

B3 Therapy

Connor, a depressed young man with no purpose in life, gets trapped with a group of strangers in an underground parking lot following an earthquake. As time passes the situation becomes more and more precarious, and Connor is forced to confront his demons.

Character traits:

CONNOR – a young adult, appearing depressed and wholly uninterested in anything and everyone around him

GRACE – a gentle, caring old lady of Christian faith

GERALD – a big guy in his mid-forties, stoic and reserved, usually sits upright, hands crossed across his chest

AVI – a short man in his late forties, temperamental and expressive with his movements, usually hunched over or lounging when sitting

BENJAMIN – Amy's husband and high school sweetheart, a strong, mild-mannered man in his late twenties.

AMY – Benjamin's pregnant wife. A calm person seeking to de-escalate volatile situations

RAJ – a happy-go-lucky guy in his mid-twenties. Takes nothing too seriously.

CLAIRE – a very old woman of worldly perspective with the soul of an artist

SCENE 1

(Total theater darkness for half a minute.
Suddenly, a terrible CRASH, so loud everybody in the theater jumps in their seat. Shouts quickly ensue.)

GRACE

Oh, dear!

BEN

What the hell?!

AMY

Benjy!

BENJAMIN

Hold my hand, Ames!

(A loud CRASH, continued rumbling)

AVI

Earthquake!

GERALD

Get down, get down! Lie on the ground!

(LOUD CRASH, short, subsiding rumbling, followed by a short silence).

(A single emergency light flickers on. It's hanging by a wire above a corridor entrance on the left side of the stage. The corridor leads to the left. The light illuminates a group of eight people surrounded by concrete rubble on all sides. Some are on their knees, some lying down, all covering their heads. Mists of dust fall gently to the ground. A cracked concrete column in the background stands diagonally, holding the semi-collapsed ceiling. Letters painted in yellow on it read 'B3')

BENJAMIN (Holding AMY tightly in a protective manner and pulling her up.)

Ames, you okay?

AMY
(Feeling around her pregnant stomach)

I'm okay, I'm okay - it looks like I'm good.

(The rest of the group rises up and inspects the scene.)

BENJAMIN

Jesus, what was that?

CONNOR (Calm, looking as though nothing happened, like he had simply entered an unfamiliar, mundane room.)

Earthquake.

GRACE (Hurrying over to Amy and fussing about her.)

Is the baby alright?

AMY

Yes, it's fine.

(GERALD pulls out his phone and checks it.)
GERALD

No reception.

AVI

Is there a way out?

(Everyone except for CONNOR, GRACE, BENJAMIN, and AMY search around for an exit. GERALD looks into the concrete corridor at the left end of the scene)

(Rumbling.)

AMY

It's coming back!

(Dust falls from the ceiling. BENJAMIN holds AMY tightly. GRACE grabs onto CONNOR's arm for balance. CONNOR looks up at the cracked, semi-collapsed ceiling casually. GRACE's eyes meet his face and she looks at him curiously. Every other actor on stage looks up and around and stretches their arms outward for balance or over their heads for protection.)

(Rumbling ends.)

(GERALD turns away from the corridor and comes to the group.)
GERALD

Stair's collapsed. Elevator's gone, too.

RAJ (Pointing to a point to the right and outside of the scene.)

I think I heard someone over there - come with me!

(RAJ, AVI, and GERALD rush across the stage and off-screen opposite to the corridor.)

GRACE (tidying up Amy's outfit and brushing dust off her face.)

Week thirty, thirty-two, dear?

AMY (Nodding.)

Thirty.

BENJAMIN (Checking his phone.)

Why is there no signal?

GERALD (Shouting from off-screen, as though straining to carry something.)

'Quake must've hit the town's power. Or antenna. Or power to the antenna. Take your pick.

(GERALD, RAJ, and AVI come back into scene, carrying a dust-covered old woman (older than GRACE) and laying her on the ground in the middle of the stage head pointed to the right of the stage, feet to the left of the stage. Everybody rushes over. AVI slides his laptop bag beneath the woman's head. The woman moans.)

(GRACE gasps.)
GRACE

She's my friend!

(GRACE holds her dress and kneels next to Claire's head. She bends close and over her.)

Claire! Claire!

AVI

Anyone here a doctor?

(Nobody answers.)

AVI

We're in the parking lot of a hospital! Are you serious?

(CLAIRE moans again.)

GRACE

I know she was due for a checkup.

(GRACE looks up at CONNOR.)

Did she have it today?

(CONNOR shrugs his shoulders. GRACE stares curiously at him.)

(AVI inspects CLAIRE.)
AVI

Looks like a small bruise to her temple. I think she'll make it.

(GRACE slides out AVI's laptop bag and rests CLAIRE's head in her lap, stroking her face.)

RAJ (Shouting into the collapsed corridor.)

Can anyone hear me? We're trapped!

(He turns and walks toward the other side of the scene stopping just behind CLAIRE.)

There are people trapped here! Please help!

(Silence.)

GERALD

Five minute drive, twenty minute assessment, then clearing the rubble...

(GERALD gauges the ceiling-high debris everywhere.)

God, who knows...

(AMY, RAJ, and AVI stare at GERALD, confused.)

AMY

What?

GERALD

How long first responders take to get workin'.

AMY

Oh.

AVI

Hmm. Assuming we're the only ones needing rescue.

GERALD

I know the Fire Department passed a huge budget increase last year. If it didn't translate to more manpower I'd be pissed.

(AVI, BENJAMIN and RAJ looked at GERALD quizzingly.)

GERALD (Noticing the stares.)

I work in town hall. City Engineer.

(AVI looks around the collapsed underground parking lot.)

AVI (Angrily, to GERALD.)

Nice work!

GERALD

Damn it, I didn't build it, didn't sign on it! 'Been in Town Hall less than two years.

(AVI throws his hands up in the air and starts walking away, thinking to himself.)

Well, great!

RAJ

What do we do?

(Silence.)

RAJ

Just wait?

BENJAMIN (looking around and up.)

I guess. What else can we do?

AVI

We can clear our own way out!

(AVI walks toward the nearest debris pile and starts touching and examining the rubble.)

GERALD

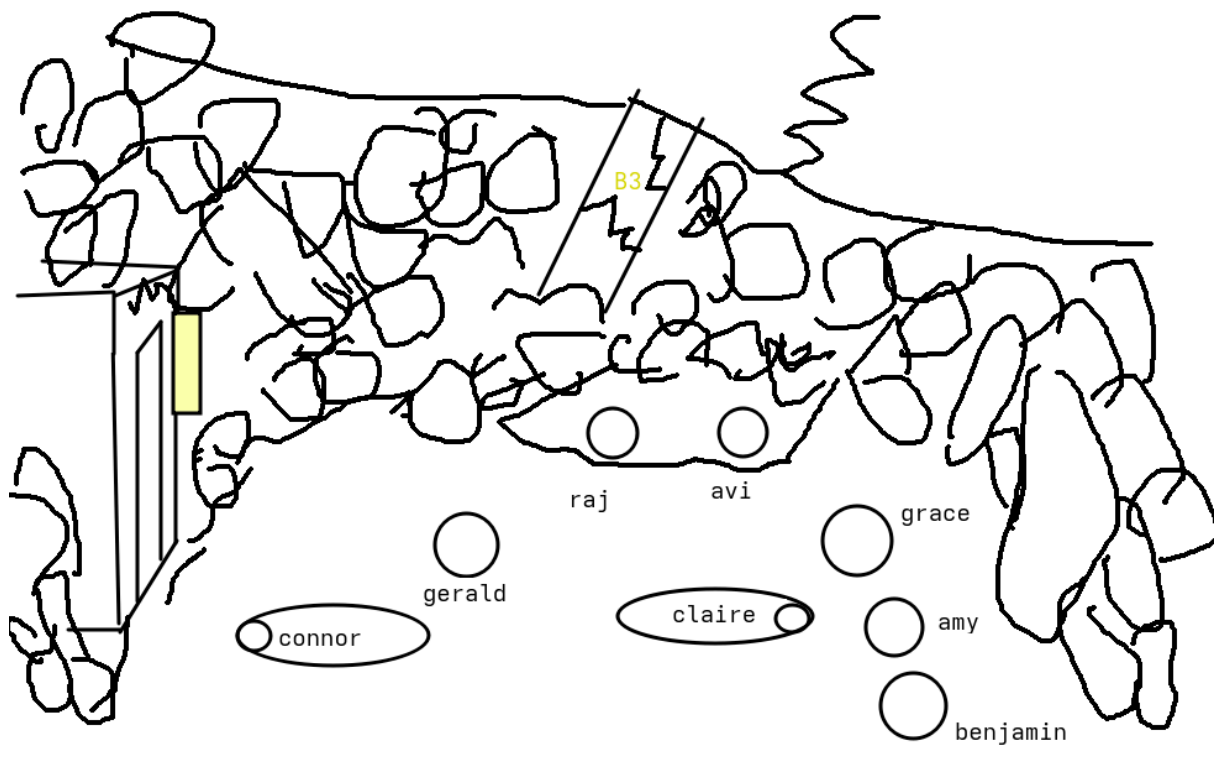
No! You don't know what holds what. Pull out the wrong chunk and the whole thing could drop on our heads.

AVI (Grumbling.)

Fine!

END SCENE

SCENE 2



SCENE 2 LAYOUT

(Everybody is sitting in an arch on the ground facing the crowd. CONNOR is sitting with his back to the corridor and at the left end of the arch. From CONNOR to the opposite end the seating arrangement is: CONNOR, GERALD (on cinder blocks piled into a makeshift seat), RAJ (on the edge of a broken, flat concrete slab slanted toward the audience), AVI, BENJAMIN, AMY, GRACE. CLAIRE lies unconscious on the ground with her head in GRACE's lap and her feet toward CONNOR.)

(Silence.)

(BENJAMIN pulls out his phone and turns it on.)
BENJAMIN

Still no signal. How long has it been? Like, thirty minutes?

RAJ

Does anyone have water?

GRACE (Pulling out a small water bottle.)

I do - but I'm saving it for Claire."

(She reaches out and holds AMY's hand for a moment.)

And you can have some, too, dear.

(BENJAMIN nods to GRACE.)

AMY (Smiling.)

Thank you.

(Long, uncomfortable silence.)

(AVI pulls out his phone).

GERALD

He just checked a minute ago. Save the battery. In fact, better we turn some off.

(GERALD pulls out his phone and turns it off.
BENJAMIN follows suit.)

Just in case.

AVI (Shrugging and putting the phone back in his pocket.)

I know, I know. I just can't stand feeling so... helpless.

(Avi pulls himself up and begins pacing back and forth in the background behind the group.)

(Silence.)

GRACE

I'm Grace.

(GRACE smiles at AMY.)

AMY

I'm Amy, I'm a teacher at the school.

GRACE (Rubbing AMY's shoulder.)

Good for you, dear.

(Short silence.)

(AMY lightly jabs BENJAMIN's side with her elbow.)

BENJAMIN (To the group.)

I'm Benjamin. I run the floor at Sam's Steel Mill.

CONNOR

Connor.

(Short silence. GRACE looks curiously at him.)

GERALD

Gerald. City Engineer, like I said.

RAJ

Hi, I'm Raj. I work in the doggy day care in front of Ashton Park.

AVI (Throwing up his arms.)

Stereotypical Jewish accountant!

(He stops pacing and goes to lounge on the concrete slab next to RAJ.)

(Silence. GRACE stares at CONNOR.)

GRACE (Pointing at CONNOR.)

You're Connor Holton? Your parents are Clara and Zachary Holton?

CONNOR (Sounding, uncaring, uninterested.)

Yeah.

GRACE (Beaming.)

I was your kindergartener.

CONNOR (Faking interest.)

Oh, wow.

(CLAIRE moans.).

GRACE

My dear friend and neighbor Claire used to be a florist.

(GRACE strokes CLAIRE's head.)

Her yard is as the Garden of Eden. And she's a poet, too. Not famous or anything fancy, more like a hobbyist, and her poems would fill your hearts if she'd ever recite them to you.

AVI (Nodding.)

I like gardening.

RAJ (Smiling.)

Gardening's cool. I tend the garden at the DDC.

GERALD

Deaf to poetry, paved over my yard first thing when I moved in.

AVI (Faking a whisper to RAJ)

I think this one's a robot.

(GERALD chuckles.)

GERALD

Just more efficient. Less costly in the long run, too.

GRACE (Holding a pointed finger at CONNOR and talking to the entire group.)

This boy was like a wild tiger cub under an eternal sun!

(CONNOR looks down, eyes blank, looking like he'd rather be left out of the conversation.)

GRACE

He was king of the playground, always smiling, always laughing, zooming across the place making me dizzy.

(GRACE puts a hand to her chest.)

Oh, such a joy you were!

(AVI gestures at Connor)

AVI

This kid? Just looking at him makes me want to pop a happy pill.

(CONNOR shuffles uneasily.)

GRACE (Emphatically.)

Yes!

AVI

Well...

(AVI gauges CONNOR.)

Something broke.

(CONNOR visibly snaps. He locks his gaze on AVI.)

CONNOR

Leave me alone.

AVI (Serious, holding CONNOR's stare.)

Why?

CONNOR

What do you mean - why? You're bothering me and I don't feel like talking.

AVI

And why should I care about what you want?

BENJAMIN

Hey, man –

GERALD

– Leave the kid alone.

AVI (Holding his hands open toward the group.)

Give me a minute." He turned to Connor.

CONNOR (Sounding a little distressed and exhausted.).

Stop it.

AVI

I'm asking you seriously, kid. Why should I care what you want, huh? Why should I leave you alone because it's what you want?

(CONNOR doesn't answer.)

AVI

If your car starts acting up. What do you do?

CONNOR (Looking down and sounding puzzled.).

What?

AVI

If your exhaust starts spewing smoke or something, what do you do?

You change the -

GERALD

(AVI held up a hand to halt GERALD.)

Well?

AVI (To CONNOR.)

Take it to the garage, I guess.

CONNOR (Shrugging.)

AVI (Smiling.)

In my faith there's this philosophy called Tikun Olam. It calls on one to help people, fix the world, that kind of stuff. It's like charity, just without the money.

Huh. That's nice.

BENJAMIN

You Christian, right?

AVI (To BENJAMIN.)

Yeah.

BENJAMIN

Christianity calls on you to do that, too. Jesus preached it, too, just more generally.

(GRACE Nodded deeply.)

GRACE

He did. You read our bible?

AVI

Yep.

(AMY put on a confused look.)

AMY

But you're Jewish.

AVI

So?

(AMY shrugs and looks to BENJAMIN for support.)

BENJAMIN

Don't you, er... hate Jesus? I mean Jews –

AVI

What?! Where did that come from?

BENJAMIN

I heard a rabbi say –

AVI

Oh, a rabbi said! A rabbi said!

(AVI scoffs.)

Do you know how many rabbis there are? Do you know how much they love to argue with one another and differ - I bet you don't! What - you think every Jew follows every word every rabbi has ever said? Their minds would tear apart, man! Like tons of other Jews before me, I've read the New Testament. Loved Jesus the man. Not so much some of his posy.

BENJAMIN

Ok, I got you. Sorry.

AVI (To BENJAMIN.)

It's fine.

(AVI turns back to Connor.)

Anyway, kid, consider this. I heartily believe in Tikun Olam, and I'm also an obnoxious and annoying, say-it-to-your-face kind of guy. The way I see it, you look like a car needing fixing, and I'm the mechanic.

(AVI gestures to the group.)

You all can be mechanics, too.

(GRACE nodded, GERALD grunted in the affirmative. RAJ shrugged and smiled.)

RAJ

Sure, why not? Pass away the boredom.

(A low rumbling. Dust falls from the semi-collapsed ceiling above the group. Everybody's looking up, wary. AMY and BENJAMIN hold on to each other tightly.)

(Rumbling ends.)

AVI (Leaning on his elbows toward CONNOR.)

Plus we're all really needing something to distract us from, you know, impending doom. So what is it, kid? Girl leave you, got a foreboding diagnosis?

(CONNOR stares at AVI as though he's mad.)
CONNOR

You're crazy. And I'm not playing with you.

(GERALD crosses his arms and half-turns to CONNOR, looking down and uneasy, yet serious.)

GERALD

Listen, kid. The way I see it, you can refuse and you can cooperate. One will keep you stuck where you are, the other may get you better.

AVI

Yeah, listen to, er, Gerald, right?

GERALD

Yes, sir.

CONNOR

You're forgetting a third option - it could make things worse.

RAJ

To be honest, man, you don't look like you could get any gloomier.

CONNOR

Let. It. GO.

(A long and uneasy silence. CONNOR picks up a piece of rebar and does lines and scratches on the ground. GRACE breaks the silence.)

GRACE

What do you do today, Connor?

(CONNOR ignores GRACE, continuing to scratch the concrete floor with the rebar.)

GRACE

Do you work?

CONNOR

I do retail.

(AVI nodded.)

AVI

Retail's ok. First job I had was retail.

GERALD (To AVI.)

Same. Pulled me through college.

(GERALD grunted and turned his head to Connor, and asks gently:)

Do you, er, study?

CONNOR

Dropped out first year.

(GERALD nods uncomfortably and turns back)
GERALD.

Ok.

CONNOR

I see what you're trying to do. Please, I asked you before - stop... just stop. I'm perfectly fine - really, I am.

GRACE

In kindergarten you picked up on my tricks quickly, too. I see that hasn't changed.
(GRACE put on a stern face and an affronted voice.)

And you were an adept liar back then, too.

(CONNOR shot up from his seat on the concrete.)

CONNOR

SHUT UP! Who the hell are you to say that? Calling me a liar? All of you people! Who are you, huh? Just a bunch of strangers stuck in a parking lot! None of you know me, none of you have any right to judge me!

BENJAMIN

Nobody is trying to judge you –

CONNOR

Shut the FUCK up!

AMY (To BENJAMIN.)

Leave it, Benjy.

(CONNOR dropped back to his place.)

AVI (Nonchalantly to GRACE.)

Say, did he have a short fuse back then, too?

GRACE

Oh, wouldn't you know it.

CONNOR

Gah! Fuck it, I don't care.

(CONNOR dragged himself a meter out of the group, to the left of the group, and lay on the ground on his right side facing the crowd, eyes closed.)

I'll go to sleep and fuck all of you.

AVI (To CONNOR.)

Yeah, sweet dreams and fuck you, too, buddy.

(To the group.)

My money's riding on girlfriend problems.

(Chuckles all around.)

GERALD

I'd go with medical. I mean, we are next to a hospital.

(GERALD looks a bit at the debris surrounding them.)

Well, probably was a hospital.

GRACE (Shaking her head.)

Lord have mercy.

(CLAIRE moans.)

AMY

Girlfriend, for sure. I know that look from heartbroken boys moping around the halls after a breakup.

(AMY smiles at BENJAMIN.)

It makes me want to hug them.

BENJAMIN (Smiling back at AMY.)

I remember being like that after you broke up with me in high school.

AMY

I remember.

(AMY leans in and pecks his cheek. He rubs her back.)

You were so miserably cute.

(To the group.)

So much I snatched him right back a month later.

AVI (Smiling.)

Highschool sweethearts.

(AVI gestures at CONNOR.)

I wouldn't try hugging him though. You might catch it.

(AMY chuckles.)

AMY

Is it a girl, Connor?

(Silence. CONNOR turns to lie on his left side, so his face is away from the crowd and staring at rubble.)

AMY

It's a girl.

(GERALD grunts in the affirmative.)

GRACE

Hmmm. Whenever Connor was being a Mr. Poutyface in kindergarten it was because he missed on something or was left out.

RAJ

Like playing ball?

GRACE (Nodding.)

Any activity – even ones he never liked. And also whenever he lost. Oh, he was such a sore loser!

BENJAMIN

I can get that.

AMY (To the group, giggling.)

Benjy's the worst!

GERALD to Benjamin

Say, weren't you the quarterback about six-seven years ago?

BENJAMIN (Perking up slightly.)

Yeah, I was.

GERALD

Knew you were familiar. Son was grade younger than you. Watched a couple of games with him.

(GERALD grunts.)

Gabriel Bute.

BENJAMIN (Lighting up.)

Yeah! I remember Gabe. Cool kid.

(RAJ slaps GERALD on the shoulder in a friendly manner.)

RAJ

Gabriel's my homie! He brings his dogs to the daycare every other month for grooming – we do that, too.

GERALD (Smiling at RAJ.)

He sure loves those mutts.

RAJ

I do reception. We chat away the time until treatment's over. You know, G, he talks very fondly of his dad.

GERALD (Looking down and holding a small, proud smile.)

Did my best for him.

RAJ (Pondering to himself.)

Never mentioned his mother, though.

BENJAMIN

Raj –

GERALD (Holding up his hands toward BENJAMIN.)

– It's ok.

(GERALD turns to RAJ.)

Mother died giving birth.

(GRACE puts a palm to her chest and wears a sad face. CONNOR stirs and steals a glance at GERALD's back.)

RAJ

Sorry.

AVI (Speaking softly.)

Must've been hard, man. I can't imagine raising my kids all alone...

GERALD shrugs his shoulders and looks at AVI

You just do it. For the kid, you know.

(GRACE nods as one who recognizes a deep truth.)

(Silence.)

(BENJAMIN glances at CONNOR, then says uneasily.)

BENJAMIN

Maybe he was, er... neglected?

GRACE (Aghast, as though it was an affront on herself.)

Dear God, no! The Holtons were exemplary parents!

AVI

Whom you lost contact with when he entered school. I mean, something could've changed after that. Marriages go bad left and right these days - and fast.

RAJ (Raising a hand and declaring casually, comically proud.)

Married at 19, divorced at 20. Don't regret it for one second. Girls today are crazy mad.

(AVI chuckles and shakes his head.)

AMY

Oh, come on!

RAJ

What? She was!

AMY

Don't give me that bull. Every day I teach soon-to-be adults – like you were up until yesterday, it looks – and I'll tell you that just in the decade I've been teaching it's the boys that have gone wrong.

(Amy continues hushly.)

Mostly the boys, anyway.

GRACE

From where I'm sitting it's the whole of society that's gone mad. Boys not being boys, girls not being girls. And both have forgotten how to be civil. Something was lost along the way, some sense of camaraderie.

AMY (Chuckling to herself.)

I'll concede on the civil part.

RAJ

I don't feel like I've lost anything.

AVI

If you did, would you even know it?

RAJ

I... guess you could lose something and, like, not know you lost it.

GRACE

Oh, don't mind me, though. I barely leave the house these days. Most of the time I just sit in front of the TV.

AVI

Yeeesh – that's the worst – and it's a big part of the problem. All you see on the news is the worst extremes and word-athletes. And every new show is bland as tofu, pushing some stupid idea, or is unmitigated junk. They don't put out good values anymore. No wonder all the young people look like mindless zombies.

I feel none of that.

RAJ (Shrugging his shoulders casually.)

AVI
Feel – no. Look – yes.

(AVI puts his hand on RAJ's shoulder.)

Hmmm.I don't think so.

RAJ (Pondering to himself.)

Then you've been spared, God bless. Ok?

AVI (Feigning exasperation.)

Anyway, I never wanna be like that.

AMY

Like... divorce?

BENJAMIN (A bit wary.)

No, silly! I mean I don't want our kid to grow messed up because of us.
(AMY hugs BENJAMIN.)
I'm never going to leave you, Benjy.

AMY

(Smiles all around. GERALD and AVI nodding,
GRACE's eyes become watery.)

Some hope in the world.

AVI

(A short silence.)

Maybe it's that. Hope.

GERALD
(GERALD nods his head towards CONNOR.)
I mean, with him.

Ah, so you're saying he's hopeless?

RAJ

GERALD

Yep. Know all about it myself. Had a troubled upbringing, got into plenty of trouble in my youth, got really messed up for a while with drugs.

AVI

You?!

GERALD

Yes, sir. Took a while to get myself straight. It took –

(CRASH, the single light go out, a loud rumble,
CRASH, continuing rumble.)

AMY

Benjamin!

Benjamin

Hold on to me!

GERALD

Everybody come toward me! Sat here for a reason!

RAJ

I can't tell where you are!

GERALD

Follow my voice!

GRACE

Who's that?! Help me with Claire!

GERALD

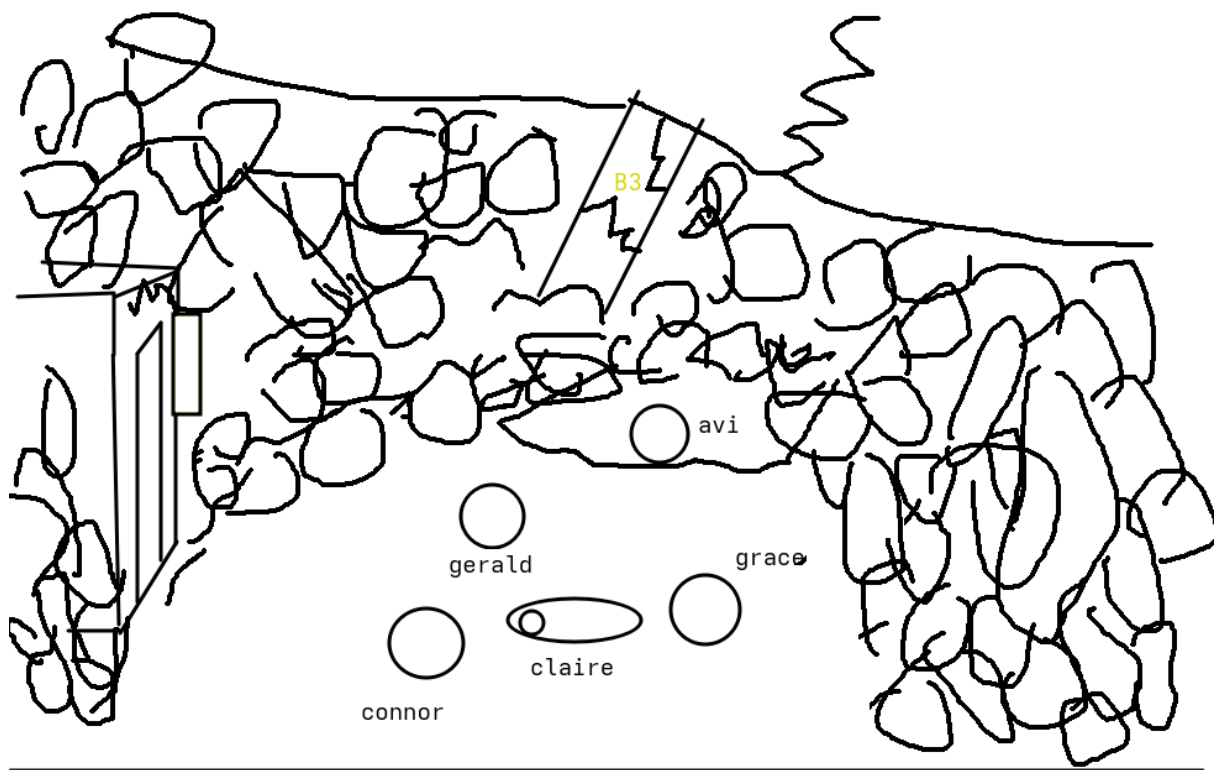
COME TOWARDS MY VOICE!

AMY

Benj–

END SCENE

SCENE 3



SCENE 3 LAYOUT

(Half of the scene is buried under rubble, mostly on the right side of the stage from the audience's POV. GERALD is sat where he was at, head bowed and resting in his palms. CONNOR also remained where he was, lying on the concrete, only now in a fetal position. GRACE is sat opposite to them, patting her eyes with a tissue. CLAIRE lies motionless in the center, her head pointing to GERALD and CONNOR.. AVI stands to GERALD's left and stares blankly at CLAIRE. A single smartphone on the ground casts its light on the scene.)

(A long, deafening silence.)

AVI

I will not die here.

(GRACE looks up from her seat at AVI. A short silence follows.)

(AVI rubs the top of his head with shaking hands and takes a deep breath.)

I will not fucking die here!

AVI

(AVI, as though possessed by a demon, lurches toward the nearest wall of debris and starts grabbing pieces of concrete and chucking them to the side.)

Stop that immediately!

GERALD (Jumping up to a stand and rushing towards AVI.)

(GERALD wraps his arms around AVI and pulls him back. The two fall to the ground, struggling. GRACE pulls CLAIRE closer to her and away from the two men struggling. CONNOR fidgets at the sound and covers his ears with shaky hands.)

Let go of me, you fat bastard! I won't die here!

AVI

GERALD

Dying is exactly what you'll get if you go on doing that!

(GERALD and AVI go on struggling for a few more seconds, then AVI stops struggling.)

Let go.

AVI

You're done?

GERALD

(AVI takes a deep breath.)

Yeah, I'm done.

AVI

(GERALD lets go and returns to his place. AVI gets up, brushes the dust of his pants and goes to sit between GRACE and GERALD.)

Sorry.

AVI (To GERALD.)

(CONNOR looks at the group for a quick moment, then drags himself to sit to the right of GERALD on the concrete with his legs to his

chest and crossed and his arms wrapped around them.)

AVI

I can't stand this feeling, this helplessness, you know, not having control over my fate.

GERALD (Grunting and giving AVI a single nod.)

Understandable.

(GRACE pulls out her bottled water and takes a few sips.)

CONNOR

It's not about a girl.

(GERALD and GRACE stare at CONNOR, confused but slowly picking up.)

CONNOR

I don't think it is, anyway. I've had girlfriends. We went out, we hung out, we kissed and... you know. We felt stuff and it was good.

AVI (Looking away from CONNOR and sounding uninterested.)

Happy to hear, kid.

CONNOR (Gesturing at GRACE.)

And like you said, it's not my parents either. They have us eat together – always. They take us on vacations even though me and my brother –

GRACE

Brandon?

(CONNOR puts on the slightest of smiles and nods at GRACE.)

CONNOR

We're both past twenty and, I mean, you don't see many parents flying their 20-year-olds out to Lake Tahoe or Europe.

(CONNOR tightens his arms around his legs.)

What I'm saying is I know they love me and my brother.

(GERALD crosses his arms.)

GERALD

Nice parents.

CONNOR

The best. And they didn't spoil us, either. Once I turned sixteen and asked for money they told me to get a job, and since then I worked for every dime I had. They'd spend money on us only if it was for insurance or for any family activities. Important or, er... bonding stuff.

(AVI gestures with his head at the wall of debris where BENJAMIN and AMY sat.)

AVI

Insurance really helped them.

(GERALD shakes head.)

AVI

Sorry, guys. Really, I'm sorry. My mind is a mess, just blurting out stupid stuff.

GRACE (Throat tightening.)

A pregnant woman...

GERALD

No sense to it.

GRACE

Don't say that. It's His plan and it's beyond our understanding.

GERALD

Don't buy it.

(GERALD turns to AVI.)

What does your faith say about senseless deaths like that?

(AVI gives out a short exhale.)

Meh. There are more opinions on that than there are stars in the sky. You know what they say: two Jews, three opinions. Now imagine a hundred Jews having their opinions.

(AVI leans shortly toward GERALD.)

And, if you ask me, they're all stupid.

(GERALD chuckles.)

AVI (Holding his hands together and staring at them.)

A year ago my little kid's best friend died in this awful car crash, and my kid came up to me bawling and asking why God took his friend away. Best I could come up with was, 'He took Rob away because, Josh, you know, Rob was so good, such a kind soul –'

(AVI's throat clenches.)

– and that made God love him so much he wanted him to go up to Heaven sooner, where nobody suffers and everyone is always happy...' That's the best I have on...

(AVI, head bowed down, wipes his eyes with one hand while gesturing with the other at the debris covering Benjamin and Amy's bodies.)

this.

(GERALD nods deeply. AVI sniffs.)

GRACE (Pulling out two tissues out of her bag. She passes one to AVI with the other she dabs her watery eyes.)

That's very comforting, Avi.

AVI

Thanks.

(AVI wipes his eyes and blows his nose into the tissue.)

(AVI, to CONNOR.)

Whatever it is that's bothering you, children set it straight.

(GERALD crosses his arms and grunts. A warm smile cracks across GRACE's face.)

GRACE

As a mother of four myself, I heartily agree. It may sound unintuitive, but to me children made life simple. I stopped minding about things beyond my control. I had children to take care of after all, and so I dwelled on what's real and important. Oh, and the joy they bring to your home!

GERALD

Hmm. I'd give my life for my kid. But my own parents... well, did tell earlier my childhood was a mess. Didn't exchange a word with them since I left home some thirty plus years ago.

GRACE

Sorry for you, Gerald.

AVI

Hard life, man.

GERALD

Nah... The hard part of my life was living with them. Real hell, that was. The rest was good in comparison.

AVI (Throwing up hands in helplessness, to CONNOR.)

Okay, so maybe children are not a hundred percent fix. But, hey, it might be.

CONNOR

I can't imagine how having children will affect me. I mean, it's not that I don't want to get married and have kids – I do, but I feel like what's messing with me isn't related to that and it's not what's going to, er... 'fix' me, I guess.

(CONNOR chuckles to himself.)

Until today, I never acknowledged to anyone I have an issue. It's kind of... a relief. Wow...

GERALD

Wow what?

CONNOR

I just realized I never even admitted it to myself. And it's been with me since high school.

AVI

Wow indeed.

GRACE (To CONNOR.)

You should be... twenty two?

CONNOR

Twenty one. You're *very* close, though. My birthday's tomorrow.

AVI

Well, happy tomorrow-birthday. I'd wait 'till the proper hour but, well...

(AVI looks at the debris imprisoning them.)

I might not be around by then...

GRACE (Leaning forward to CONNOR,
smiling.)

Happy birthday, Connor.

CONNOR

Thank you both.

GERALD

Birthday's what's got you down? Somehow they do that.

CONNOR

Hmm... more than usual. But not by a lot. This feeling has been haunting me for years. Like... a dark friend that was always around but to whom I never spoke.

GRACE

How would you call this friend, dear?

CONNOR

It's hard to give it a name or put into words. I never really confronted it until today or gave it any thought.

GRACE

How do you feel, then?

CONNOR (Staring up at no point in particular of
the semi-collapsed ceiling.)

I guess... empty. Just feeling empty all the time –

Empty? AVI (Interrupting.)

Empty of what? (AVI leans towards CONNOR.)

(CONNOR, looking clueless, shrugs his shoulders.)

(AVI chuckles.)

AVI

How can you be empty of a thing you don't know of?

CONNOR (Looking confused.)

I... don't know? It's just a feeling.

AVI

Answer this, kid. Does a person born blind miss its eyes?

AVI (Looking at the point on the concrete slab where RAJ sat.)

Will a Hindu miss the taste of beef – which he has never in his entire life known?

CONNOR

What are you trying to say?

AVI

I'm saying that somewhere deep down in your chest *you already know what's missing*.
(AVI leans back, resting his elbows on the concrete slab.)

(CONNOR screwed his face trying – and failing – to understand AVI.)

(GERALD, seeing CONNOR's confusion, gestures briefly to AVI.)

GERALD

Let me try.

(GERALD turns to CONNOR.)

Think of the period in your life when you were happier. Frame it in your head. Got it?

CONNOR

Yeah.

GERALD

Now think of the time when you lost your happiness.

CONNOR (Immediately.)

Adolescence, around fourteen. And thinking about it, I'll add – getting worse since finishing high school.

GERALD

Good. What changed at fourteen?

CONNOR

Uh... nothing comes to mind right now. It just came with growing up.

GRACE

What did you feel then?

CONNOR

... Confused, mostly?

(GERALD grunted uncomfortably.)

GERALD

You mean, er, with your body?

CONNOR

Well, that was *definitely* a confusing part of being that age, but I was speaking more along a philosophical line, I guess?

AVI

Philosophical line, huh? Have we got ourselves a secret philosopher here?

CONNOR (Shaking his head.)

Nothing like that. It's just, my mind... it's always working, always thinking, steaming on, racing, trying to figure stuff out, never resting. And despite having a locomotive inside my skull, it seems I can never make sense of anything.

AVI

What kind of thoughts plague you?

(A long rumble, a bit of dust falls from the ceiling as everybody looks up.)

(Rumble ends, followed with a short silence.)

CONNOR

Mostly random stuff. Like... Could I survive if I were restricted to live in the small forest across the creek? What would I do? What would my treehouse look like?

Why did that guy jump the line at the gas station yesterday – and I mean the real, underlying reason he did that, not just to save time. *What makes* people behave like that at their core?

Is there really a difference between ideas and propagating your genes? Because, er, how would I put it..... a gene passed on is like the *idea* that this trait is better than others, right? So then what's the difference between spreading your genes and spreading an ideology?

(Very short pause.)

CONNOR

If the corner of a rock cracks and falls off, is it the same rock? Is it Ninety percent the same rock? If I were to glue the pieces back together, would I be making the rock whole? Or is it a new rock now? Are rocks and dirt and planets alive? I mean, I don't have the perspective of a rock, so who am I to determine? For all I know, they are alive in a way that's impossible for me to perceive.

GERALD (Nodding slowly.)

Confused's an understatement.

AVI (To CONNOR.)

Does that locomotive in your head run on jet fuel? And have you tested the driver for psychedelics?

(CONNOR chuckles.)

GERALD

Were your thoughts different before adolescence?

CONNOR

It's hard to recall. But I think I lived more in the moment.

GERALD (Holding his hands out to CONNOR as though offering a solution.)

Then go back to that.

(A short rumble.)

AVI (Shaking his head.)

He shouldn't ignore it and shove it aside. That's like hiding from the issue. He needs to tackle it head-on, process it and move forward.

CONNOR (To GERALD.)

I don't know if I can. And besides, those examples aren't the really, er, problematic thoughts. I was getting to those. It's thoughts that, I guess, seek deep truths or purpose, the meaning in stuff. Those always lead to a dead end. Like, if life on Earth will inevitably cease some day, why should I – we – even make an effort at life? I can have kids, they will have kids and so forth, but undoubtedly sometime in the future it will all come to an end. Even if I have a million offspring down the line, sometime, somehow, it will all stop. And eventually nobody will remember any of them. And hell, why is it even important they will be remembered? Why are people so hung up on that?

(AVI lets out an exhale, as though preparing to tackle a huge task.)

AVI

Oy vey...

CONNOR

See?

AVI (Shaking his hands at the sky, as though speaking to God.)

What's the meaning of it all?!

(AVI shaking his head.)

Stupid questions. Here –

(AVI opens his briefcase and pulls out a plastic fork.)

What's the meaning of this fork?

CONNOR

The meaning of this fork is... that people need a tool to eat food with? Or maybe that someone in the past thought 'there's got to be a better way to get food into your mouth.'

AVI (Shaking his head.)

The former is a purpose and the latter's a reason. Neither are a meaning. See, you, and a gazillion others before you, have the audacity to question these grand meanings when you can't even explain the meaning of a fork!

(AVI twiddles the fork in CONNOR's face.)

A fork!

(CLAIRE moans.)

(AVI puts the fork back in his briefcase.)

AVI

You can't explain a fork and yet you try to understand humanity itself?

CONNOR

So what, because I can't explain the meaning of a fork I should just let go and believe in God like you do?

AVI

I'm only saying we're all too young and too dumb to grasp at any grand truth. There's no point to it, so why bother. Maybe God will reveal these truths to us someday, maybe he'll allow us to reach them on our own... who knows. You decide for yourself whether or not to become a believer.

GERALD (Shaking his head.)

Forget all that metaphysic stuff. It's not practical.

GERALD (To CONNOR, holding out a forearm like a knife pointed forward.)

What you need is structure.

GRACE (Nodding.)

Let me tell you, faith has a healthy structure! In my church you will find many who were once lost.

(GERALD shakes his head in mild frustration.)

AVI

Judaism's pretty chill. We got loads of holidays – that's loads of days off – and everybody gets to go to Heaven.

GRACE

No Hell?

AVI

Well, if you've been bad in life, the angels toss you into a sort of naughty camp, where you serve a term, and after that you join the rest of mankind in Heaven.

CONNOR

Wait – the rest of mankind? So everybody in the world goes to Jewish Heaven?

AVI

Yeah. Not even death rids you of us, and we get to say 'Told you so' for eternity. Judaism's funny like that.

(CONNOR and GERALD laugh briefly.)
CONNOR (Jokingly.)

Less of an incentive now.

(AVI bellows with laughter, CONNOR joins in.)

GRACE (As though realizing something of great importance.)

Connor!

(CONNOR looks across their prison to GRACE.)

GRACE

You're smiling.

CONNOR (A great smile crossing his reddening, abashed face.)

I am.

GRACE

This is the first time I'm seeing you happy since we got trapped. *Hold* this feeling. Describe it to us.

CONNOR

Warmth. Inside. Wanting to smile, to get to know everybody better.

GRACE

It's a sense of community, Connor. You are *connecting* with us. When did you last feel like this?

CONNOR

A year ago, I think, when I and a couple of friends who came for the holidays spent a night at the lake.

(A short rumble.)

GRACE (Leaning toward CONNOR.)

You need people, Connor. Do you have more people in your life?

(A short silence.)

CONNOR

Excluding family? Not really. But even if I did, it wouldn't be possible to spend all my time with friends to ward off these... thoughts.

GRACE

Regardless, I really recommend you come to my church. You'd meet many people and new friends, and that will help you some. And who knows? Christ might work for you, too.

(CONNOR made a face like he had just taken a bite from a somewhat questionable food item.)

(GRACE was about to say something, but GERALD raises a hand to stop her.)

GERALD

Don't think Jesus is his path.

(GERALD turns to CONNOR.)

Listen, kid. Never got hooked on Christ, myself. Don't know much about God or an afterlife. Can't say whether Heaven and Hell are real or not. I *can* say there were days in my life that felt like Heaven and days which felt like Hell. I guess, er, I believe... We are alive in the now and the world is what we make of it. It can be Heaven today and Hell tomorrow. It's not completely under our control, but to some intangible extent it is. And so I've structured my life so I have as many heavenly days as possible. I work hard, I take care of myself, work out, I go out, I spend as much time as I can with my boys, and if I have a free day or afternoon I use them to prepare for the future. And if I've got none to do I go volunteerin' –

(GERALD points at CONNOR.)

– that's a great way to meet new friends, by the way.

GRACE (Placing a hand to her chest.)

I volunteer, too. Actually, I was just coming in for a shift in the hospital, in the new maternity ward across the yard. I'm a cuddler. I'm called whenever there's a babe needing warmth. For instance if a mom had a hard birth and she's unavailable, or if, God forbid, there's an orphan.

(GRACE shut her eyes. A warm smile filled her face and she gesticulates as though she had a baby in her bosom at this very moment.)

I lounge with the babies on my bosom, I pat and stroke them, I sing lullabies.

(GRACE singing hushly.)

La-la la... la da-da da...

(Continuing to speak in a normal voice.)

You will find much satisfaction in helping others.

GERALD

I'll second that.

(GERALD grunts.)

Makes you feel fulfilled.

AVI

And I'll three that.

(GRACE and GERALD stare at AVI.)

AVI

What? I'm doing it right now – Tikun Olam!

GERALD

Hmm. I guess you do.

(A short silence.)

CONNOR

I like everything you all said, and I really appreciate it. But... it all feels like bandaids, you know? I mean, stuff to treat the symptoms but not the root cause of –

(CLAIRE moans.)

CLAIRE

Wha...

GRACE (Rushing over to CLAIRE's right side - on the audience's side.)

Claire!

(CONNOR perks up, AVI and GERALD jump up and jolt to CLAIRE's other side.)

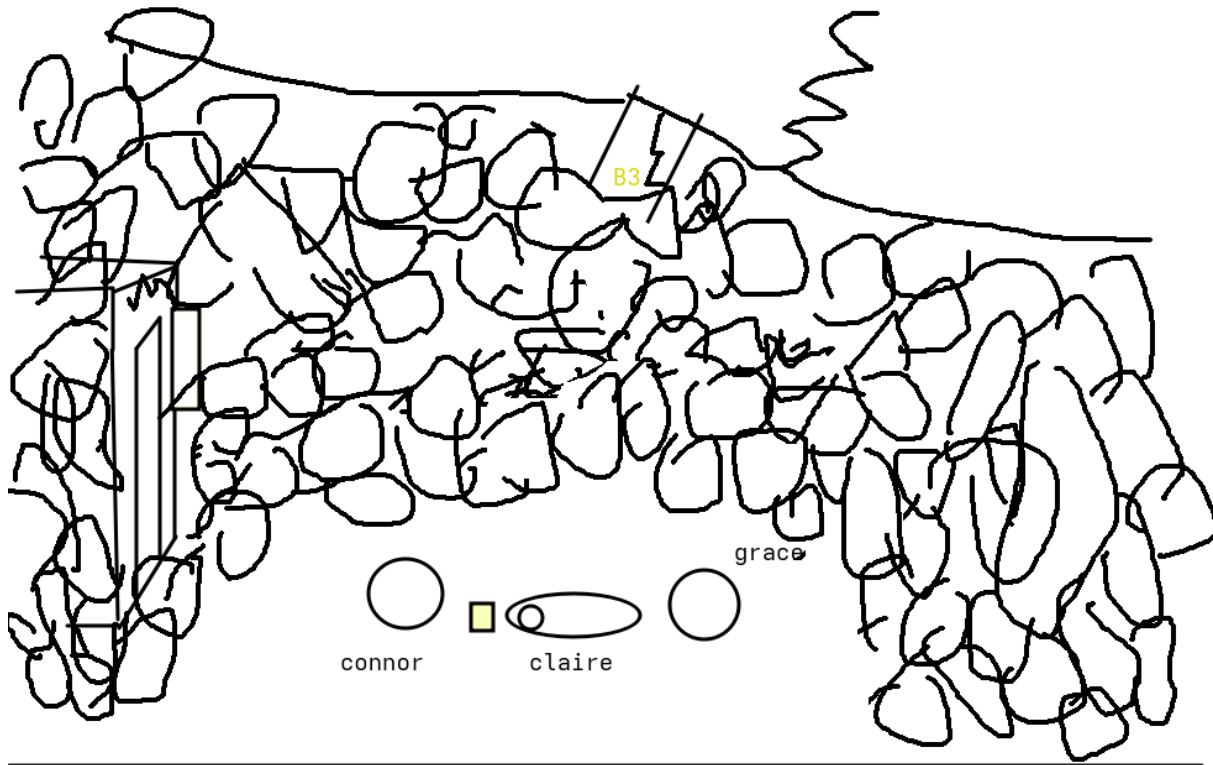
GRACE

Claire, Claire!

(Lights out, CRASH, a loud rumbling.)

END SCENE

SCENE 4



SCENE 4 LAYOUT

(The scene has shrunk. The area behind CLAIRE (from the audience's POV), where GERALD and AVI stood at the very end of scene 3, has collapsed entirely and is now full of debris. GRACE and CONNOR move closer to CLAIRE. Instead of sitting cross-legged with his legs to his chest, CONNOR sits limply on his knees. CLAIRE is between them, like before, head pointed to CONNOR, legs to GRACE. The single source of light changes slightly either to the left or to the right, but still between CONNOR and GRACE)

(A long silence.)

GRACE

Perhaps you need a new way of looking at things.

(CONNOR slowly raises his stare to GRACE.)

GRACE

Following the death of my husband, I lost my faith in Christ for some years. I felt lost, like you do now. But one thing kept in my heart – the love Jesus had for people. And so, without noticing it, I had formed a new way of looking at life that carried me forward, and which today exists in peace alongside my faith in Christ. I have never shared it to anyone because it sounds a bit ridiculous to be honest – I daresay hippie-like.

(GRACE shudders briefly.)

But I believe it may help you, dear, maybe help you better understand the world confusing you, so I will. It boils down to this: Every action taken by any being alive today or in the long past is or was motivated by one single force: Love.

CONNOR (Screwing his eyes at GRACE, wrestling with the idea in his mind.)

Love?

GRACE

That's right.

(A short silence.)

CONNOR

A terrorist –

GRACE

Attacks you because you are a threat to that which he loves. What he loves might be his family, his nation, faith, or many other things.

CONNOR

But you did nothing wrong to him.

GRACE

It doesn't matter what I or you actually do or did. *He* believes it so, and so it is. See, I had already challenged this truth of mine.

CONNOR

Okay. Me eating lunch. How is that love?

GRACE

Easy. You like yourself. You like the idea of you going on living.

CONNOR

Is that really love?

GRACE

Like, sympathize, appreciate – all different levels of love.

CONNOR

A person littering, or cutting in line.

GRACE

Is a person who loves his own convenience too much.

CONNOR

Could you also say he loves others too little?

GRACE (Nodding.)

You could.

CONNOR

What about a person starving himself, for whatever reason, so he eventually dies.

GRACE

I'd say he loves the idea of his own ending. The reason why doesn't matter. He just loves it.

CONNOR (As though struck by a curious revelation.)

Huh...

GRACE

A year ago a cat gave birth in my yard. I let her and her three kittens stay, and I fed the mother every once in a while. One of Mother's kittens, a cute little thing – Scrappy, I named her – was frail from birth and ill every other day, yet Mother kept caring for her. But one day, out of the blue, as I was having my morning tea, Mother lunged at Scrappy and, to my horror, tore her to bits like a demon possessed! And let me tell you – even *that* was an act of love.

CONNOR (Asking out of pure intrigue.)

How?

It was the love of a mother who couldn't bear her child's suffering, the love of a mother worried for her other children, who might have caught Scrappy's diseases and died, too, and it was the love of a mother for Scrappy's siblings, who got less nourishment for as long as Scrappy lived. And do you know what happened later?

CONNOR

What?

GRACE

I'll tell you. For a week after I had taken Scrappy's remains away, Mother kept returning to the place where Scrappy died and lay there, meowling with anguish.

CONNOR

That's... very sad.

GRACE

It is. But you see, Connor, how easy it is to explain what you see through the lens of love?

(CLAIRE moans.)

CONNOR

I do. Thank you. For sharing that.

GRACE (Gesturing to CONNOR to come to her.)

Come here, little kid.

(CONNOR drags himself to CLAIRE, who hugs him.)

GRACE

Oh, I so wish I've helped you.

(CONNOR drags himself back to his place, opposite of GRACE with CLAIRE in between them)

CONNOR

I wonder if it can be taken further.

(GRACE giggles.)

GRACE (Smiling at CONNOR.)

Indeed a steamroller for a mind.

CONNOR

I mean... could you ask... is humanity... is life – creation – is creation itself an act of love?

GRACE (Beaming with excitement.)

My, what a thought!

CONNOR

But an act of love by who?

GRACE

For me that would be God.

CONNOR

For me – the world.

GRACE

Look at you, unravelling the universe!

(An ongoing rumble...)

GRACE (Looking up at the ceiling of debris, smiling.)

Oh, wouldn't it be fitting?

CONNOR

What?

GRACE

That we who are unraveling the mystery of the world were to die soon after. As though we dared to trespass sacred ground and so we are struck!

CONNOR

Don't say that!

(A small piece of debris falls from the ceiling and hits the smartphone. The scene becomes totally dark, the rumbling ends.)

(A brief silence.)

GRACE (Sounding serious.)

Are you afraid of dying, Connor?

(A brief silence.)

CONNOR

Yes.

(A brief silence.)

GRACE

It's funny.

CONNOR

What is?

GRACE

That you who sees no purpose in life is scared of leaving it behind.

CONNOR

Huh...

(A brief silence.)

GRACE

Connor?

CONNOR

Yes?

GRACE

I'm with you. Don't be afraid.

(GRACE's face lights up from below – she switched on the screen on her smartphone..)

GRACE (Smiling.)

See? I'm here.

CONNOR (Smiling back.)

I see you.

GRACE (Fiddling with the phone.)

Now how do I turn on the light thingy?

CONNOR

Here.

(GRACE passes the phone to CONNOR, who switches on the flashlight. CONNOR places the phone, flashlight facing up, on the ground in front of him.)

CONNOR

Lucky you still had power. Mine died ten minutes in.

(A brief silence.)

GRACE

Have you ever wondered why people are afraid of the darkness?

CONNOR

Darkness is ancient danger. It's when predators lurk. It's when you miss the next step, slip, and hurt yourself.

GRACE

Of course, but I was talking about the *idea* of darkness.

CONNOR

It's the unknown. I guess you could say we don't know whether or not it could hurt because we don't know what it entails for us, so we're wary of it. Like death – that's the perfect example.

GRACE

Death indeed. Funny how we're scared of something that's inevitable and as absolute as that.

(A short rumble, followed by brief silence.)

CONNOR

Grace?

GRACE

Yes, Connor?

CONNOR

I'm still scared. What would you say to a person like me about the afterlife? I mean, no Bible stuff.

GRACE

Oh. Well..... I'd say death is exactly how things were for you before you were born. Do you remember that time?

(CONNOR chuckles.)

CONNOR

Obviously not.

GRACE

Excellent! Then that's what death is, and so there's no reason to fear it, my sweet Connor.

CONNOR

That's... weirdly comforting. I think. Thank you.

(A short silence.)

(A loud rumble. CONNOR grabs the phone and twists around. The left side of the scene is lit by the phone. Debris are crashing down, covering the corridor.)

GRACE (Loud but calm.)

Don't be afraid, Connor!

(A great CRACK sounds from above. CONNOR looks up, phone in hand, lighting the ceiling. from which plumes of dust fall.)

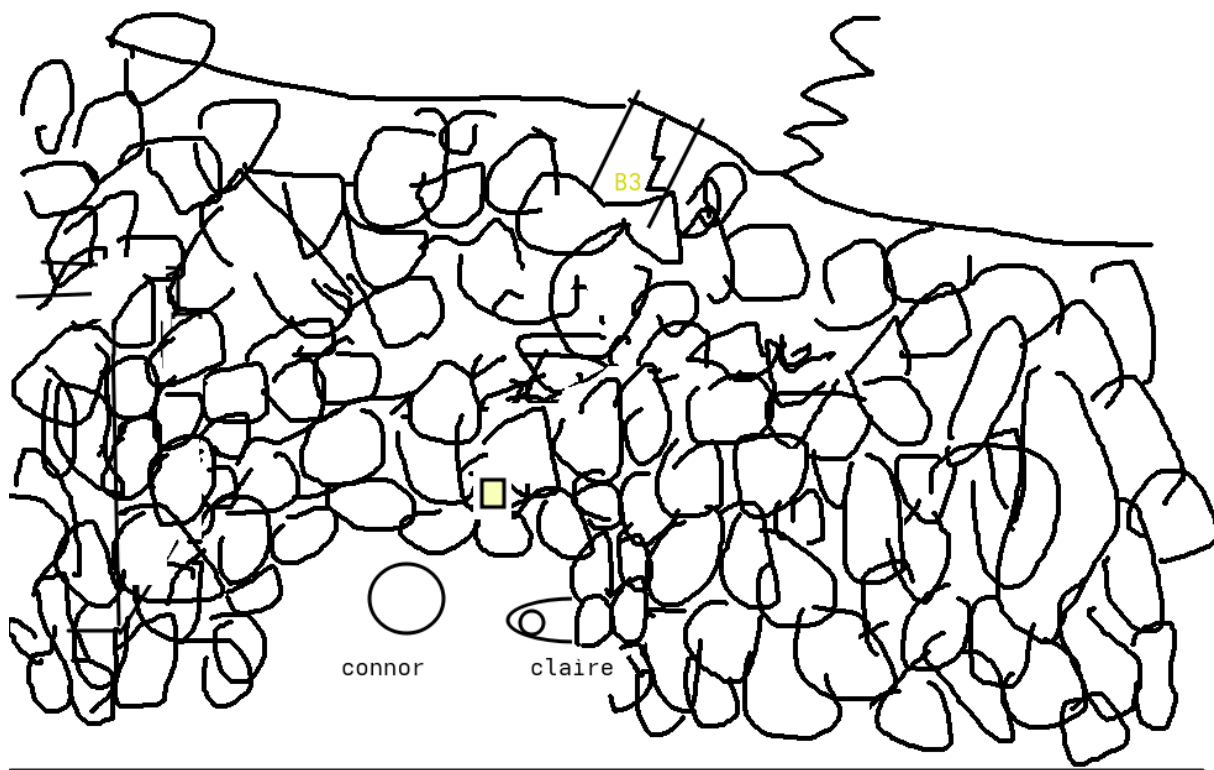
GRACE

Be at peace!

(CRASH and lights out.)

END SCENE

SCENE 5



SCENE 5 LAYOUT

(CONNOR is sat to the left of CLAIRE. He had placed the smartphone on a small concrete piece jutting out of the wall of debris in the background, at face height and to the opposite of the audience, so CONNOR and CLAIRE are between the source of light and the audience so the audience sees their silhouettes. The corridor to the left is buried under rubble, as is the area to the right where GRACE sat. CLAIRE's lower half is buried in rubble. The ceiling has dropped more than a little, but it's still tall enough that CONNOR can stand up without bumping his head.)

(A long silence. CONNOR is holding his bowed head in his hands.)

CLAIRE

Connor... are you there?

(CONNOR lurches a step over to CLAIRE and stops with his head above hers. On his knees,

he bends to look down at her. From CLAIRE's
POV, CONNOR's face is upside-down.)
CONNOR

You know my name. Here...

(CONNOR gently lifts CLAIRE's head and rests
it between his knees.)

CLAIRE (Smiling up at him as though he were a
loved grandson returning from a long trip abroad
who dropped on surprise at her doorstep.)

What a handsome heartbreaker, you are, Connor. And yes, I do know your name. I know all
their names. I heard it all but I could force not a single word from my mouth. Such an
interesting bunch. Half the time I wanted their bodyless voices to shut up for being so
criminally nonsensical, but the other half I wished I were able to prod them to say more.

(CLAIRE takes a long, loud inhale and exhale.)

Ahh... and Grace. Lovely, loving Grace as always. A being of love if there ever was one,
indeed. Oh, but I'm mad at her now. She'll sure suffer my wrath once I hop the gap!

CONNOR

What for?

CLAIRE (Sounding affronted.)

For hiding her Truth of Love from *me*, of course!

CLAIRE (Suddenly gentle-voiced, twisting back
her neck to see CONNOR better.)

Wasn't that sublime?

CONNOR (Nodding.)

It was.

CLAIRE

How gracious of her to let you in on it. And how gracious the world for letting me eaves-drop
on you two. Though I wish I could have learned her secret truth sooner, for it is tantalizing
and wonderful, but I fear the ferryman is coming my way, and he's not being lazy about it,
too.

CONNOR (Shaking his head.)

You're injured but that doesn't mean you need to give up on life.

CLAIRE

It's fine, Connor. I had a couple of months of gardening at best anyway – don't ask me what
it is. That doesn't matter. So you see, I was already dead. And right now, right at this
moment with you in this dark cavern, I know it in my ancient heart that I'll be dead much,
much sooner, and yours will be the last words I hear.

CONNOR

What are you saying?! How can you know that?

(The smartphone, the single light source, gradually turns brighter so CLAIRE's and CONNOR's silhouettes become more pronounced. Their voices from here on out are amplified further.)

CLAIRE

Because, Connor, all my life, everything I experienced, everything I said and did from womb to tomb suddenly makes perfect sense, all at once, all together, in a beautiful amalgamation of infinite depth ad infinitum. The world is revealing itself to me, and somehow I can put none of it to words for your aching heart. That's how I know I'll be cold very, very soon. Even if the World Soul were to grant me a new, young, healthy body at this very moment, I will still die shortly after and nothing can stop it. And now be quiet, and listen. I want to speak. Father Time and Mother Nature are with me now, so take heed.

(CONNOR bends his torso lower so his face is nearer to CLAIRE's.)

CLAIRE

Your new friends, whom I'll shortly join, talked of God. God, God, God. Across an epoch every other nobody told me what God is and what God wasn't. Well, allow this learned, ancient, young, dying nobody tell you a thing, too. It's my turn now and I'll have my bit.

(A low and ongoing rumbling begins to rise.)

CLAIRE

God is the blooming flowers, He's the dancing grass in the meadow, the mountain dominating the valley and the stars watching over it. He's there when you smile at someone you care for and He's there when you bury a loved one. And He's also there in the one-eyed cat digging through trash. And maybe it's not even God, but the world, or a mindless, senseless void beneath a veil draped over our eyes, or perhaps they are all one and the same, and maybe it's all in our imagination. But the *feeling* of it, young Connor, Connor of the ancient mind, that deep unexplained feeling reaching out to us from across an impassable chasm – that's real. You know that whatever it is it's there with you when you stroll through a morning forest or – and I truly hope this comes to pass, dear – when you hold your newborn in your arms. My tutelage for you is this. Stop trying to make sense of this existence. Delving into absolute meaning is to play with madness. There's no single human truth to be grasped in this world. Do not tire your magnificent head, let the *feeling* of it all guide you – that's your own creator calling at you. Learn to connect with people, talk to them, with yourself, with anyone and everything around you – learn to love them and you. Don't ask me why that works – you witnessed today that it does – and don't ask me how you do that. The best person to teach you how to do that is you. Others can point you towards a path, but to where it leads no one knows. Explore on your own, Connor. Listen to the string of your soul. Try this and try that and try until you get it, find your path across this field of the living. Don't dawdle. Start now. Let this morbid concrete womb rebirth you.

(CONNOR lets out a small whimper. The ongoing rumbling subsides.)

CLAIRE

Are those tears for me?

(CONNOR nods and sniffs.)

CLAIRE

Don't cry. I lived a good life. And I die happy. Not even for my orphaned garden do I weep, for from its decay new, wild life will rise. I'm at peace. Just like Grace.

CONNOR

Right...

(CLAIRE extends a shaky hand toward CONNOR, who grabs it by the palm and holds it caringly.)

CLAIRE

Death is here. The final petal of my life is dropping. Say something, Connor, so I have an echo to accompany me onto eternity.

(CONNOR's in inner turmoil, chest heaving erratically.)

CONNOR

... I love you!

(CLAIRE smiles.)

CLAIRE

That's it, Connor. That's it...

CONNOR

I love you all!

(CLAIRE gasps loudly, keeping on smiling.)

CLAIRE

Be a flower, young Connor.

(CLAIRE takes a raspy inhale.)

Bloom...

(CLAIRE inhales very weakly.)

Dance in the wind..... and depart...

(CLAIRE exhales, her hand drops limply to the concrete. CONNOR sits as he is.)

(CONNOR bows his head so his and CLAIRE's foreheads touch. He begins to hyperventilate. A small whimper escapes his throat. A growing rumbling ensues.)

(CONNOR starts crying. The rumbling is growing louder and louder.)

CONNOR

I'm ready. I'm at peace.

(The rumbling grows to deafening levels.)

CONNOR

Take me!

(Plumes of dust and debris fall from the ceiling.)

CONNOR

I am not afraid to die! I love and I am loved!

(A chunk of debris falls down in the background and covers the phone. Total darkness follows.)

CONNOR

I'm not afraid! Here, take me! Take me now or go away! You're wasting your time anyway!

(CRASH! CRASH! Silence for 10 seconds.)

(A piece of debris on the right side of the scene falls and a beam of strong light punches in.

CONNOR, sat as he was earlier and facing the light beam, is bathed in light punching in through the opening.)

FIREFIGHTER'S VOICE

Is there anybody in there?

(CONNOR bows his head down to look at CLAIRE's dead, smiling face.)

CONNOR (Hushly.)

I'm alive.

FIREFIGHTER'S VOICE

Hello?

CONNOR (To CLAIRE.)

Thank you, Claire.

(CONNOR kisses CLAIRE's forehead.)

I am alive. I *am* alive!

(CONNOR looks up at the ceiling and bellowing not to the firemen.)

I – AM – ALIVE!

Stay right there!

FIREFIGHTER'S VOICE

I am alive.

CONNOR (Head bows back down to CLAIRE's face. He continues serenely, happily.)

THE END

Connor, to himself: "I'm alive..." he's shaking on all fours, staring into Claire's dead, smiling, peaceful face.

Connor, shouting to the firefighter: "I'm Alive! ... I'M ALIVE!"

"