

LIMINAL SPACE: A PHILOSOPHICAL AND DRAMATIC EXPLORATION
OF PERSONAL IDENTITY AND AFTERLIFE

by

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HONORS THESIS

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DEDICATION

For my grandfather, who instilled in me the desire to ask questions and seek knowledge.

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ABSTRACT

For my thesis, I really wanted to combine my interest in the philosophical concepts of the afterlife and personal identity with dramatic writing and theatre. I decided to write a one act play that explores these concepts. The biggest questions that I wanted to address with this project are: what happens to us when we die and what constitutes an individual's personal identity? I do not view it as my place to answer these questions, as these topics are quite subjective. Rather, I wanted to create something that sparked conversation around these universal topics. In terms of philosophy, my research largely revolved around the Mind/Body Problem; I tried to gather as many different perspectives on personal identity as I could and inject these beliefs into the framework of my characters. From a theatrical standpoint, my research consisted of learning as much as I could about dramatic structure, which boiled down to reading a lot of plays and books about plays. My "findings" were probably a bit different from the typical thesis. I learned that there are an infinite amount of perspectives on the universe and a lot of different ways to write plays. I did my very best to ask the questions I wanted to ask in a way that I believe to be engaging. Everyone is of course entitled to their own opinion on what they think is contained within the universe and what they think constitutes personal identity. What I did find, is that not everyone thinks about these sorts of questions on a daily basis. I don't believe that you should be consumed by these sorts of questions, but I do think that it is important to at least know where you stand on these topics. My entire goal with this project was to pose the questions and to stimulate the conversation, while learning a bit more about playwriting in the process.

Liminal Space: A Play in One Act

Colin Trudell

Characters:

ALEX PORTER: a rising sophomore in college. Friendly and social, home from school for break. Classical Studies major. Mind/Body Materialist. Atheist.

CAMERON RICHARDSON: A rising college junior. Not very social, has had a few panic attacks. Devout Christian. Mind/Body Dualist. Christian.

CLAIRE PORTER: Alex's mother, small business owner. Spiritual.

STEPHEN PORTER: Alex's father, teacher. Atheist.

JAN RICHARDSON: Cameron's mother, nurse. Devout Christian.

THE CURATOR: Art gallery curator, seemingly out of touch with reality

THE DOCTOR: A neurosurgeon with a God complex

A dark stage. Lights up on two adults, Alex's parents, watching television. They seem just as interested in the show as they are in each other; mildly.

STEPHEN

Claire.

He points to the clock on the wall. CLAIRE glances at it but is not surprised.

CLAIRE

What do you expect me to do about it?

STEPHEN

Nothing, I'm just pointing out the pattern.

CLAIRE

What pattern?

STEPHEN

Every night, Claire. She is out every night/

CLAIRE

/Yes, she's 19, she doesn't live here anymore, what do you want me to say to her?/

STEPHEN

/She *does* live here. I consider her living here when she's home.

CLAIRE

Is it the worst thing in the world? She's out. She's, uh, "finding out who she is," I don't know. I trust her.

STEPHEN

Who is she with?

CLAIRE

(After a pause) I can call her, would it make you happy if I called her?

STEPHEN

Yes, it would, thank you/

CLAIRE

She is not going to like this.

STEPHEN

That's fine, I will. You can hand me the phone if you want.

Both gazes slide back to the TV as Claire holds the phone up to her ear. It continues to ring as they watch. The lights come up stage right in a dimly lit kitchen. A woman, JAN, sits at her rather retro looking kitchen table, going over a thick stack of papers, taxes maybe. She stops what she is doing and picks up her phone. She dials and waits, just as Claire does. The ringing intensifies and the sound shifts into that of screeching tires, culminating in a loud crash. Lights go dark immediately after the crash.

Lights up on a vacant, spacious, and oddly lit art gallery. ALEX is laying face up on the floor. She sits up and looks around for a second, completely dumbfounded as to how she ended up in the gallery. As she does this, the CURATOR walks out from behind a column.

CURATOR

Why hello there.

ALEX

AHH.

CURATOR

(immediate response) AHHH. *(an awkward moment of tension)* Sorry! I didn't mean to scare you.

ALEX

What?? Why did you/

CURATOR

/You yelled so I yelled. It seemed refreshing.

They look at each other for a moment.

Program?

ALEX

What?

CURATOR

I am offering you a program.

ALEX

A program for what?

CURATOR

This gallery of course. Isn't it lovely?

ALEX

(a beat) Okay. *(attempting to get her bearings)* Yeah, no I'm good, thank you though. I need to...um...wait what?

CURATOR

I'm offering you a program for this gallery.

Alex cautiously walks over and snatches the program from him and then swiftly walks back to where she was standing before, all the while maintaining eye contact. She opens the program.

ALEX

This is a blank piece of paper.

CURATOR

Incorrect.

ALEX

No, no I'm pretty sure I know what I'm saying.

CURATOR

That is not a blank piece of paper.

Alex waves the paper around carelessly.

ALEX

Well then what the fuck is it.

CURATOR

That is a white piece of paper.

They stare at each other.

ALEX

Hilarious. Please let me out of your dungeon.

CURATOR

I was not making a joke.

ALEX

Why did you give me a *white* piece of paper?

CURATOR

It represents the gallery.

ALEX

Empty??

CURATOR

Full of potential. If that program were empty, as you say, or blank, its purpose would be entirely lacking, as its only task would be to direct you around a gallery destined to remain barren.

Alex fails at forming a response.

Let me ask, if I may, what good is a gallery that is built to stand empty?

ALEX

I have no idea.

CURATOR

Well, what's curious is that a gallery built to forever remain empty is completely identical to a gallery built to someday be filled with beautiful and unique pieces of art.

ALEX

(quite confused and overwhelmed at this response) Okay, well that was a lot. If I have to respond to that/

CURATOR

/You don't have to.

ALEX

Well now I'm curious, okay? How do you know which one this is?

CURATOR

I suppose that is for you to decide. This is your gallery after all.

ALEX

My gallery?

CURATOR

Yes. When someone dies –

ALEX

Who's dead?

CURATOR

You are. At least you're in the process of dying, I suppose that would be more accurate.

ALEX

How do you know that?

CURATOR

If you weren't dying you wouldn't have met me.

ALEX

Why not?

CURATOR

When someone is passing between life and death, they must wind up somewhere while they wait.

ALEX

I'm not following.

CURATOR

Think of it this way; if you exist in life, and you exist beyond life, as far I can figure you must exist between the two. I am here to facilitate that.

ALEX

But you can't exist past death. Death is death, that's it, it's the end of the line – Oh my god I'm dead. I'm dead holy shit no no no no...

CURATOR

Wow we are really just jumping right in/

ALEX

/Wait hold on just a fucking second. Maybe I'm... Maybe I'm only like knocked out or something/

CURATOR

/You're confusing the state of unconsciousness with moving consciously into a new state of existence.

ALEX

I really must have hit my head, like, hard.

CURATOR

That may be so, but it does not substitute for my presence.

ALEX

(Frantic) Well I'd like to not be here, if that's alright with you. I have shit to do, and my parents, and/

CURATOR

/I'm sure you do, but unfortunately, I also have a job to do, and I've never once failed to follow through.

ALEX

You curate an empty gallery, what jobs could you possibly have?

CURATOR

To you it's a gallery, to me it's the passage between life and beyond, and I have to see it through that you don't get stuck here.

ALEX

So what? That's it? I'm toast?

CURATOR

Interestingly enough, not necessarily. This situation is more peculiar than most.

ALEX

How could this get more peculiar?

Suddenly, a faint noise is heard coming from behind one of the columns in the gallery.
Alex is extremely startled. Out walks CAMERON, visibly afraid and confused.

Ah yes! The other one is here!

The other one??

ALEX

The Curator doesn't respond. Alex and Cameron look at each other and we hear another sound of a car crash. The lights grow intense for a quick second before blacking out.

Lights up in an office at the hospital. A DOCTOR is standing in the middle of the room with Claire and Stephen sat off to the side. Jan sits on the other side, facing them in a bit of a daze.

CLAIRE

Can you go over it one more time/

STEPHEN

/Claire please/

CLAIRE

/No, just tell me again.

DOCTOR

Well, like I said Mrs. Porter, this procedure is experimental. We haven't tried it on human patients, but your daughters are the perfect candidates.

STEPHEN

No. No, absolutely not.

JAN

(no eye contact) It's unnatural.

STEPHEN

Not to mention impossible! And unethical and/

CLAIRE

/But it could bring her back. Just think if/

STEPHEN

/Unbelievable.

DOCTOR

Would you like me to continue?

Yes. CLAIRE

Mrs. Richardson? DOCTOR

She says nothing.

I'll go over it again for Mrs. Porter, and I'll reiterate that the decision is entirely yours. As we know, Alex's brain/

CLAIRE
/Stop, nevermind, please. Just – can you really do this?

DOCTOR
Yes. Based on the scans, you daughters are/

JAN
/They could wake up.

DOCTOR
I would say it is extremely unlikely.

STEPHEN
Well that's the only other option, I'm not letting you mutilate my daughter's head so you can win some fucking award.

JAN
John 5:6, Bethesda. Jesus made a man walk who hadn't taken one step in over 30 years. It can happen.

STEPHEN
(A sarcastic beat) See?

The Doctor has no response to this.

CLAIRE
Is it possible?

DOCTOR
I wouldn't be talking with you if I didn't think that I could do it, but if we do decide to move forward, we are going to have to do it very soon. As with any transplant, the sooner we do it, the better.

It is silent for a short moment. Claire finally speaks.

Who would live?

CLAIRE

Neither of them.

STEPHEN

I have to professionally disagree.

DOCTOR

STEPHEN

Okay, well then humor me, you say you can save one of them. Who are you okay with killing? Our daughter or hers?

The Doctor takes off his lab coat and becomes the Curator yet again. Alex and Cameron take the places of their mothers who walk off. Stephen walks away in complete frustration. All the while, the office shifts back into the art gallery. The Curator stands in the center of the room.

CURATOR

It is my understanding that you two know each other.

ALEX

That's news to me.

CAMERON

I know this place.

ALEX

You do? Wait who are you?

CAMERON

Cameron, and yes, it's the art gallery from campus.

CURATOR

Ah very interesting. Well, now that you both are here, we have a very important/

CAMERON

/Why is that interesting?

CURATOR

This liminal space is created entirely by your subconscious, I am always interested to see how an individual is represented when they first arrive. As I was saying/

CAMERON

/What do you mean?

CURATOR

You made all of this up. Might I continue?

ALEX

What is a liminal space?

CURATOR

A space between. Could be as simple as a hallway, but in this case, it is a space between existences/

ALEX

/Well I don't recognize this place at all.

CURATOR

That's not uncommon.

ALEX

Well why does she recognize this place and I don't?

CURATOR

Typically, everyone gets their own space as they transition into the beyond. There are, however, special cases, such as this, where two people must share the same location. That's what I've been trying to explain if you would let me/

ALEX

/I don't understand.

CURATOR

(Getting more flustered) While it may seem confusing/

CAMERON

/It's like purgatory.

CURATOR

To some, yes.

CAMERON

No, no this is purgatory. How long will I be here??

CURATOR

If you would let me/

CAMERON

/I can't believe I got stuck here, it could be a lifetime, I really thought I was set for heaven for sure/

CURATOR

/Please let me finish explaining and it will make much more sense/

CAMERON

/Also why am I the only one who recognizes this place??

ALEX

True, I didn't even know there was an art gallery on campus.

CURATOR

WELL MAYBE YOU SHOULD GET OUT MORE – I mean... you are represented in this gallery just as much as Cameron.

ALEX

It's empty! How am I represented by emptiness?? And I've never even met her.

CURATOR

You two met for the first time in the last instants of your lives/

CAMERON

/Wait what? Last instant of who's lives?? Does that mean I'm dead? I don't feel dead.

CURATOR

(Very agitated) I never said you were dead.

CAMERON

But you said/

CURATOR

/Do you feel alive?

CAMERON

I don't know.

CURATOR

And how can you know what death feels like if you've never died before?

CAMERON

(Concerned) I don't want to be dead at all.

ALEX

Let's stay on track please – why are we here?

CURATOR

...I mentioned that you two being together is somewhat of a special circumstance. With a single occupancy liminal space, it's guaranteed that the individual is on their way to the next phase of life – whatever that may be/

ALEX

/What is the next phase of life?

CURATOR

I only know that there is one, I've never been allowed to visit. No vacation days. What I do know is that you are both here. When two people appear together, it means that one of you is not yet meant to die, even after looking death in the face. One of you is still meant to spend a little more time in the physical world while the other is meant to continue to the next phase of existence. Right now, you're both having out-of-body experiences. You're both *almost* dead, if you will.

CAMERON

So, we're just supposed to choose who, like, fully dies...?

An awkward beat.

CURATOR

In essence, yes.

ALEX

That's an impossible choice.

CAMERON

(Pointing to Alex) I pick her.

Alex looks at Cameron with bewilderment

CURATOR

Hm, okay, well I'm going to step away for a moment and let you two mull this over. Okay, ta ta.

He looks around and hides behind a column. Alex and Cameron's gazes meet. We hear sirens and the lights shift us back to the hospital room. The three parents are gathered in an otherwise empty office. Stephen is pacing, Claire sits in a chair, and Jan is leaning against the wall.

CLAIRE

He gave us thirty minutes.

STEPHEN

What is there to decide? How are you still considering this?

CLAIRE

It gives us another chance with our daughter.

STEPHEN

It won't be her! How could it be her? Everything that she knows, all of the things that she can do, what she sounds like, her sense of humor – any of it, it's gone.

CLAIRE

She's right there. She is right in front of us. Her blood is still pumping and I –

STEPHEN

You're grasping for anything you can hold onto. You know that you are.

JAN

We should wait.

STEPHEN

For what? A miracle?

JAN

I'm not crazy.

STEPHEN

I just thought Jesus was the one who performed miracles, and last I checked he hasn't shown up, unless you count Doctor Miracle himself.

CLAIRE

You saw the research, he's not delusional, he's on the forefront –

STEPHEN

Right. (*exasperated*) Think about what you are saying. Alex cannot be Alex without her brain. I don't know how else to say this.

JAN

I personally agree with Stephen/

STEPHEN

/Thank you/

JAN

/in regard to miracles... But we have to consider their souls. When I look at my daughter, I see her body, her vessel, that is bound to this Earth. It's compromised, and she has no way out of it right now, but that doesn't mean that she's gone. Her soul will always live.

STEPHEN

So you want to do this too??

JAN

I didn't say that.

STEPHEN

To be an individual, you have to have your body and you have to have your brain. There's no exception to this rule. They work together to make you who you are, you can't just change the rules, even if you want to. I'm sorry but Cameron ceases to be Cameron the minute you ignore this.

CLAIRE

Why do you have to be so harsh/

STEPHEN

/It's not harsh, well it is – but it's reality. I didn't make this up.

CLAIRE

Jan said it herself, our bodies are our vessels and if/

STEPHEN

/Alright. Humor me on this then, where would she live? What classes would she go to/

CLAIRE

/That's not helpful/

STEPHEN

/What do you mean it's not helpful?? If this is what you really want, that's what you'll have to deal with, every single day.

JAN

We aren't dealing with it right now. I said what I said, but right now, we have thirty minutes to pray that this decision never has to be made.

STEPHEN

Praying will get us nowhere.

They sit in silence for a short moment before Claire speaks up again.

CLAIRE

I don't want Alex to be alone.

JAN

She's not alone.

CLAIRE

How do you know.

JAN

We all have our angels whether we know it or not.

CLAIRE

It still doesn't seem right for her to just lay in that room by herself.

JAN

I can see if the nurses will move Cameron into Alex's room, I think hers is a double.

CLAIRE

I'd like that.

Jan gets up and leaves the room.

STEPHEN

Claire.

CLAIRE

What.

STEPHEN

You know we can't go through with this.

CLAIRE

Do I? Do I know that?

STEPHEN

Think about what it would do.

CLAIRE

You think I haven't??

STEPHEN

No, not fully, and if/

CLAIRE

/how can you possibly do this right now?

STEPHEN

Do what? I'm trying to/

CLAIRE

/I'm trying too. To keep our daughter alive.

STEPHEN

I think you're not allowing yourself to accept what has happened.

CLAIRE

I know exactly what happened. I brought a man into my life who thinks he can dictate everything that I do and say and think. And then I brought a child into this world with him. And if she goes, I have nothing.

STEPHEN

What the hell do you mean nothing/

CLAIRE

/We are nothing. We have nothing without her. I live for her and this marriage only exists for her.

STEPHEN

If I could change it I would, what do you want me to do?

CLAIRE

Believe in something. Believe in her, believe in us, believe in anything. Just believe in something, for once in your life.

Claire walks out. Stephen is left alone as the lights shift back to the gallery. He exits. The Curator is standing in the center of the room looking off into space.

ALEX

(walking onstage) I found a clock.

CURATOR

Ah yes, that makes sense.

ALEX

Are you gonna explain-

CURATOR

You don't have forever to make your decision.

ALEX

What happens if we don't decide?

CURATOR

I don't quite know. I suppose neither of you will move on or revert back. A sort of perpetual semi-existence would ensue without me or this gallery or anything else. I wouldn't want that for you or for me, I quite like my job, so I suppose that's why you found a clock. To keep you on schedule.

Alex looks at the clock and Cameron's voice is heard from the opposite wing.

CAMERON

Look at this.

She walks into the space dragging a large chest

ALEX

Where did you find that?

CAMERON

I just bumped into it while I was wandering around.

She opens up the chest and pulls out a package

It says "for Alex."

She hands the gift to Alex, who begins to open it.

ALEX

It doesn't say who it's from.

CURATOR

It's from you. You created this place.

ALEX

Why would I give myself a gift?

CURATOR

Why wouldn't you?

Alex finishes opening the present to reveal a painting. It is a copy of the painting *Several Circles* by Kandinsky.

ALEX

I've seen this one before.

CAMERON

What is it?

ALEX

It's a Kandinsky, my mom studied it when she was in college, she used to have a copy in her office.

CURATOR

Very interesting. Tasteful.

CAMERON

Why would you give it to yourself?

ALEX

I don't know. I just remember being perplexed by it, but we got rid of it when we moved. Sort of forgot about it until now.

ALEX

What else is in there?

CAMERON

There's some things to hang the paintings with. And some other random stuff.

She digs through the chest and throws out a soccer ball, a parking ticket, a recipe book, and a few other various items

ALEX

Wait this was my boyfriend's.

She picks up the soccer ball

Why is this in here?

CURATOR

It must hold some weight in your life.

ALEX

Yeah it does. They lost the state championship with it, but he kept it for me anyways. He asked me out afterwards.

CAMERON

I got this parking ticket learning to drive with my mom.

ALEX

The recipes were my grandmother's. She gave them to my mom and my mom had just given them to me. We were supposed to cook some of them, but we never found the time.

CAMERON

Mmm. My mom was always working.

ALEX

To be fair I tried my best to avoid my mom.

CAMERON

I did at times too. She's probably alone right now. The house is no doubt in shambles, I always kept it clean for her.

Cameron looks at the parking ticket

I'm sorry, I don't really know how to bring this up but I have to be the one who leaves.

ALEX

Oh really? My family will fall apart if I don't come back. My parents fucking hate each other, I used to watch them tear each other apart every day. When I went to school, I was expecting them to get divorced immediately/

CAMERON

/But they didn't. My dad left before I even met him. I don't know what he looks like, my mom hasn't even shown me one picture/

ALEX

/My mom is having an affair.

CAMERON

Wow.

ALEX

She told me the last time I was home from school. No clue why, but I'm the only one that knows. I'm not taking that secret to the grave for her/

CAMERON

/Okay I'm sorry, that really sucks, but I can't agree to be dead just to save your parents broken marriage.

ALEX

Well I don't want to be dead!

CAMERON

Neither do I!

CURATOR

Remember the clock! I'll be back in a moment.

He exits

ALEX

You're the one who's going to heaven!! I gotta figure my shit out first, I can't just be thrown into the middle of nowhere after this/

CAMERON

/I have no idea if I'm going to heaven!! I want to. I believe that I am but/

ALEX

/You're contradicting yourself!! How can you believe something and then say that you actually have no idea if it will happen??/

CAMERON

It's confusing!! It's a lot to accept, and it's hard to stick to the Bible sometimes!

ALEX

I don't really care! As far as I know, there's nothing out there, and I'm not ready to deal with that yet. Death is the end of the line, so I'm sorry if I'd like to spend a little more time being alive.

CAMERON

If death is the end of the line, then why be so afraid?? You won't even know you're there!

ALEX

When I was a kid I had this dream about a black void that I would float around in all the time, and I'm not ready to/

CAMERON

/Now *you're* contradicting yourself! A black void is a real enough thing, and you were in it! You just don't know what you believe.

ALEX

Then let me go back and figure it out!

CAMERON

No! I have my own shit to figure out!

ALEX

Like what? You're on your predetermined path, right? Maybe this was what was meant to happen to you?

CAMERON

I don't know, I don't know/

ALEX

What? You don't know what?

CAMERON

Let's just drop it, please. Can we at least hang some of these stupid paintings?

ALEX

No! I want to *leave* remember??

CAMERON

You know what, fine. Head on out.

Alex stands there.

You want to leave so bad?? Go for it!

Alex continues to look away, not going anywhere.

Oh, that's right! We don't even know how to fucking get out of here. So, if we're going to be stuck, lets at least hang some paintings.

ALEX

Fine.

CURATOR

Okay, well I'm glad we battled that one out. Have we reached a decision?

ALEX

No!! It's not possible.

CAMERON

I feel that if there is ever a time to be selfish it would be right now.

CURATOR

Maybe so.

He sees the paintings

Planning to fill the gallery?

ALEX

There's nothing else to do.

CURATOR

How does it feel that the fate of this entire display lies in your own hands?

ALEX

I really don't need that shit right now.

CURATOR

Fair enough.

He exits. Lights transition into the hospital room with Jan and Claire, sitting next to their daughters' beds. Jan and Claire are hanging up some paintings.

CLAIRE

This seems a bit silly when you really think about it.

Jan doesn't respond

CLAIRE

You know, I didn't know Alex painted until like 3 months ago.

JAN

(Without eye contact) Seems like she's a natural.

CLAIRE

She told me that she thought they were bad. Didn't want to show anyone. I really like them though.

JAN

How much time has it been?

CLAIRE

7 minutes.

Jan chuckles

JAN

I was supposed to go down to campus and visit Cameron last week. I canceled to get a few more hours at work.

CLAIRE

You made the best decision you could in that moment.

JAN

Mmm.

CLAIRE

You couldn't have known this would happen.

JAN

It just makes me wonder what I don't know about her. If she's hiding anything from me. It's just been me and her for so long.

CLAIRE

I don't know if that's worth the strain.

JAN

I think I'm having the classic retrospective realization that I wasn't a good mom, and if I could change it I would, but I can't.

CLAIRE

It's like you said, miracles can happen.

JAN

You don't have to believe that.

CLAIRE

(Sarcastically) I feel like I've been living one being married to Stephen.

JAN

He's still with you, isn't he?

CLAIRE

Yes, but he always/

JAN

/Be grateful you have someone.

Claire starts to respond but thinks better of it. A moment of awkward tension passes.

CLAIRE

(Looking at Alex) She's older than I remember her to be.

JAN

Cameron grew up before I realized it. Must be why she secretly hated her birthday presents, she was already too old for them.

CLAIRE

(searching for things to say) I feel numb. Do you feel numb?

JAN

What do you mean?

CLAIRE

I don't feel anything anymore. I feel like I should be sad or angry or something, but I'm not.

JAN

This isn't supposed to be real. We're not supposed to lose our daughters.

CLAIRE

At first it felt like I was reliving the phone call every ten minutes. My stomach would flip thinking about... well anything.

JAN

I for one am praying that I hear my daughter's voice before that doctor comes back into this room.

CLAIRE

I admire your faith, I really do. I guess that's why I'm putting all this up, so I can feel like I'm doing something. Sometimes I wish I would have been a little more forward with religion and all that, but Stephen didn't ever/

JAN

/can I tell you something?

CLAIRE

Uh, yes sure, go ahead.

JAN

I don't talk about this, well actually I've never talked about this.

CLAIRE

Um, okay, are you sure you/

JAN

I tried to abort her.

CLAIRE

Oh.

JAN

I wasn't married. I was young. I would have been kicked out, so I panicked. And I spend every day telling my God how much I regret it.

CLAIRE

I-

JAN

And she thinks her father left her. That he didn't care about her, or me. He knew that I was having the abortion even though he begged me not to. The day it was scheduled was the last time I ever saw him. If she dies, she will have lived an entire life of me lying to her. The amount of times I have listened to her go on and on about how much she hates her father; he doesn't even know she exists. I am praying for a miracle because I have to tell my daughter the truth. I'm damned if she dies.

Neither speak for a moment.

CLAIRE

How long has it been now?

JAN

No idea.

A moment goes by

CLAIRE

I don't know a whole lot about the Christian faith, but won't you get to see Cameron again someday? No matter what happens?

JAN

If we both end up in heaven after all this, I suppose yes.

CLAIRE

Then repent, ask for forgiveness if that will help you believe that you'll see her.

JAN

Forgiveness from God is not what I'm worried about. I need forgiveness from my daughter.

Stephen enters from the hall.

STEPHEN

Don't mean to interrupt.

JAN

It's alright, I'll get some air.

Stephen walks to the opposite wall and remains standing. After a while he speaks.

STEPHEN

What are you thinking?

CLAIRE

What do you mean?

STEPHEN

I'm just curious what you're thinking.

CLAIRE

I'm trying to not think for the time being.

STEPHEN

Mmm.

After a moment

What did you mean?

CLAIRE

What do you mean what did you mean?

STEPHEN

"Believe in something."

CLAIRE

You have no faith, Stephen. You have no hope.

STEPHEN

I have hope.

CLAIRE

No, you don't. If you can't prove it, it's not possible. That's how you operate.

STEPHEN

Wanting proof isn't a bad thing, I just want to know that/

CLAIRE

/We don't always get that Stephen. I can't prove that Alex will grow up to be successful, but I want her to be. I believe that she will be, and I do what I can to help prepare her, but I don't know for certain that it will happen. So, should I go about my day doubting it because I'm unsure?

STEPHEN

Of course not, I just/

CLAIRE

/What harm does it do to have some hope? To believe in something? Sure, it's scary, because for once it's not up to you, but it's better than just turning your back on it completely.

STEPHEN

I'm only trying to help. I focus on the things that I can control.

CLAIRE

You can control how you treat me.

STEPHEN

That's off topic.

CLAIRE

No it's not. You don't think we're gonna work out so you gave up. You don't think Alex is gonna wake up so you're not willing to try and/

STEPHEN

/Don't you think I want her to wake up?? You think I want to watch this happen, to go through all of this? I wish I could do...something right now; I'm useless. But if we cut her *brain* out, the Alex that we know and love, the Alex that is RIGHT THERE, will never exist again.

Claire leaves. Stephen doesn't try to follow. He picks a painting off the wall and sits on the end of Alex's bed. Another transition of sorts back into the gallery. Alex and Cameron are setting up paintings all over the room, the same ones from the hospital room. Alex stands on a ladder and is hanging *Several Circles* while Cameron takes a step back to look at their progress. They continue setting up the gallery throughout the entirety of this scene.

CAMERON

I never did like modern art.

ALEX

Eh, modern is a loose term. I'm pretty sure this thing is like a hundred years old.

CAMERON

I'd still say that's modern.

ALEX

Maybe, but this is still more interesting than the modern stuff I've seen.

CAMERON

I want a painting to really grab me from the start. This is just circles.

ALEX

I mean, a circle can be anything, so you're saying that this painting is just anything.

CAMERON

Maybe it's just too much possibility for me.

ALEX

There's a lot that goes into it. You've got kind of a main circle there in the middle, looks a bit like an eye to me. Some of the other circles are looking at the big eye, but the big eye isn't looking at them, and some of the circles are looking away. Some of the eyes seem to be closed, some are open. Okay, look, there's a few things that really get me. Look at the big eye, there's like a white glow that goes around it, and some of the circles are inside the glow and some aren't. There's one little eyeball on the left that looks like he really wants to be in the glow, but the big eye isn't paying attention to him. And the green eye on the right is looking directly at me. That freaks me out a little bit. But the kicker is the black paint, all of the circles are a part of a slightly darker blob except for like two or three really small dots, and I always wonder why they got left out.

CAMERON

They all look really randomly placed to me.

ALEX

No I think they're exactly where they're supposed to be.

CAMERON

Would the painting be any different if some of the little circles moved around a little, or were a different color or something?

ALEX

Maybe, but they're not. And they never will be, so we'll never know.

CAMERON

Hmm.

Cameron stares at the painting for a moment

It's the focus of it, like sometimes I forget that some of the circles are even there. They kinda move around.

She moves closer to the painting

The black paint looks like space. And I actually think the paint is darkest inside the big circle.

ALEX

My mom always told me it was supposed to be the universe.

CAMERON

You think the whole universe could fit in one painting?

ALEX

I didn't say *I* thought it was the universe. Maybe some people can see that, but when I picture the universe, I don't see texture and colors or feel warmth and other presence.

CAMERON

And you feel that with this painting?

ALEX

Yeah I guess I do.

CAMERON

What do you think the universe is then?

ALEX

...you really want to do this?

CAMERON

We've got a few minutes to kill. You have my attention.

ALEX

Well honestly I was always too scared to give it too much thought. It's massive and everything is so uncertain, and I don't see how we can ever prove what the universe is. I know that some people believe in God, like yourself, and some are more spiritual, and others don't buy into any of it, but we can't control any of it anyways. I can control what I do when I'm alive, to a degree, so that's where the majority of my focus would go, but when I had a second where my mind wasn't occupied with something, that's when a sense of doom would creep in.

CAMERON

Why doom?

ALEX

Like what if Earth is all that there is, and that when we die, it's just gone. I had a nightmare when I was a kid of this rocking chair, and the chair wasn't scary, but it

terrified me that one day I might not know what a rocking chair was. Because that would mean I wouldn't know what anything else was.

CAMERON

But you still had a perception of the rocking chair.

ALEX

Yes, in a dream. I wasn't actually dead.

CAMERON

I used to dream of arriving in heaven.

ALEX

What was that like?

CAMERON

Couldn't tell you. Purgatory is supposedly an art gallery, so I have no clue. It's there though.

ALEX

I doubt it.

CAMERON

I know that in this moment heaven exists. I'm positive.

ALEX

How? How can you say that with such confidence? Like without any evidence at all?

CAMERON

You're not going to like this.

ALEX

Say it.

CAMERON

The Bible.

ALEX

Oh boy.

CAMERON

Everything in the Bible is true.

ALEX

Prove it.

CAMERON

Every time I try to disprove the Bible, I end up solidifying its truth even more.

ALEX

I said prove, not disprove.

CAMERON

I know, but in trying to prove that my faith was legit, I found that I was constantly trying to disprove the scriptures. And every time I found an argument against faith, I found evidence in the Bible that reassured me.

ALEX

Mmm.

CAMERON

I know what you're thinking.

ALEX

What am I thinking?

CAMERON

You're judging me.

ALEX

I just don't agree with you.

CAMERON

We both know what the Bible says. There's lots of things that I wish it didn't say, but if I'm going to follow it, I have to *follow* it, you know?

ALEX

That seems like a very hard way to live.

CAMERON

You are correct.

ALEX

I think it's metaphorical and horribly over-translated.

CAMERON

I've heard that one before.

ALEX

And you disagree?

CAMERON

God knows what is going to happen. He's always known that we'd be here. That society would be in this state. He wouldn't give us things that would die out and need rewriting as society evolved. They're eternal laws.

ALEX

So then how am I here?

CAMERON

What do you mean?

ALEX

I don't believe in God. I've never asked for forgiveness. I have sex all the time. And we're both here.

CAMERON

I don't know. I do know that you just admitted that you're here. In some sort of afterlife.

They stare at each other.

Lights up in a hospital hallway, long and empty (his own liminal space). Stephen walks in and kneels.

STEPHEN

Uh, hello. Whoever is there, if you're there. God, maybe, I don't know. I don't know what I'm doing. I need help. My family is falling apart. I think my wife is going to leave me. Honestly, I want to leave her sometimes. My daughter is dying right in front of me. I can't lose her. I can't lose either of them. I don't know what else to do. I try to do what I think is right, but every time it becomes abundantly obvious that it was the wrong choice, and I don't know why. Are you listening to me? I'm trying to be open so please if anyone is there just listen. I thought this was it. You live and you die. I thought this was Alex's one shot at life, so I tried to set it up the best I could for her. Claire told me I need to believe in something. I don't even know if she believes in anything, she never talks about it, but apparently, I need to step it up. And what about Alex? What does Alex believe? Did she get to go somewhere? I need her to either go somewhere amazing or come back. Come on just give me something, show me something to know I'm not insane. You've got me on my knees here. That water bottle. Under the chair. Make it move. If it falls, I'll know you're listening. I'll tell everyone about it, just do it. Do it. DO IT. Please. Fall over. Fall over. Please.

It doesn't move. He weeps. Lights stay on Stephen as he sits defeated on the floor and come up SR in the Doctor's personal office. He is seated at his desk. Claire and Jan enter.

DOCTOR

Have we come to a decision? I was just about to give you a call.

JAN

We have.

CLAIRE

We want to do it.

DOCTOR

(Looking at Claire) The entire group agrees?

CLAIRE

Yes.

DOCTOR

This is fantastic news. I'll begin the prep immediately. We'll operate as soon as possible. In the meantime, the nurses can keep you updated.

He begins to exit

CLAIRE

Wait just one more thing, can I just/

DOCTOR

/There really isn't time for anything more, the time is now and I have to prep.

He leaves without ever stopping.

CLAIRE

(To Jan) I-

Jan

Don't.

The two sit there with nothing more to say. We transition back to the gallery. Alex and Cameron are looking at the paintings.

ALEX

Are you okay?

CAMERON

It's all just kind of hitting me right now.

ALEX

About the universe?

CAMERON

The fact that we're dead. We're dead, and it just feels like we're away from home on some trip.

ALEX

I'm trying not to think about it.

CAMERON

Like I never told my roommates that I was leaving. I never called my mom back. There's so much that I didn't finish and now it's just over.

ALEX

The Curator did say one of us is going back.

CAMERON

If one of us is actually going back, then why are we here? Why put us through this?

ALEX

I don't know.

CAMERON

It doesn't make sense.

ALEX

Well. Think of it this way. I didn't even think that anything came after death. Remember the blackness? This is anything but that, and yet it's here. And I'm seeing exactly what you're seeing.

CAMERON

Yes but what/

ALEX

/No no hear me out! I thought that death was going to be absolutely empty. You thought you'd end up in heaven. And right now, in this moment, we are here in the same space, looking at the same paintings, talking to each other. What does that tell you?

CAMERON

That everyone is wrong?

ALEX

Or that everyone is right. Like everyone.

CAMERON

How could everyone be right?

ALEX

Everyone has their own claim of what comes next, but no one can prove what it'll be like. The simple fact that anything exists past life proves that they could be right. (*pulling out the program*) That's why this stupid thing doesn't have anything in it.

CAMERON

But by saying that you negate belief as a form of proof.

ALEX

Think about this then. What is a liminal space? It's a place where you can let go. The past isn't real. Whatever your identity, whatever you used to believe in – it doesn't matter anymore because the past doesn't exist. You can become anything. And liminal spaces are everywhere – and we need them! Don't take this too literally, but we need them so that we can change. We have to let go and evolve sometimes.

CAMERON

And what, that's what you think we're doing right now?

ALEX

You believe in heaven, I believe in essentially nothing, and we both died and went to an art gallery *together*.

Suddenly the clock rings quite loudly. The paintings start falling down and the lights begin to change. The clock gets louder.

Well this seems bad.

CAMERON

We never picked who's going back!

The clock gets louder still

ALEX

Well, I don't know, just pick someone!!

CAMERON

You want me to just pick?? That's how you want to end this??

ALEX

Yes just do it!! Do it or –

The clock stops and the stage goes black. After a moment, lights come up and we are

in the hallway again. Stephen is furiously
pacing.

CLAIRE

Stephen, we had to. We didn't have another option.

STEPHEN

Yes, you did. You just ignored it. He butchered our child.

CLAIRE

It is a legitimate surgery that could save our only child. I need her to live, I am not ready
for her to –

STEPHEN

Why? Why not?

CLAIRE

Why what?

STEPHEN

Why are you so afraid? She was the strongest person I knew.

CLAIRE

Yes I know.

STEPHEN

(Looking up) This isn't what I meant!!!

CLAIRE

What?

STEPHEN

It's bullshit! There's nothing out there Claire. You told me to have some faith, so I tried, I
really did, and the one time I was out of the room you went behind my back and –

He stops mid-sentence, staring at something
on the ground.

CLAIRE

What is it?

STEPHEN

Did you touch that?

CLAIRE

No, I just came out here now.

Claire turns around to where Stephen is looking and sees the water bottle, laying on its side. Jan enters in a hurry, she can barely speak.

JAN

Come with me right now.

CLAIRE

What's going on/

JAN

They're awake.

Stephen falls to his knees as Claire and Jan run off. Blackout

End of play.