rises, and offers his hand to DREAMER, who takes it. They move center stage and begin to dance, but the Amygdalae appear to share the dance with them.)

RIGHT AMYGDALA

Change partners!

(DREAMER and DRACULA step apart, and RIGHT AMYGDALA takes the vampire's place as DREAMER's partner. They continue to dance as the dialogue continues.)

DREAMER

So, your right amygdala is responsible for your declarative memory.

RIGHT AMYGDALA

We hold these truths to be self-evident...

DREAMER

Not *that* kind of declaration. Your job is to keep track of facts and information.

RIGHT AMYGDALA

Just the facts, ma'am.

DREAMER

You're also tuned into the darker emotions of fear, sadness, and grief.

Right Amygdala

Well, that's depressing.

DREAMER

Is it? Those emotions are important, in moderation. And you hold important memories associated with love and loss and nostalgia.



RIGHT AMYGDALA

Oooh! Vintage!

(RIGHT AMYGDALA twirls DREAMER under their arm, causing her to crash into DRACULA and LEFT AMYGDALA.)

LEFT AMYGDALA

About time I got a turn with you. You look so fetching in those... wait. Pajamas? At a tango club? *Seriously?*

DREAMER

They're comfortable.

LEFT AMYGDALA

Whatever. This is the part where you talk about how awesome I am.

DREAMER

Well, you are awesome. Your specialty is episodic memory.

LEFT AMYGDALA

Previously on 'who's dreaming, anyway...'

DREAMER

Actually, you're not far off. Episodic memory includes linear experiences with emotional context. But you also handle emotions, dark ones like fear – just like your other half – but also happiness, joy, and pleasure.

It's because of you that pain and fear can be turned into pleasure and excitement.

Without you –

RIGHT AMYGDALA

(leaves DRACULA without a partner and joins LEFT AMYGDALA, flanking DREAMER, and continuing to dance)

And me!

## DREAMER

Yes, and you. Without both of you humans wouldn't remember things or have emotional reactions.... And maybe not dream at all.

The threesome continues to tango, but DRACULA becomes more and more annoyed until he drags DREAMER away from the Amygdalae and sinks his fangs into her neck. As she dies, the music fades and the lights

FADE TO BLACK

## SCENE THREE

### SPOTLIGHT ON THE TABLE

It's been restored to the position from the beginning of the play, as has the entire set, including the bed upstage right. At the beginning of the scene, we see on the back wall a projected image of DREAMER lying on her back on the table, blood trickling from a bite mark on her neck.

(DREAMER sits up and rubs her neck, then looks at her fingers. The image projected does NOT change.)

## DREAMER

Damn, I have *got* to stop eating liverwurst before bed. Wait... I don't have a pulse. Wait... did I... die in my dream? Does that mean I died for real?

(Off stage, FREDDY KRUEGERS menacing laughter is heard over speakers, and his shadow is visible on the projection)

## DREAMER

(realizing)

Oh, thank God, I'm still dreaming. Wait! I'm still dreaming! Which means... I can change the ending. Old fang face doesn't have to win.

(She turns so she's facing the audience directly and dangles her feet over the edge of the

table. In her 'narrator' voice she explains.)

As children, we're often at the mercy of our dreams, and require assistance to wake up, but as adults, we can learn the technique of lucid dreaming. That's when you recognize mid-nightmare that you're actually dreaming, and take control.

(As she speaks the images on the walls begin to appear in reverse order, so DRACULA un-bites her, etc. At the same time the Cranberries "Zombie" begins to play, and the AMYGDALAE come out on roller skates and help DREAMER put on a pair as well, then lift her off the table. Hand-in-hand-in-hand the threesome begins a skating routine around the table, as the videos swirl faster and the music gets louder and louder.)

(The rest of the cast, including CHILD holding her teddy bear, enter in reverse order of appearance, skate to downstage center, and then join the routine which has become a follow-the-leader thing with DREAMER at the head of the line.)

("Zombie" blends into a repeat of Aerosmith's "Dream On" as DREAMER is escorted back to her bed. The rest of the cast exits as the music and lights...)

FADE OUT

## EPILOGUE

LIGHTS FADE FROM DARKNESS TO FALSE DAWN TO EARLY MORNING

The projections on the walls now represent morning light streaming in the windows of a lovely modern house. DREAMER is in her bed, but it's now center stage, and she isn't alone. An alarm clock rings, and DREAMER reaches out to silence it. Then she nudges the person sleeping with her.

DREAMER

Honey? Honey, wake up. The alarm went off.

PARTNER

I'm awake... I'm surprised you are, though. You were tossing and turning all night.

DREAMER

Yeah, I had this wild dream. I was me, but I was also a kid, and a professor of dreamology and the monsters got me, but my teddy bear saved me and –

PARTNER

(interrupting)

Teddy bear? You mean that faded old thing you found in a box the other day.

DREAMER

Teddy is not faded or old...

(She reaches under her pillow and pulls out the same turquoise bear that CHILD had earlier.)

... he's the best bear in all the world.

(Before PARTNER can respond, LeVar Burton – yes, from Star Trek TNG and Reading Rainbow – pops up from behind the headboard of the bed. He's wearing FREDDY KRUEGER's signature sweater.)

LEVAR BURTON

But you don't have to take my word for it.

BLACKOUT