THE LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

(A play in two acts)
CHARACTERS

Eva – 35 – Believes she has had near death experience

Aaron – 40 – Devout Christian

Frank – 45– Irreverent non-believer

George -45 – Comical con man.

Professor Prentice -55– Researcher

Dr. Michael Phillips – 36 – Researcher

Gerald Foote– Hospital Administrator (simply a voice offstage for phone conversation)

SETTING: Stage is split 50-50 between research room which has three chairs in a half circle on a small rectangular rug. A computer with a microphone and speaker is on the table.

Waiting room has four chairs positioned around a table with magazines and a large artificial flower. There is a coffee pot on a pedestal to stage right of the table and chair.

Mozart's Symphony #21 could play at intervals during the performance or at beginning and end plus intermission.
Scene One, Act I

Stage is totally dark as voice of Eva in chair facing the two seated doctors relates her NDE. Eva is sitting in a chair center of research room facing audience. Professor Prentice is on stage right of room facing her and Dr. Phillips stage left also looking at her. Both have notebooks, a tape recorder and a computer with speaker and phone on a small table in front of Eva. There is a pitcher of water and glasses on the table.

EVA

“I remember lying on the operating table with my eyes closed., I was nervous, of course, cancer is serious stuff, my stomach you know, and they thought it had metastasized too. I wondered if I would die right there on that operating table during the operation. I felt a chill of fear run through my body. I wondered how my husband would take it, I knew my daughter would care and that comforted me, but then I started to worry about what would happen to her. Cancer runs in my family, my mother and father died from it. I wondered if my daughter would inherit the gene or whatever it was that caused it and someday she would be on the operating table like I was now. I had all these depressing thoughts. I wanted to stop thinking about it, so I opened my eyes and sort of raised my head a little and looked around me. The lights bothered me for a moment but then my eyes adjusted. Everyone was very busy, there must have been a half dozen of them in the room, all dressed in those green gowns or whatever you call them., scrubs that's it scrubs. Everything seemed very bright, very clean, very efficient, somehow that was reassuring to me. I saw my surgeon talking with a nurse, he looked over at me when he saw I was looking at him and waved. I couldn't wave back but I think I smiled at him. I felt calmer then, everything seemed so normal.

One doctor came and bent over me, he told me his name....Doctor Wright and he said he was the anesthesiologist. He was nice, with a soft, soothing voice, told me he was going to put this mask over my face and in a few minutes I would drift off to sleep, said he would keep monitoring me. “Okay?” he asked. “Right”, I said, You can call me Bill he said and we both laughed.” I asked him if the anesthesia would make me sick afterwards and he said that it usually didn't. He asked if I had any more questions and when I said no he put the mask on my face and I looked up at the bright lights above me, they blinded me and I closed my eyes.

“That's all I remember, It seemed I went down very fast. I don't know how long I was like that but it didn't seem long at all until I woke up, sort of like falling asleep at home in bed right away and then waking up shortly after-words. I always do that. I was surprised, “shouldn't I be asleep?”, I thought, but there I was, wide awake, hearing the talk, mostly medical stuff but some joking around too, I could hear a chuckle now and then. I knew they were working on me but I couldn't see what they were doing. I was very worried that I might feel some pain since I seemed so awake. He didn't give me enough anesthesia I thought. I looked around for him but he was watching the monitor and I couldn't catch his eye. But I wasn't really feeling any pain.

Then, an extraordinary thing happened, my body began to lift slowly upwards and I felt myself rising up toward the ceiling, above everything and everybody, music was playing, I recognized it, Mozart's Concerto 21 in D major, it was all so pleasant, liberating. I looked down and saw that they had opened my stomach up and were cutting away some tissue, “cancerous”, I thought, “they're cutting out the bad stuff”. The whole scene was the strangest I've ever had. I felt like a voyeur watching myself. It seemed so paradoxical.
I don't know how I avoided the overhead lights going up. I saw the anesthesia machine which had tubes running to me, the monitor, the surgical instruments on a table. There were things I didn't know what they were. Then... I saw Doctor Wright and I was shocked to see he was groping the nurse nearest him.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE

(upset) Groping how?

EVA

(hesitant) Rubbing her backside,

PROFESSOR PRENTICE

How did she react? How long did this go on?

EVA

She was smiling at him. It seemed to go on for a couple of minutes while I watched but I don't know how long it went on after-wards because then things changed rapidly. I was being pulled from the room toward something in the upper corner of the room, something shrouded in blackness. I was more startled then frightened and then I entered the blackness. It took me a moment before I realized it was a tunnel, a large circular tunnel, I tried to adjust my eyes to the darkness. I was rushing through it very fast and I was afraid I would hit something. Then I could see a light of some kind, a brightness far down the tunnel.

(One spotlight here on Eva's face)

A subway, I thought at first, a subway tunnel and I'm going through it to somewhere fast, very fast and the light must be sunlight when I come out. I've been on a lot of subway rides, you're in this subway car in a dark tunnel and then suddenly, pop, you're up and out in the daylight. I wasn't scared. I was accepting, it seemed very right, very appropriate, even kind of adventurous. I just had this feeling that something good was happening to me, that this was a trip worth taking.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS

Was the music still playing Eva?

EVA

Yes, yes, it was, always there in the background, the same work, sometimes louder, sometimes softer sort of like when you turn it up or down on the radio.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS

Go on please.

EVA

The light...the light was blinding at first but when I reached it I was able to walk right through it, just as if it was just this very bright enveloping cloud. Then, I saw them. They were all standing there, smiling warmly at me, no not just warmly, lovingly. They were all dressed as I remember them. My parents, were there smiling at me, at first I didn't recognize them because they were so young, like 30 or something the way they were when I was little, it was so strange, looking at your parents when they
are younger than you are, but I kind of liked it too. My uncle, two aunts, my cousins all looking so young and healthy, even my little baby brother who died at six months was there but he was a young man, somehow, I knew him right away, tall, handsome, smiling broadly. All of them. I was overwhelmed, (Eva stops here emotional) I'm sorry, just thinking about it...

**DOCTOR PHILLIPS**

That's okay Eva, take your time.

**EVA**

(beat) I'm okay, Doctor, I'm alright now. They all seemed so happy, so serene, so loving. I wanted desperately to join them but there was this distance between us that seemed impassable. When I moved toward them they seemed to step back.

**PROFESSOR PRENTICE**

How far away would you say they were Eva?

**EVA**

That's what was so strange, it seemed like maybe ten feet but it felt like a hundred when I tried to reach out to them like there was this invisible border that I couldn't trespass through. Finally I started to cry, I told them I wanted to join them, to be with them like this forever but they just stood there smiling sadly and shaking their heads. The separation was very painful to me. Why, I said, why can't I be with you? I love you all, why? My mother took one step toward me, “you have to go back Eva, you have unfinished business to take care of there” Her voice sounded just like it did when I was growing up, not commanding or anything, just, just very reasonable. You couldn't argue with her, you just knew she was speaking the truth. Those were the only words spoken to me there.

**DOCTOR PHILLIPS**

Do you have any idea how long you were there Eva?

**EVA**

I've thought about that Doctor Phillips but I have no idea, it could have been minutes or hours, time seemed to stop still.

**DOCTOR PHILLIPS**

Then what happened....after your mother spoke to you?

**EVA**

They began to move back, slowly, smiling, waving goodbye. My mother had tears in her eyes and I was crying too. But as they started to fade away, I realized they were right, I had to go back I had Mary, my little girl to take care of, my work wasn't done yet. I sort of reluctantly resigned myself to it.

**DOCTOR PHILLIPS**

What was the environment like Eva, What did you see around you?
EVA
Oh, this wonderful expanse of green, flowers everywhere, all in perfect bloom, woods, trees in the background, I've never seen anything so gorgeous, so picture perfect. There was water, a lake or something, in the distance, a beautiful blue presence. The air on my face was like caress. There was this wonderful scent of flowers.....(beat)

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
Please continue.

EVA
Suddenly I felt this tremendous force, a pull really, and then I was moving back in the tunnel racing through it the other way. In moments it seemed I was there back in the operating room slowly sinking back to my body, a kind of soft landing. Then I was back in it and everything went black.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Did you see anything on the way down to your body Eva?

EVA
No, it happened so fast, there wasn't time to look. When I woke Doctor Wright and a nurse were there. I felt terrible, my body ached and I had this terrific headache. They asked me how I felt and I told them and they gave me some medication and I fell asleep again.

(Lights up on research room)

EVA
I'm thirsty from all that talking, (drinks some water)

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
How has it been for you since that experience Eva?

EVA
I'm fine, the operation went real well, they believe they have gotten it all out of me. I'll be going back for a follow-up exam next month.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
No, I meant psychologically.

EVA
Oh.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Have you felt any changes psychologically?

EVA
Definitely.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
And?
EVA
I feel funny talking about it Professor Prentice, but I guess that is what this is all about.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Yes it is.
Scene Two, ACT I (Lights switch to waiting room where Aaron is seated, Aaron is reading a book)

(Frank walks in and sits down)

FRANK

Any good?

AARON

What?

FRANK

The book.

AARON

Oh, yes, very interesting all about near-death experiences.

FRANK

Yeah, I've been reading a little about those myself since I got into the study.

AARON

I'm Aaron, so you're in the study too?

FRANK

I'm Frank. Yep, I'm in for better or worse.

AARON

Should be very, very interesting, can hardly wait to get interviewed.

FRANK

So how did you get involved in this Aaron?

AARON

One of the members of my congregation works here and he saw a notice on the cafeteria bulletin board asking for research volunteers and told some of us about at church. I jumped at it because I thought it might help me understand my experience better.

FRANK

Christian?

AARON

Yes.

FRANK

What brand of Christian are you?
AARON
Brand? What kind, what denomination you mean, I'm Evangelical...more or less

FRANK
More or less?

AARON
Well, I mean I have faith in the important beliefs but, you knows, doubts about some.

FRANK
I see. So you think this is going to help you huh? What was your experience like anyhow?

AARON
It was the best experience of my life. Ironic isn't it, a near death experience is the best one of your life. I wouldn't trade it for anything. It's made me a different person.

FRANK
What was so cool about it?

AARON
I saw my whole life in review, it was incredible, like a video in blazing fast forward, almost simultaneous if that makes sense, more conceptual than visual really, you're judging yourself, kind of like giving yourself a grade on a very long test.

FRANK
How did you make out?

AARON
Okay, I think I passed, not perfect, of course, but they accepted it.

FRANK
They?

AARON
Maybe I shouldn't be telling you all this.

FRANK
It's okay with me. I don't think there are any rules against it.

AARON
I went to the other side.
FRANK

The other side of what? Oh, Heaven.

AARON

Yes, can you believe it?

FRANK

(ignores question) How long were you there?

AARON

I have no idea, could have been minutes or years, time didn't mean anything, it didn't seem to exist.

FRANK

But you were only in the operating room for a limited period of time, hours right?

AARON

Yes, that's true but in that realm it could have been eternity.

FRANK

Weird

AARON

I know it’s hard to comprehend.

FRANK

Yeah, it sure is. Who did you see over there, up there, on the other side or wherever it is?

AARON

You won't believe this either.

FRANK

Probably not.

AARON

Jesus and his disciples.

FRANK

How do you know you weren't just dreaming all this?

AARON

No, no I know what dreams are like, this was different, this was real.

FRANK

Yeah?

AARON

You're skeptical.
FRANK

Yeah, Aaron, I guess I am.
Scene Three, ACT I  (Lights back to Eva and research room)

EVA
What's changed? Lots. I have this special sensitivity. I don't know if you would call it ESP but I seem to be able to anticipate things that I didn't before. Phone calls, I often know who's calling before I pick up the phone, same thing with mail, even email. I seem more perceptive, I feel more intuitively. I'm a lot more compassionate than I was before. Experiencing death can put things, life into perspective. I can see things, people so much more clearly than before and....and...you may not believe this but I have no fear of death anymore.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Very interesting.

EVA
And before this, this experience I was definitely frightened by the thought of dying even though I am not old yet. I worried about this and that: illness, car accidents, even disasters. I would have bad dreams. I don't have those anymore, I just am not afraid of it anymore Professor Prentice. I mean I still fear being sick and in pain and all that, the cancer coming back. I don't want to die hard. I would miss people, my daughter but since I've discovered what death really is I'm no longer afraid of it.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Interesting.

EVA
This has been the most profound experience of my life, its like for the first time in my life everything is in perspective, everything makes sense to me now.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
Are you a religious person Eva?

EVA
I'm more a spiritual person Doctor Phillips. I'm not much into institutional religion anymore. But I do believe in certain things. I am very spiritual.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
Such as....

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Let me continue my line of reasoning, Doctor Phillips, if you don't mind.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
I just thought it important to....
PROFESSOR PRENTICE
I know, I know, but let me pursue my questions.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
I defer to you Professor Prentice.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Thank you, now how have your relationships been since your experience Eva?

EVA
Well, not so good, I mean people, my friends are glad I'm okay but...

But?

EVA
Well, when I tell them about my experience, they think that...I'm weird, or something, not all of them, of course. And my husband, well, he thinks I'm losing it, thinks it's all a dream, dismisses it out-of-hand. I resent that. I know what I've experienced. I know the difference between reality and a dream. We've had some rather heated discussions, he just doesn't see it, he thinks I'm being self-indulgent.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Self-indulgent?

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
I think she means intellectually. (Professor Prentice shoots him a look)

EVA
Exactly. He doesn't share a lot of my thoughts and feelings especially on this one. I feel that demeans me and my experience. I think this is really threatening our relationship which I guess was rather tenuous anyhow. It's sort of an issue with a lot of other issues underneath it. I guess he picked this one to express his dissatisfaction with our relationship and I respond in kind. We're on shaky grounds.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
I see.

EVA
And what really bothers me is that he is influencing, Mary, my daughter, to doubt my experience also. She really looks up to him and when she hears him discredit it she believes him not me. I mean she doesn't say anything but I can tell, its pretty obvious. She is wondering about me too.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
Sounds as if it might be a good time for some family counseling Eva.
EVA
I've thought of that but right now, I don't know, we are so far apart. I'm not sure it would do any good. One of the reasons I signed up for this, this research was just to make sure I could talk about it and people wouldn't think I was crazy.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Many, many thousands of people have had similar experiences Eva. They weren't crazy nor are you.

EVA
I know I've read that but still, I've read about other near-death experiences but....still when you run up against people who....

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
You have to go by your own experience Eva.

EVA
(Nods) I guess so. I do. I am trying to do that.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Well, I think that about does it for you right now, thank you Eva.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
Thanks very much Eva, this interview is nice contribution to our research study.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
We may like to talk to you again.

EVA
That's fine. Bye now. (Eva starts to leave but then stops) I want to tell you one more thing that happened to me up there.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
What was that Eva?

EVA
When I was there I saw my two cousins, as I said, but one of them was still living and I remember later, I didn't think of it at the time that Roger, that was his name, shouldn't have been there, I couldn't figure out why he was. When I got out of the hospital, I was home about a week or so and my husband mentioned to me that Roger had died the day I entered the hospital.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Fascinating, thank you so much Eva, a very important point.

EVA
You're welcome, well bye again.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
Bye Eva. (Eva leaves stage right to waiting room)
PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Quite convincing, an intelligent articulate woman, what strikes me again and again is how these people's lives are changed so profoundly by their near-death experiences.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
Yes, that is interesting, but their reactions, although strong, aren't terribly different than any of us who have faced a near escape with death, right?, we start looking at and appreciating life differently and sometimes that can be quite profound too. Cardiac patients go through this all the time, gunshot victims too.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
She was very clear and concise on her perceptual changes after her NDE.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
Assuming she actually saw it what do you think of the anesthesiologist and the nurse?

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
I don't know what to think of it, highly irregular.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
Not too professional but perhaps he was just being playful.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
For a couple of minutes or more? Maybe let's hope so.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
Her “heightened sensitivity” bothers me somewhat.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Because...

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
Well, I mean if we know the context of our lives, what we're currently doing, who we are in contact with, what sort of things are going on whether it be socially or business it's not terribly clairvoyant to know what sort of phone calls or mail you are expecting. I get a call from my mother every Saturday morning around nine I can pretty much figure that's her calling when the phone rings at that time on Saturdays. If I leave a message on an answering machine for someone I can figure on a return call from that person in the near future. Eva would have to keep a record on her hits and misses to make her point of being clairvoyant. That was a pretty general statement.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
I think she was being more specific than that.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
We didn't establish that. It seems to me normal anticipation of common events rather than precognition of any kind, Professor Prentice, These reports of clairvoyance really seem to follow the subjects' propensity toward the paranormal before their hospitalization. I mean we have some studies supporting that characteristic.
And we have studies questioning that conclusion. Wait a minute Michael, you heard her last report about her cousin. She actually saw her dead cousin without being aware of his death at the time she was experiencing her NDE. She learned about it later. That’s something we can confirm.

I'd like to do that.

Perhaps we can get some collaboration from her husband and the death certificate of her cousin.

That would be interesting.

“Interesting”. Always the skeptic, I've always found the problem with skeptics Michael is that they have trouble opening their minds to go beyond their skepticism.

Really, I've always found a too open mind lets in too many drafts.

(suppressed anger) Really!

I would have liked to have pursued her beliefs Professor Prentice, what a person believes can have a great influence on what they think they experience, religious experiences, for example. I mean it’s clear that in our culture many people are acclimated as children to supernatural beliefs, an after-life if you will, the bible in Genesis talks about darkness for six days and then on the seventh there is light so light becomes an element of good in people’s minds. There is cultural conditioning going on here. There’s even a tunnel tornado in the Wizard of Oz which leads to the Good Witch. That kind of influences impacts people at an unconscious level. They go into the operating room with a conscious or unconscious mindset created by all these things. Studies have confirmed this.

We all know about acculturation Doctor Phillips.

But we don't know her belief system.

(annoyed with discussion) Perhaps we can go into that next time to your satisfaction, Doctor Phillips.

Fine!
Scene Four, ACT I

(Aaron and Frank are seated there, Eva is standing there in front of the two men).

FRANK

So how it did it go Eva?

EVA

Very good, they were very nice.

FRANK

They give you any idea of what happened to you?

EVA

What do you mean Frank?

FRANK

You know, what caused it, the anesthesia or something like that.

EVA

Sorry Frank, nothing like that, I did the talking, they did the listening, they accepted what I said as my experience.

FRANK

Well, sure, its your experience we all know that but what caused it is the question, isn't that what this study, this research is all about?

EVA

I'll leave you to explore that Frank, I'm content with my experience as is. Wait till they hear yours, we'll see what answers come up then.

FRANK

Well, just remember, you talked me into this. I've already got the answers as far as I'm concerned. I've done some reading about this stuff and to be honest I can't see it. I mean you've got people who have this so-called near-death experience who go through a tunnel and wind up seeing their doctors on the other end (laughs) I mean, give me a break!

AARON

Then what are you doing here Frank?

FRANK

I had an experience, they want all kinds of experiences whether you believe in it or not. Shit, I have near-death experiences on the expressway once a week.

AARON

Seriously.
FRANK
It's hard for me to take this stuff seriously Aaron. Get this. There is a tribe in New Guinea that believes ancestors give them technology. Their near death experience consists of computers, autos, cell phones, ipads, big screen TVs…

EVA
Very funny Frank.

FRANK
I'm serious, I read this in a journal, these people think spirits are in these technologies (beat)
Sometimes I do too especially when they screw up.

EVA
I would like to read that article.

FRANK
I'll email it to you. Have to wonder what these folks think when their computers crash.

AARON
(sincerely) They likely have angered their ancestor who leaves them.

Yeah, sure.

EVA
You may have already guessed this Aaron. but Frank has been a devout doubter, if I can use that description, ever since I have known him. Since what? Third year of college Frank?

FRANK
Second actually but we didn't see each other much then.

AARON
A doubter I was getting that impression, that's too bad.

FRANK
(annoyed) What's too bad about it?

EVA
Okay guys....

FRANK
I'm getting a little tired of waiting out here.

EVA
No, but they have time for more interviews.

FRANK
Harry picking you up?
No he's at a conference in Chicago. I drove, it's no problem, he probably wouldn't have driven me if he was here.

I hate to say I told you so Eva, but remember I said, you shouldn't marry the guy.

I remember. He's got his good points.

I'm sure, but not enough of them.

I'm trying to balance it out.

I know that but I don't like the way he treats you.

Don't worry about it Frank.

I do Eva, I do.

Thank you for caring Frank.

(Enter George)
Hi folks, is this the Near Death group?

We're getting nearer to it every day.

Frank! Yes it is, are you a study volunteer?

Yes, I'm George, they said not to use last names.

Nice to meet you George, I'm Eva, this is Frank and this is Aaron.

Good meeting you George.
Hi Aaron. Hello Frank

Welcome to the near death cult George.

Thanks, are they interviewing now?

Yes, yes they are. Are you scheduled for today?

Yeah, this afternoon. I can't wait to tell them about my OBE.

Really! Well, you can tell us first if you want.

That's okay?

Sure George lay it on us.

It's hard to believe.

My whole life has been hard to believe, go ahead George, try us.

Well, while I was supposed to be under I was actually having an out-of-body experience and hovering (gesturing to group) meaning I was floating above the operating table.

We know what hovering means George, we're a pretty sophisticated group.

Oh, good. Well there I was hovering and the medics they're not operating on me they are pumping me out and feeding me some stuff.

I don't mean to interrupt George but pumping what out of you?

Well, I hate to admit it but I attempted suicide and drank a lot of whiskey and took some sleeping pills.
Goodness!

Could have gone to hell for that George.

Must have had a hell of a hangover.

Yeah, I guess I was lucky a friend found me.

So what happened when you were hovering?

I saw, it's rather embarrassing to tell, I heard the surgeon pointing his instrument at me and saying, “this guy's an alcoholic, his liver looks like a dead fish”

Really?

No!

No kidding!

He did it more than once. The other doctor and anesthesiologist were laughing.

Laughing?

Yeah, one said, “we should have saved the anesthesia, he probably didn't need any.”

Not nice.

Yeah, and the surgeon said, “we could have given hm a pint of whiskey”. And they all laughed again.

Terrible talk.

(smiling) Kind of funny.
ARON
How long did you stay up there hovering George.

GEORGE
I came down after that, they were starting to try to revive me so I had to get back into my body.

EVA
Disgusting!

FRANK
They may have been drinking some of what George had before the procedure.

EVA
You should have reported it George.

GEORGE
Nobody would have believed me.

AARON
George could have died for all they seemed to care.

FRANK
Left to hover all his life, I'm going to hover over and get some coffee.

(Eva joins him at coffee pot)

EVA
Why are you being so flippant about George's experience.

FRANK
I don't know, I have a hard time taking him seriously. He sounds like he's been drinking.

EVA
You have a hard time taking lots of things seriously.

FRANK
I still take you seriously Eva, why don't you dump that jerk. We could try again.

EVA
You know I can't do that, there is Mary to think of and he is not a bad man. He's a good father.....

FRANK
Do you love him?
EVA

Love isn't everything in life Frank.

FRANK

I'm trying to learn that.
Scene Five, ACT I (Back in waiting room, Eva, Frank and Aaron)

EVA
You’re staying Aaron?

AARON
I thought they might call me back.

EVA
They do that sometimes

FRANK
I should be up next. Well I can tell you I didn't see Jesus, Aaron, but I didn't see the devil either.

AARON
I'll be right back, want to use the restroom.

EVA
You're upsetting him Frank.

FRANK
Or maybe he just had to pee.

EVA
Be tactful with him Frank, he is a nice person.

FRANK
Yeah, okay, (beat) Eva did you think about what I said?

EVA
What Frank?

FRANK
Don't what Frank me,Eva, you know what I mean, you and me trying it again. I'd love to have Mary with us.

EVA
Frank it's too complicated for me to think about now. It's just not a simple yes or no there are so many considerations.

FRANK
Only one important one Eva if you love me enough, if there is enough love for you to try it again with me. You did call me about this study didn't you, that wasn't just for the study was it Eva?

EVA
Let's talk about it later Frank
FRANK
(a little upset) Later. When are we going to talk about it later Eva, when?

EVA
Please understand Frank, there is too much going on right now.

FRANK
(resigned) Yeah, okay, later.

(enter Doctor Phillips)

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
Frank you’re up, ready for this?

FRANK
Let’s go.

FRANK
Alright. See you later Eva.

EVA
Good luck Frank.

FRANK
Yeah, I need some of that but not with the interview.
Scene Six, ACT I  (research room Frank and doctors seated)

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Good to have you here Frank, our intake workers indicate your experience was quite different from the usual. Want to get started telling us about it?

FRANK
Sure. Well, I went out right away from the anesthesia. I always do. It takes very little of anything to put me to sleep. I go to sleep after a glass of milk. I sleep on subway trains all the time but know exactly when to wake up and get off at my stop. Talk about out-of-body experiences.

But this experience…

FRANK
I digress, I’m given to digressions, well, anyhow, I did have this sensation of getting up out of my body and leaving the room. It was like an experience I had smoking marijuana one time when I was high. I was sitting in a friend’s apartment and we were smoking joints and listening to jazz when suddenly I hear a saxophone like I've never heard before and then I had this feeling of leaving the room, sitting in the chair but being pulled out into the universe, scared the shit out of me, didn’t smoke anything for years after-wards.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
And back to the Near Death Experience Frank….

FRANK
Sorry, I digress again, back to the experience, so I'm getting pulled somewhere and everything is black.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Were you in a tunnel?

FRANK
No tunnel, just this all enveloping blackness and then suddenly I'm in the city, Chicago, here, and I'm on this deserted street in this downtrodden neighborhood, seemed familiar, like one I've been on before but I just can't think of the damn name, I know this city, better then most cab drivers really, but I can't think of the name of that street but I know I've been on it, I could tell by the buildings, the homes, the store at the corner.

Anyhow, I'm on the street, it's night time and I'm trying to figure out what I'm doing there and I'm frightened because I'm alone and I know it's dark and it's a bad neighborhood. I hear voices and they sound threatening although what they're saying is not clear. I think they're talking about me. I see movements in the shadows by one of the homes and I decide I better get out my ass out of there.
I start walking fast toward the store on the corner. I figure if they have a phone I'll call a cab, I knew there wouldn't be any public transportation at this time in this neighborhood. It seemed to take me a long time to get to the store like I was on a treadmill. Meanwhile I could see more and more activity in the shadows and the voices getting meaner and louder.

When I got to the store it was open but empty. There was pay phone on the store in front of it but when I reached into my pocket it was empty too. I saw a cash register but I was afraid to go to it in case the owner showed up. I didn't know what to do. Then I thought I would dial 911 and I did but the phone was dead and I hung up. The shadows were coming at me fast now so I started to run. I ran and ran up one street and down another.

Everywhere I went it was deserted, it was like I was the only person alive in the city. No one on the streets, just empty cars, all the lights in the building off, this sense of danger, the darkness. No moon to speak of, the sky looked jet black, I couldn't see any clouds at all. I figured it must be late at night or early morning but when I looked at my watch it was only 9pm. I ran and ran for what seemed to be miles and the shadows finally disappeared.

I was downtown, Michigan Avenue. I felt better but there was still no life. Nothing, all the street lights, the neons were out, no lights from the office buildings, nothing. I was scared out of my mind not my body. I thought I had died. I was thinking this was my private hell, I start thinking about my past life, some of the screw-ups and regrets but even then I couldn't quite buy this was the end. And I wanted to go on living. I just felt something was terribly wrong with the city but couldn't figure out what. I thought it must be a blackout or something, that consoled me, but I wasn't sure it was true.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS

So then what happened Frank?

FRANK

Then I try to lighten up a little I figure it might be a holiday too, (laughs) made sense at the time, so I go over to State Street to see if there is anything or anyone over there. There's always somebody on State Street even if they are sleeping on the sidewalk. But nothing, not a damn thing. Now I'm really spooked, I've never been this scared before. I don't know what to do, I stand at State and Congress and look at the library. I see there is this deep dark darkness at the entrance and walk over to it. I figure darkness got me into this mess and maybe darkness will get me out. Damned if it didn't as I drew near it sucked me in like a giant vacuum and enveloped me. And then bang I was back in my body in the operating room and the nurse was asking me how I was doing. I wasn't in a good mood so I said something like how does it look like I'm doing? She blew it off, probably gets that half the time.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS

So now that you've had time to integrate this experience what do you think about it.

FRANK

Nothing but a bad dream as far as I'm concerned. It was vivid as hell and very, very real but it was a dream nonetheless. I've had a lot of very realistic bad dreams, most of them are. You know those dreams when you think it's all over and then you wake up and you're grateful as hell that it was just a dream. That's the way I felt about it then and that's the way I feel about it now. I've had reoccurring death dreams, very, very scary, I've had dreams about flying, dreams about being chased, most of my dreams are bad. I have these dreams, lucid dreams they call them where I am half in and
(continuing)

half out, I know I'm dreaming but I'm not awake either. When I wake up I'm not sure what is real and what is the dream for a few minutes.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
But this whole experience wasn't real to you Frank?

FRANK
I didn't come back with any souvenirs did I?

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Are you normally depressed?

FRANK
Who's normally depressed?

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
I mean....

FRANK
Yeah, I know what you mean, no, I mean I consider myself a realist, which might be a delusion in itself, and realism brings with it some tough feelings but no, I can't say I'm normally depressed, I have my ups and downs like everybody else but nothing all that bad for any length of time.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
How or has it changed you or your life Frank?

FRANK
Not a damn bit. Well, when I go to bed at night I kind of hope I don't have that dream again but my dreams are not all that pleasant anyhow as I said so I guess I can live with it if I do. What bothers me most of all is I still can't think of the name of that damn street. I know I know it.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
Well, maybe it will come to you one of these days....or nights. Anything else you'd like to say about it all Frank?

FRANK
Not really. Next time I have a by-pass I'll ask for a local anesthesia (laughs).

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
Okay Frank that will do it for now, thanks for your participation, it adds another dimension to our study.

FRANK
No problem. You through with me for today.

DOCTOR PRENCTICE
Yes, we are.
FRANK

See you later.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS

Okay Frank.

(Frank returns to waiting room)

DOCTOR PHILLIPS

Well, he's a pretty good example of a negative NDE wouldn't you say Professor Prentice?

PROFESSOR PRENTICE

Yes, definitely, there are some of those. Would be intriguing to understand why. It might have to do with the personalities of the patients or their life history.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS

Well, from my experience and others it is clear that the context of one's life, preconceptions, especially religious ones have a strong influence on NDEs. Frank is obviously an atheist and saw no deceased relatives, supernatural beings, etc. They simply aren't part of his life philosophy. He's a down-to-earth guy in every sense of the word.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE

I would have to agree with you on that Michael. Buddhists see Amida, pure light, Hindus go to Rig-Veda perpetual light. Muslims to Mohammad. Apparently Atheists go to dark places.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS

I guess that's what realism triggers. Hey, we finally agree on something. (both men laugh)

END OF ACT I
Scene one, ACT II

(Back in research room)

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Hello George, I'm Professor Prentice, this is Doctor Phillips, thank you for participating in the research.

GEORGE
Sure thing.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
We've reviewed the screener's report which said you were admitted as a suicide attempt, is that correct?

GEORGE
Yes.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
So you deliberately took a number of sleeping pills after drinking rum all night?

GEORGE
As I recall. 150 proof rum so I'm a little vague on what happened. But when I was discharged I noticed the pills in the bottle were less. I don't sleep too well when I drink too much so I take pills sometimes.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
So it could have been an accident as opposed to a suicide attempt.

GEORGE
(smiles) Suicide gets you through the ER faster.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
You been there before.

GEORGE
Right.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Tell us about your NDE experience George.
GEORGE

(Anthony animates all his experience, standing, mimicking hovering, gesturing his NDE throughout the interview)

Well, there I was on the table, dead to the world, (laughs as he realizes what he says) and suddenly I was wide awake, could see and hear everything said and done in the room. I began to get up, rise up in the air, I hovered there for awhile and watched while they pumped me out, kind of disgusting really. I was shocked. I hung up there for awhile but then slowly I was pushed into this long, dark tunnel. As I went through it my whole life passed before me.

Really, how did it look?

GEORGE

(Cavalierly) Not all that bad, really, some x-rated stuff but nothing all that bad. Then I saw this bright light, sort of like a searchlight, at the end of the tunnel. When I got there I knew I was on the other side.

The other side?

DOCTOR PHILLIPS

PROFESSOR PRENTICE

You want to continue to take this Doctor Phillips?

If that's okay with you.

GOVERNMENT

Go ahead.

You know, Heaven.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS

Heaven, how did you recognize it as Heaven George?

GEORGE

Oh, angels, harp music, singing, lots of holy looking people reading bibles and stuff.

Reading bibles?

DOCTOR PHILLIPS

GEORGE

And Jesus was there.
What was He doing?

Preaching.

To the choir? (beat) What did he look like?

He had a long beard, mustache, lots of hair. Long white robe, sandals, sort of how he looked in the movies.

What language was he speaking in?

Didn't catch that.

How close were you to him?

I could almost touch him (gestures with hands) He was that close

Did he speak to you?

Yes. He knew I had tried to commit suicide and he told me that was a sin and I should repent or the next time I died I would go to hell. I told him I understood and that I wouldn't do it again. He blessed me and told me he forgave me and said to go and sin no more. I said I wouldn't and that was it. I went back into the tunnel and back into the operating room and into my body.

So apparently he was speaking in English. How has this experience changed you George or has it?

I'm a lot more spiritual, I pray a lot more, go to church on Sundays.

Still drinking.

(smiles) A little, now and then.

I see. Are you working now George
GEORGE
I've been unemployed for some time, economy you know.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
So the $500 for participation in the study will come in handy.

GEORGE
Everything helps

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
I don't have any other questions

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Nor do I, you can go now George.

GEORGE
You're finished already?

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Finished.

(George sheepishly exits)

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
What did you think of that Professor Prentice.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Clearly a fraud, in it for the money. We'll drop him from the study.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
I wonder how he got by the intake workers.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
He's pretty glib. Let's drop him now.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
This points out the danger of these anecdotal veridical perceptions in NDE's.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Well, clearly his testimony isn't true but there have been any number of reported incidences where NDE's have reported seeing and hearing things while supposedly under anesthesia or near actual death, Out-of-body experiences are quite common.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
But none hold up under close examination. In fact while they are having these OBE's they often report something inaccurately and miss other obvious sightings.
PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Not true Michael, we have some experiences which have been collaborated and look at our Eva's experience with groping and her deceased cousin.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
There have only been a handful of such incidents and I'm not convinced despite the so-called collaboration.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
(annoyed) Just what would it take to persuade you there is some veracity to these reports Doctor?

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
People claim to see all kinds of things during the OBEs. It's usually things they see before they go under or when they come out or what they dreamt about.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Some of them are quite convincing.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
OBE's have been created by electrical stimulation of the temporal lobes. Epileptic seizures create NDEs.

PROFESSOR PHILLIPS
I know that!

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
And I know you've heard about these controlled target experiments they set up at some two dozen or more hospitals where they put up a target sighting so that the patient can spot it during an NDE and report back on it.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Of course, I read all the pertinent literature.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
. Sounds easy, but they've run into problems with the patients and staff seeing them beforehand so now they are putting the targets up there at the ceiling facing upwards because that's where most of the NDE's say they go when they have the out-of-body experience. They even doing electronic stuff with vivid red colors, numbers, signs, words that are changed periodically and again can't be seen even by staff.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
I like the approaches being developed, should come up with some conclusive evidence.... might even convince the likes of skeptics like you Michael.
DOCTOR PHILLIPS
More of the NDE reports of the controlled experiments accurately identifying these perceptual targets would do it for me Professor. When we set up targets in the operating room and the patient has an OBE and sees these targets and reports on them I would have to reconsider my position.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
That would be very interesting.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
Yeah, to me also, but to date no NDE has reported seeing one of the targets. If OBE's exist why haven't they seen these obvious targets up in the operating room?

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
The studies so far haven't been conclusive because the studies unfortunately haven't had many OBE's; I believe we'll be hearing of some target sightings in the future as more data comes in.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
We'll see what develops.

(Gets up and calls out to waiting room)
We're ready for you Aaron, if you're ready for us.

AARON
I'm ready Doctor Phillips, I'm all set to go.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
Okay, let's do it.

(Aaron enters research room)
Scene Two, ACT II (The Doctors in their respective chairs, Aaron in his)

AARON
Fine Doctor, fine,...a little nervous actually.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Of course, perfectly normal, don't worry about a thing, just tell us your experience.

Okay. Where should I start?

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Wherever you feel appropriate Aaron.

AARON
Do you mind if I lie down to do this, it will put me in the mood.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Might be kind of uncomfortable Aaron.

AARON
No, I'll be fine.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
If you'd like.

(Lies down parallel to audience)
Okay, well I was up for a triple by-pass and I was doing a lot praying. I know it's a pretty common medical procedure now-a-days but still one worries. I was more worried about what would happen to my soul after I died then if my body died although I was worried about that too. I was kind of reviewing my life to see if I had been good enough to get to heaven. So I was praying all the way up to the time they gave me the anesthesia. I was still praying when I went under.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Uh,huh

AARON
I have no idea how much time passed but I just woke up, just like that, fully awake. I couldn't figure that out, I knew I was supposed to be under anesthesia. It didn't feel right. And then bang I was lifted up gently but forcefully and pushed up and into this darkness. Before I knew it I was in this dark round tunnel moving through it really fast.

(Aaron sits up he is animated in his descriptions)
PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Did you see anything before you left the operating room?

AARON
No as I said this happened so fast I didn't have an opportunity to see anything.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
What were you feeling at the time Aaron?

AARON
I'm not sure I felt much of anything except complete surprise.

No fear?

AARON
Not that I can recall, but things were happening so fast that I hardly had a chance to feel anything until I got to the light at the end of the tunnel. Then I distinctly remember thinking, wow, so this is what death is like, what have I been worried about. Everything was wonderful, I felt wonderful too. There was a peace, a serenity I've never felt before, music was playing, everything seemed so rich, the fields, the sky so blue, that puzzled me I hadn't expected a sky in heaven....

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
So you thought it was heaven, how could you determine that Aaron?

AARON
Well, I didn't know for sure until I saw Him.

Him?

AARON
Jesus, of course, there he was just like I had imagined, just like I had always seen Him depicted. I thought, wow, he is just like all his pictures. The beard, the long flowing robes, the penetrating eyes, the magnetism. I was spellbound. And He was surrounded by others in robes too, I figured they were disciples, I may have recognized some from pictures of the last supper or something like that. They all seemed holy because they all had this, this powerful presence, I can't describe it really, different from anything I had ever felt on earth.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Did you speak to each other?
AARON
I was speechless. Overwhelmed, I couldn't even move let alone talk. They just stood there smiling in this very kind, loving way. I never felt that kind of warmth before not even from my parents, or wife or kids. I was filled with this love, this caring. That gave me the courage to ask them if I could join them. I want to be with you I said. I want to stay here with you. They gathered together and talked. I thought that they might be discussing whether or not to let me join them. Some of them looked at me as they spoke. Finally Jesus stepped out and forward two steps. He just shook his head sadly and backed away slowly at first and the faster and faster. It was his angel who spoke. “You must go back Aaron” he said, “you are not ready to be with us now, your time has not come”. I protested again and again yelling but I want to be with you now not later, why not now, let me be with you now, please, please. But I couldn't move my body toward them more than a couple of feet. They were close but at the same time inaccessible. I'm ashamed to say I begged but it was no good, then they all moved further and further away, some waved goodbye and then turned and disappeared. I stood there crying, beginning to grieve but before I could feel anything more I felt that force again pulling me.

Then I was back in the tunnel moving at I don't know how many miles per hour but not as fast as the trip out, in fact it seemed rather slow in comparison. Maybe because I was resisting going back. I wanted to go back to them but I knew I couldn't. Deep down I knew they were right; I had a wife and kids, it would be selfish to leave them for my own happiness no matter how good. Then suddenly I was back in the operating room. I could see they had sewn up my chest, I could see the stitches, I tried to see if I was breathing but I couldn't tell but I figured I must be alive since I was back. I went into my body and felt very bad, sore, thirsty, hurting. I asked for water and told the nurse I was feeling pain. They gave me medication. They told me the operation went well but really I was hardly concerned about that. I knew I was back but I would never be the same again.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
How has it been for you since that time Aaron?

AARON
Good, very good. Once I got back with my family I didn't have any more regrets, I knew that I belonged there for now and I would join them up there sooner or later, that comforted me a lot. The people around me, my congregation they were very impressed with my experience and I even talked about it from the pulpit on one Sunday. I guess I became a minor celebrity because everyone was shaking my hand congratulating me, wanting to talk about the experience again and again. Usually the same questions over and over. It got kind of weighty after awhile but overall it was nice, very nice.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Have you changed personally because of the experience Aaron
AARON
I'm definitely happier, my wife likes that very much. I'm more relaxed, not as uptight as I was before. I think I feel more. I'm much more sensitive much more attuned to what's going around me, to people. I do more volunteer work, I always did some but now I want to do more and more. I'm thinking about changing jobs to do more social work. I'd like to become a missionary but I don't know if I can pull that off with a family and everything. I feel more attached to God than ever. I feel a very real personal relationship with Jesus that I never felt before. I'm very happy I had the experience. It changed my life forever. I'm not afraid of death anymore, people don't believe it when I tell them that but it's true, I just don't worry about dying or death, in fact, at some level I would welcome it. I know what it's like now and as long as I believe I am going to Heaven I have no fear of death. My only fear now is whether or not I do go to Heaven but I believe that as long as I live a good life I will.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Quite an amazing experience Aaron.

AARON
(Aaron sits up) Yes it was.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Any questions Doctor Phillips?

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
You're experience would indicate a belief you may or will go to Heaven in an after-life.

AARON
I don't mean to be presumptuous, that's just what the experience was.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
No, no I didn't mean to imply that at all. I just find it interesting that your experience indicated a Heaven while 18% of near-death experiences are negative, distressing, even hellish.

AARON
That makes sense to me, not all of us are going to Heaven.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
As a child did you suffer any trauma, abuse Aaron?

AARON
No, not really, my Dad was strict, got the strap once in awhile but I usually deserved it.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
(Looks puzzled at Doctor Phillips)

PROFESSOR PHILLIPS
Studies show that NDEs have more trauma than the norm.
PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Really? Okay, Aaron, you can get up now Aaron, you're free to go, thanks very much for your time.

AARON
You're very welcome, my pleasure.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
Thanks Aaron.

(Aaron goes back to waiting room)

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Impressive, striking similarity to Eva's experience don't you think.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
Well, we know many, many of these NDEs are similar, the tunnel, the light, the deceased, Jesus, interesting isn't it that his vision of Jesus was just like the prayer cards he likely saw as a child and grew up with, the beard, the eyes, the charisma etc.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
(somewhat sarcastically) I guess you have to be a religious person to appreciate his experience.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
What was interesting to me was that he didn't see any of his dead relatives there, that's a little different from most stories we hear.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Stories, you do believe these are only fiction don't you Michael?.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
We don't have any evidence that they aren't Professor.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Evidence? When you have many thousands of people all over the world coming forth with these experiences. 4% or more percent of the population in the United States. They are atheists, agnostics, Christians, Hindu, Buddhists, every race and nationality testifying to their near death experience in the most vivid terms and you don't call that evidence Michael? Recorded NDE reports go back centuries before Christ. These experiences don't mean anything, don't signify something? Are we to dismiss them as mere stories, individual hallucinations on a massive scale?
DOCTOR PHILLIPS
But what about the many more millions who have come close to death, near death so to speak and who have not had these experiences, how does one explain those exceptions. As I mentioned only 18% of NDEs experience an after-life. We hear a lot about these anecdotal coincidences because they are good media stuff but nothing about all the experiences which don't happen which is the norm.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
That doesn't invalidate those who do have such experiences.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
I'm sure you would agree it's not objective evidence Doctor, I mean you're the one who pounded that home to me in medical school. Evidence, evidence, evidence, science, science, science.. We have millions of people who believe in ghosts and many who claim they have seen or heard them but that's not evidence. Two-thirds of people claim to have had a mystical or religious experience of some kind. It's no different with these NDEs. It's no different with dreams is it? Flying, excitement, anxiety, pleasure, running from danger, sex, extraordinary experiences of all kind. Some times the dreamer doesn't know if internal or external events are influencing the dream, you can actually hear a telephone ring and incorporate it in a dream. There is a breakdown of boundaries as to what is real and what is a dream. Patients under anesthesia hear the medical people talking at times. There are tremendous commonalities in these dreams but we don't call them evidence of real experiences despite the fact that most of the human race have such content in their dreams... over thousands of years I might add.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
But dreams are often incoherent at least to the dreamer. NDEs are lucid coherent narratives.

PROFESSOR PHILLIPS
There are experts on dreams who would argue they make sense too. And beyond dreams fantasy plays a role in NDEs, studies have shown them to be more absorbed in fantasy than the norm.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
To the experts perhaps but not necessarily to the dreamer. As far as fantasy goes we all do that. The fact that NDEs fantasize more doesn't persuade me. But let's talk about evidence of death, shall we, Michael. There is absolutely irrefutable evidence of patients who have suffered cardiac arrest, no brain-stem activity, a flat-lined EEG, no visible respiration, nothing, who nevertheless survived and had a near-death experience. These people were clinically dead as possible and had no brain activity yet were able to have a conscious experience and live to tell about it. How do you explain that phenomenon Michael?

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
We may well be dealing with a level of consciousness which instruments such as the EEG aren't sophisticated enough yet to pick up. And far as being dead is concerned who knows when a person is truly dead, lack of breath, response, EEG, brain stem activity, there are a number of criteria that define death and it's still controversial.
PROFESSOR PRENTICE
I recognize the complexity of defining death but the evidence we do have is our best current criteria of being death and that's what I'm talking about.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
We simply don't know for sure. Furthermore no one knows when these alleged NDEs are taking place during these long operations, they could be happening when the patient firsts goes under or is coming out, they can take place in literal seconds, it's like when we have dreams, whole sequences occur in seconds, I repeat no one has shown exactly when these so-called NDEs take place during the time the patient is out so to speak. Some patients are under for hours. The NDEs could have taken place before or after the so-called clinical death measurements.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
We know that when we resuscitate patients after being clinically dead they have lucid memories of having experiences during the time they were considered dead. Conceivably consciousness can survive death, if you believe some philosophers and scientists,

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
Some theologians perhaps.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
I said philosophers and scientists.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
A distinct minority. Look, we know brain cells exist within the brain for some time after they are called clinically dead but once those cell dies its over, all over. There is no evidence of consciousness existing after that finality takes place. I believe when one is actually death they are actually dead and can't be resuscitated. Near death isn't death.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
You always have an answer, that's what I remember most about you as a student Michael, always an answer, right or wrong but always an answer.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
I thought teachers like answers Professor. Isn't that why they ask questions, for answers. I believe there are answers to most things if we dig long enough and hard enough to get them. We can't simply dismiss science because it doesn't have all the answers now. The answers to most of these questions are coming as they always have...sooner or later.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
I've learned something you haven't Michael and I may have to teach you that also. Perhaps this research will do that job for me. There are things beyond science and medicine that have their own truth.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
(beat-somewhat sadly) How did we become so different Professor?

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
I don't know, Michael, I don't know.
Scene Three  ACT II

FRANK
How did it go Aaron?

AARON
Very well, I enjoyed talking about it, brought back some good feelings. They are smart people, very interested, in what I had to say.

EVA
They are. I'm glad it went well for you Aaron.

FRANK
What did they say when you told them you saw Jesus.

AARON
Nothing, I did almost all of the talking.

EVA
I'm sure you enjoyed that part too Frank.

FRANK
Very funny, just remember Eva you talked me into this study or research or whatever it is. I'm not sure it's worth the $500 they paying us for our time and effort. I could have written a couple of programs for clients in the time I'm spending here.

EVA
Well, when I found out you had one too, it just seemed reasonable for you to come too.

FRANK
Reasonable?

EVA
I think you are more interested than you let on Frank.

FRANK
I'm interested Eva but not in the study, I'm here because of you and not the study.

AARON
So what was your near death experience like Frank, I told you about mine.

FRANK
I'll tell you about it later Aaron.
AARON
Okay. (beat) So how long did you and Eva stay friends after college.

FRANK
We were more than friends for awhile

EVA
Frank!

FRANK
What he's a big boy.

EVA
That's not the point, that's very personal.

AARON
I didn't need to know that Frank.

FRANK
I'm sorry really, that wasn't necessary. I'm kind of messed up today with this stuff.
Scene Four, ACT II  (Phillips and Prentice in Research room)

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
What time is she due?

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
Right about now. I'll take a look in the waiting room.

(goes looks, returns)

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
Not there yet.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
So your interested in her sighting, her visual perception while she was in the NDE?

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
I want to explore that with her some more.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
We have evidence supporting Eva's experienced

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
Like what?

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
The deceased cousin, I confirmed the date of his death.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
I'm not sure that is so conclusive. (gets up and looks in waiting room) Eva! Come on in.

EVA
I didn't know whether to knock or what.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
No problem, have a seat. How are you doing Eva?

EVA
I'm fine. What was it you wanted to review with me?

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
We just want to explore and clarify a couple of points you mentioned
EVA

Oh, okay, like what?

DOCTOR PHILLIPS

Your deceased cousin Roger for one.

EVA

I saw Roger.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS

I'm sure you did. How old was your cousin when he died.

EVA

Oh, maybe almost 20 years older than me. He was my oldest cousin.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS

And were you aware that he had been quite ill for some time before his death.

EVA

Yes, as a matter of fact I visited him in the hospital. Why.... oh I see you think I saw him as deceased because I knew he might die. Is that the real question here?

DOCTOR PHILLIPS

I'm merely exploring it as a possibility Eva.

EVA

(defensively) All I know is what I saw and that's what I reported.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE

I don't think this line of interrogation proves anything Doctor Phillips.

Merely suggestive Doctor.

EVA

I didn't know he was dead.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE

We accept that Eva.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS

I've arranged for a conference call.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE

A conference call?
DOCTOR PHILLIPS
Between us and Gerald Foote, an administrator in charge of technology at the hospital

EVA
Oh!

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Why wasn't I informed of this Doctor Phillips. I don't like these surprises. Protocol would have dictated your informing me of this and getting my consent.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
I was just able to make the connection right before we met this morning. I didn't want to raise the issue unless it was possible to do it. I apologize. But I was sure you would want the collaboration of a witness to Eva's experience.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
I do, but I am going to note this as departure from research protocol when this is over.

EVA
I hope I'm not causing trouble.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
Not at all Eva, just our little problem. Now let's see if I can get Mr. foote (presses button on computer). Ah, how about that, got him on the first try, Mr. Foote can you hear me ok? Good? I'm here with Professor Prentice, my research colleague and Eva. Yes.

(Phillips is using a speaker phone, someone offstage can do the speaking)

GERALD FOOTE
Hi Eva, how you doing?

EVA
Fine, Mr. Footet, just fine, thanks to your hospital and the great doctors.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
I just have a few questions on what happened in the operating room during the time Eva was in there.

GERALD FOOTE
Of course.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
I've related to you the visual experience Eva had of the staff during her Out-of-body experience, her belief she witnessed some physical contact between a doctor and a nurse.

GERALD FOOTE
Yes.
Knowing that was a highly irregular issue I waited so as to give you time to investigate the matter, have you concluded that investigation?

Yes, I have.

You questioned the staff involved?

That wasn't necessary.

I don't understand, I thought you said you investigated, how could you investigate without…

Let me explain. Chicago Hospital decided last year to join a new pioneering program which puts cameras in the operating room.

Cameras!

Right. The belief and hope is that they will be able to be an excellent training aide for new personnel as well as a tool for surgeons and staff to review their work, noting any errors with a view to improve skills and improve patient care.

So your camera was running throughout Eva's operation, you recorded everything that went on.

That's correct.

(leaning forward) And the fondling experience?

Didn't happen.

(shouting) It did happen I saw it happen with my own eyes.
GERALD FOOTE
I'm sorry but the camera ran the entire time and recorded all the actions of the participants. It shows conclusively no such thing occurred during your operation.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
I'd like to see that film.

EVA
I don't believe it. It must have gone off for awhile or something, I know what I saw.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
Any chance there was any down time.

GERALD FOOTE
None, we record the start and finish time of every operation and the film agrees with it to the minute.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
That sounds conclusive, any question, anybody?

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
It's possible, isn't it that the angle of the camera might have missed what happened.

GERALD FOOTE
I said camera but we actually have three cameras including an overhead which really precludes missing anything of that nature.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
Okay, I guess that's it. Deeply appreciate your time Mr. Foote.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Why didn't you question the doctor and nurse?

GERALD FOOTE
We felt that would have created undue embarrassment to them and since the film really answered the question their responses would have been irrelevant.

EVA
This is very upsetting.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
Thanks again Mr. Foote.

GERALD FOOTE
You're very welcome.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
I'd like a copy of that film.
GERALD FOOTE
Will get that to you as soon as possible. Bye now.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
Goodbye Mr. Foote, well I guess that's it.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
It's conceivable the hospital manipulated the film in order to protect its staff and the hospital from a lawsuit.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
You'll need evidence to support that suspicion, Professor Prentice.

EVA
I just was so sure....

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Perhaps you saw them before the film started.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
(Angry) Professor Prentice, I have to object to this, you're feeding the research person reasons and suppositions for her behavior. This is completely inappropriate.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Not any more inappropriate then what you just pulled off.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
I'll be filing a complaint with the Ethics Board.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Be my guest.

EVA
If you're finished with me I think I would like to leave now.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
We're finished. Thank you Eva. You're free to see one of the staff research counselors if you need to. I can arrange that.

EVA
I'll be okay. Bye now.
Scene Five, ACT II  (Eva goes to waiting room. Frank is waiting for her)

FRANK
(looks at her) What's wrong?

EVA
Everything. The film doesn't show anything unusual happening.. And the docs, they're fighting in there.

FRANK
I sensed some tension between them.

EVA
It's uncomfortable at times..

FRANK
So there was no groping, fondling, whatever?

EVA
They film the operations at that hospital.

Really?

EVA
You never believed my NDE anyhow.

FRANK
No, we both knew that. Let me drive you home.

EVA
No...I think I'd like to be alone right now. I'll grab a cab.

FRANK
And if I had accepted your experience would it have made a difference for us?

EVA
I don't know Frank, maybe.

FRANK
Maybe.

EVA
I need to go now. Bye Frank.

FRANK
(beat) Bye Eva.
Scene Six, ACT II

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
You're not a scientist Professor Prentice, you're a biased believer, you shouldn't be involved in a study such as this. You're thinking hasn't changed in twenty years, you believe in the same things now that you believed in then despite all the new theories that have been advanced on NDE's.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
And you're problem is that you believe in nothing. And please don't tell me what I should or should not be involved in. I know how to separate my beliefs from my science. And I keep up with developments in the field. I resent your comments.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
There is as little evidence for that claim as the claims by NDEs.

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Don't get personal with me Doctor Phillips I'm not going to tolerate much more of your arrogance.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
I am going to ask the Board to relieve me of this collaboration. (He gets up to leave)

PROFESSOR PRENTICE
Fine with me.

(Exit Doctor Phillips)
SCENE Seven, ACT II (Doctor Phillips goes into waiting room and sees Frank who is at coffee machine)

FRANK
Hi Doctor, all finished with the interviews.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
All finished Frank.

FRANK
Want some coffee, it's not bad, relatively speaking.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
No thanks.....wait a minute, on second thought, yeah, I would like some coffee.

FRANK
Cream, powdered cream, that is?

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
Please, no sugar.

FRANK
Good they don't have any.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
Eva's left?

FRANK
Afraid so. (Brings back coffees to the table)

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
You and her?

FRANK
A long time ago but I've never quite gotten over that experience, talking about near death experiences, the end of that one almost killed me emotionally.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
She seemed to be having some difficulties with her husband.
FRANK
Guys a jerk. I don't get it, I couldn't be any worst than him and I might even be better
I think it's this damn NDE of hers. She is so committed to it, she can't live with anyone who doesn't
share that belief with her. She'll probably wind up divorcing him and marry the first guy who accepts
her NDE. Crazy. I could have pretended to believe her, go along with the story but I just couldn't
bring myself to do it. I mean what the hell, what's the big deal in my doing that? But I just couldn't do
it. I'm as crazy as her in my own way. But it looks like it's all over.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
Hopeless?

FRANK
Maybe, maybe if she divorces her husband I could take another shot at it but who knows.

(Professor Prentice walks out and through the room)

FRANK
What's with him?

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
We had some serious disagreements on the research process. We're splitting up.

FRANK
You too.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
Us too. We had...different perspectives on NDEs. It got personal. We couldn't get past that.

FRANK
Eva and I couldn't get past it either but thought you guys had to do that.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
We do, but sometimes, personalities, feelings, strong views on evidence it breaks down, that's why I'm
stepping out. It's best for the study. It'll hurt me professionally because he will have the last word given
his stature in the profession.

FRANK
Evidence. What good is it? I argued with Eva over and over before we came here for the study.
I kept telling here it couldn't have been real but she believed in her experience so strongly it was
impossible to change her mind.

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
She needed to believe it.

FRANK
Yeah, that's it, that's right. Evidence won't change her mind. But why, why does she,
why did she need to believe something regardless whether it's true or not?
DOCTOR PHILLIPS
She needs to believe in something bigger, something beyond her reality which was pretty difficult and her experience provides that for her. It's not just Eva, Frank, we all have our needs to believe some things. We believe what we need to believe not what is necessarily true.

FRANK
What about truth? Doesn't that count for something? We can need to believe any kind of bullshit. What's true has to mean something, doesn't it?

DOCTOR PHILLIPS
Only if you need it to mean something, Frank. That's a rough, tough realization for those of us who work at getting to what we think is the truth but I think that's the way it is whether we like it or not. That doesn't mean we can't keep searching for the truth but it means we have to try to be aware of our emotional needs to believe certain things too. Gotta go, thanks for the coffee Frank, good meeting you, good working with you. Good luck with you know who.

FRANK
Yeah, thanks Doctor Philips, (Phillips leaves)….take it easy

( Frank, (with finality) tosses rest of coffee into the garbage pail, walks away)

THE END