

FILLING EMPTY SPACE

The first act of a two-act play

By

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DRAFT - 7-4-15

DRAFT - 7-6-15

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CHARACTERS

ONE

TWO

THREE

FOUR

FIVE

SIX

SEVEN

EIGHT

NINE

TEN

ELEVEN

All characters are gender-neutral. Change/choose pronouns in dialogue as needed.

When listing cast members in the program, assigning the corresponding character number from the script may be confusing. The playwright recommends listing the cast in order of appearance.

SYNOPSIS

Eleven people find themselves in a white room with no doors or windows, with no knowledge of how they got there or their relationship to the other occupants. One by one they disappear – why?

SETTING

An apparently windowless, doorless room, in which a door will appear as if by magic. May be suggested with lighting or actual walls.

DUAL DIALOGUE

The competing conversations should ebb and peak as needed depending on the importance of the information being delivered in the dialogue.

BLACKOUTS

The blackouts are actually happening in the world of the play in real time, meaning they aren't meant to mark the passing of time but instead are the lights going out in the room in which the characters are trapped. If appropriate, characters can be heard during the blackouts, and/or sound effects if desired by the production.

Lights up quickly. A large room with no windows or doors. No entrance or exit, just blank walls. As the lights come up, eleven PEOPLE are revealed in the room, some standing, some sitting, all frozen in place - some with fear, some trying to take in information. The lights have gone out without warning, and have come back up in the same manner.

ONE

Don't move. Don't move! (Counts) One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven.

SEVEN

I can't take this anymore.

TWO

Did you count yourself?

ELEVEN

I don't think you have a choice.

ONE

Yes, of course I did.

SEVEN

I know, I just...s/he's driving me crazy. And the lights...

THREE

One more down.

ELEVEN

Take a deep breath.

FOUR

We were twelve? I thought it was thirteen.

SEVEN

I've taken enough deep breaths for one day.

ONE

Yes, twelve. I'm keeping very good track.

SIX

Oh, my God, you can't even count.

FIVE

There has to be a pattern.

FOUR

What are you talking about?

ELEVEN

Why are you starting an argument?

SIX

Well, I was talking to myself, first of all. There's nothing to do here but count. I'm just observing s/he can't count.

FOUR

I have to keep saying this or I'll forget; we started out with twenty, nine have disappeared leaving us with eleven.

NINE

Please, both of you, I'm begging you to stop.

FOUR

I can't. I feel like I have to fight to remember each time.

FIVE

Same here.

ONE

That's why I keep counting.

TWO

Where am I? Who are you people?

NINE

What are you talking about? You've been here the entire time.

TWO

I haven't.

NINE

This one done lost his/her mind.

EIGHT

I still can't remember how I got here. I thought maybe each time the lights went off and on again I'd remember. Like that was part of it.

FIVE

Anyone's memory jogged?

ALL

(Improvised "No"s.)

FIVE

Maybe it's determined by where we're standing.

FOUR

Maybe we were supposed to sit?

FIVE

But some of us were standing and some of us were sitting. I don't remember if he was standing or sitting.

FOUR

(to FIVE)

Give me a piece of paper. I'll start keeping track.

FIVE

What makes you think I have paper?

FOUR

You're the only person here with a bag.

FIVE

What?

(Realizes they're carrying a backpack.)

Oh, right. Here.

FIVE pulls a pen and a book out of his/her bag
and hands it to FOUR.

FIVE

The only paper I have is this book. You can use the end pages, but don't mess up the insides. I need it for class. Wait! I just remembered that! I need this stuff for class.

NINE

What class?

FIVE

Uh...

THREE

Have we had our memories wiped?

FOUR

(To FIVE)

Were you standing or sitting?

FIVE

Oh, uh... standing.

SIX

Wow, lucid dreaming. This is a trip.

TWO

(Praying)

St. Antony, please hear the prayer of one who is missing and guide those that would rescue us to our salvation.

NINE

(To SIX)

What are you talking about?

ONE

We've been through this eight times already.

FOUR

Nine.

ONE

Nine times. The common denominator with everyone who disappears is there's no common denominator, and that's because we don't know enough about each other. If we knew important stuff about each other, maybe we could piece this together. Not only why people are being taken, but maybe why we're here in the first place.

THREE

But we've been talking to each other the whole time. We just don't remember after the lights go off.

ELEVEN

You said "taken." Are they being taken? Or are they leaving? Maybe they've earned their way out.

FOUR

(To SIX)

Standing or sitting?

SIX

Standing, but I agree with (Gestures to NINE). This whole counting and recounting thing is getting super annoying, and once I get a handle on this, you're out.

ALL

(Improvised shocked reactions at SIX implying they're somehow in charge.)

EIGHT

You're in charge?

SIX

Well, yeah. It's my dream. So sort of in charge.

TEN

I knew it!

SIX

I mean, who can ever completely control their dreams, right? But I've been working on lucid dreaming. So I think I'm sort of controlling all this. Sort of.

EIGHT

If this is your dream, and if you're in charge, may I stay?

ALL

(Improvised reactions to EIGHT wanting to stay.)

EIGHT

What? There's a certain peace to this... blankness.

THREE

Stockholm syndrome.

EIGHT

I have this feeling I'm normally very... agitated. And this is very calming. So if you're choosing...

NINE

We're not in his/her brain! Trust me, I'd have caused him/her a stroke by now if I was in his/her brain.

ELEVEN

I'm telling you, we're dead. This is purgatory. We're just waiting here for the greenlight for the afterlife. The longer you keep up this dream business, the longer you'll be here.

TEN

That makes so much sense! Wait, but that means there's two ways out of here. (Points up)
And...(Points down).

THREE

If you guys want to keep ignoring the obvious, feel free, but that's probably the point of this experiment.

EIGHT

Experiment? By who?

THREE
(Sarcastic)

By who.

FOUR
Oh, shut up. The government wouldn't pull something like this.

FIVE
How would they even get it set up? That takes, like, people.

THREE
Tuskegee? Thalidomide? Black Ops prisons? Freedom of Information Act. It's all there.

TEN
Oh, my God, I never thought about that! I think s/he's right!

NINE
(To TEN)
So, according to you, we're in a government experiment causing us to dream about the afterlife?

TEN
They all sound so perfect. It's hard to pick just one.

SIX
I have to say, I'm really clever!

SEVEN
Guys, I don't... I can't.. I'm crawling out of my skin. I'm not sure I can take much more of this.

NINE
And yet here you are, taking more of it.

SEVEN
Seriously, I think I'm losing my mind.

TEN
We're all insane! Yes!

SEVEN
My heart's racing.

SEVEN staggers. ELEVEN moves over to SEVEN and holds him/her up.

ELEVEN

I can feel his/her heart beating just touching him/her. You're fine. You're having a panic attack.

THREE

Or a heart attack. Maybe that will get them in here.

SEVEN

Is it true if you think you're crazy, you're not.

SIX

I like that philosophy.

FOUR

We stared with twenty, now there's eleven left...

NINE

Stop doing the math! Reciting numbers isn't going to give them more meaning.

FOUR

It's analysis.

NINE

It's annoying.

ONE

It has to be behavior based. What did number twelve do differently than the rest of us?

NINE

Get himself out of this room...

FOUR

Was he twelve, or nine? He was the ninth to go. Shouldn't we call him Nine?

ONE

We have to think clearly on this.

TEN

But he was the twelfth person here.

THREE

It so hot in here. It's impossible to think.

FOUR

Maybe you're the twelfth person, and the eleventh person disappeared. You have no idea how they've numbered us.

ONE

It's not that hot. It's not even any temperature. Are you sick?

TEN

He said his name! He told us his name. It was William! That's what he did differently!

ONE

Did all the others say their names?

TEN

(Counts on fingers)

William...Ellen...Maria...Avi...um...

FOUR

There was Michael, and...

FIVE

Eloise, that older woman...

THREE

Oh! I think it was Davita and...oh, it's coming to me...

ONE

Lincoln. I think that was a last name.

THREE

Sam.

NINE

Has anyone here said their name? Does anyone know anyone else's name?

THREE

Don't say it! Just point.

EVERYONE looks around uneasily.

FIVE

Maybe that's it then! If we just keep quiet --

Blackout.

Lights up. TWO is missing. EVERYONE else is frozen in their previous positions. EVERYONE waits a beat, then moves again.

ONE

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten.

FOUR

We started out with twenty, ten have disappeared leaving us with ten.

ELEVEN

Who was it?

THREE

That was faster than last time.

SEVEN

The person next to him/her. The one who was praying!

NINE

Are they getting faster? Or was it just that time?

SIX

I've always hated that.

ONE

That was definitely faster.

FOUR

Hated what?

SIX

Big "Look at me!" displays of religion. It's just showing off.

THREE

(About SIX)

What if it's him/her? Who were you standing next to last time? What if s/he's a plant or something?! S/he works for them!

TEN

Are you? With them? Which one? Heaven or the government?

SIX

Oh, stop it!

*

ONE

If they're getting faster we don't have a lot of time.

THREE

Who else were you standing next to?

SIX

What are you talking about? I don't know.

THREE

You don't know? We barely move each time. You remember who you were standing next to.

SIX

I don't! I have a horrible short-term memory.

THREE

Yeah, right.

SIX

I do! When we get out of here I'll show you my SATs. "Not working up to potential" was my senior yearbook quote.

THREE

(Moving away from SIX)

Scoot back if you want to live.

NINE

You're being paranoid.

THREE

I've got reason to be! We all do!

SIX

Shut up! It's not me. Look, I'm moving!

SIX moves around the space. Some try to avoid standing next to him/her, some don't care.

SEVEN

Why would you do that?!

SIX

Oh, come on! It's not me! Wait, why am I arguing with you people? You're all in my dream and my dream is in my brain and if you're going to be in my brain you can't accuse me of killing your friends. That is the rule of my brain!

THREE

Who said anything about killing? We don't know what happens to people when they leave. Interesting that you jumped to that conclusion.

SIX

Gaah! Stupid brain! Stop arguing with me!

TEN

S/he said s/he was in control, maybe we are in his/her dream. S/he doesn't like praying, bam! Gone.

EIGHT

Just let me know what I can do to stay. Seriously. I won't pray. I don't even believe in God.

FIVE

S/he was praying. Maybe that's it.

ONE

It's not religion.

FIVE

Maybe s/he was a pastor or something.

ONE

It has to have more logic than that.

FIVE

Is anyone else here religious?

ELEVEN

I am.

THREE

S/he's anti-religious.

SIX

I am not! It's just so silly when people pray in public.

FIVE

I was standing next to him/her, too, I remember now.

ONE

We can't just wait here for them to take us one by one.

ELEVEN

Don't get paranoid. You're fine.

NINE

Really? That's genius. All this time I thought there was nothing we could do. Let's go, everyone!

ONE

We're in an unimaginable situation. Where are we? Why? Who are we? Does anyone remember anything except their name, if that? We've gone from our lives to this with no frame of reference or context. Ten people have disappeared. It's a puzzle with no clues, and yet I believe it's a puzzle we're meant to solve.

FOUR

There's no new information. How are we supposed to solve a puzzle with no clues?

ONE

We don't need clues.

NINE

You're right. We need a crowbar.

(To SIX)

Got any crowbars in your brain?

ONE

We need logic.

TEN

Yes! I think.

ONE

Wait! I just came to me. We need faith.

Blackout.

Lights up. EVERYONE once again frozen in place. SIX is clutching ONE in one hand and EIGHT in the other. SEVEN is missing. After a beat EVERYONE starts moving again. EIGHT yanks their arm from SIX's hand.

EIGHT

You tried to get rid of me!

ONE

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine.

SIX

No, I tried to keep you. See? It's not me.

FOUR

We started out with twenty, eleven have disappeared leaving us with nine.

FOUR

It was the person next to me.

ONE

I'm still here, so I must be on to something.

NINE

Careful, this room may not be big enough for your head.

ONE

Think about it – I had a really big thought. I made a bold statement, and I’m still here. I’m being rewarded.

THREE

Or punished. Maybe disappearing is actually the prize.

ONE

I prefer to think I’m being rewarded. I can move forward, rather than just wait in fear.

TEN

S/he may be right.

ONE

(Affected by some unseen force.)

It’s just pouring in... I think I have it... Wait...

ELEVEN

If we’re in Purgatory - which is, as you know, my vote - the only thing you can do is wait. That’s kind of the point.

ONE

I got it!

FIVE

Tell us what you got, buddy. You never know when those lights will go out again.

ELEVEN

You said we needed logic and faith.

ONE

Exactly.

FIVE

For what?

ONE

To solve the puzzle that is our existence in this room.

ELEVEN

I have faith. You think I haven’t been praying that we be released?

NINE

(to SIX)

That’s pretty annoying, am I right?

ONE

You're doing it wrong.

ELEVEN

I beg your pardon?

ONE

You're still here.

ELEVEN

Okay, just FYI, having faith doesn't mean everything in your life works out perfectly. We can't know God's plan—

ONE

I'm not talking about a concept--and again, this is all pouring into me, and I'm just trying to keep up, so I apologize if I'm not being clear. Not a concept, or something out there. More like something you can hold, like a tool.

SIX

I have no idea what you're talking about.

NINE

So I guess you're not dreaming this then. Maybe I am...

TEN

I'm not a religious person, but if you don't have faith in something...larger than yourself, what's left? Isn't that what faith is?

ONE

You're talking about faith with a capital "f." I'm talking about it in its pure form. Absolute confidence in something not based on proof.

NINE

Like, I know the latest "Twilight" movie completely sucks, even though I haven't seen it. I have faith in the super boringness of the "Twilight" franchise.

ELEVEN

I understand the definition of the word. But I'm not sure how it applies to our situation without some sort of religious basis or...I don't know, divinity behind it.

SIX

Ugh, does it always have to be so Jesus-y with you people? I blame Sunday school for planting you in my brain.

ELEVEN

Yeah, that's sort of the definition of "us" people. But I resent the implication that I don't have an open mind for these...vocabulary gymnastics.

THREE

(To NINE)

We should check ourselves for injection marks.

TEN

I think I know what you're talking about.

FIVE

I'm lost.

FOUR

And what about the logic part?

ONE

I believe faith is actually a force that can be used to accomplish anything. And within that is logic.

Blackout.

Lights up. EVERYONE again frozen in place.
THREE is missing.

ONE

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight.

FIVE

It was the guy/girl in the gray sweater, the guy/girl who thought maybe it was a reward to disappear.

FOUR

We started out with twenty, twelve have disappeared leaving us with eight.

NINE

(Points up)

We have a winner!

(Points down)

Or a loser!

SIX

S/he seemed a little angry, and I really try to cut free floating anger out of my life.

TEN

You were saying?

ONE

Wait...

FIVE

Spit it out! We don't have a lot of time left.

ONE

Got it. It's about faith in something you construct yourself. You have faith that it will work. You believe it will work. And when it doesn't, one could argue that you weren't using the tool correctly. And that's applicable to everything. You have faith that chemotherapy will cure your mother of breast cancer, but it doesn't. You weren't skilled enough with that tool. But you can learn that skill.

NINE

(A beat. Bursts out laughing)

ELEVEN

That's awful!

NINE

You really know how to rally the troops! Dying of cancer – very effective. Suggestion – for the next example, use a multi-car pileup on the highway. People love those!

ONE

That sounds incredibly harsh, I know, but who said life was fair? Or maybe it is fair in a way that we don't understand because we don't know all the rules. This is so frustrating because I know what I want to say, but I can't put it together in a way you all can comprehend.

NINE

We're the remedial class.

TEN

I think I understand.

NINE

Impossible.

TEN

You're saying that faith is a...tool, like a paint brush or a hammer, that you can actually use in a physical way. But not physical, because you can't hold it.

FOUR

So it's sort of a metaphor? Where's the logic?

ONE

Internally, within the concept.

FIVE

Wow, super lost.

ELEVEN

I get that concept. I'm not sure I believe it.

EIGHT

So if we have faith do we stay? Or go?

FOUR

So, what? We're going to faith our way out of here? That makes no sense.

ONE

It does if you consider we're in a quantifiable situation--

ELEVEN

We are?

ONE

Like a math problem. The value of "X". If you're in a box, and the answer is you're out of the box, the value of "X" is open the box.

ELEVEN

So you're saying the value of "X" is faith?

ONE

In a quantifiable way. And the quotient is us out of this situation.

FOUR

Division. That I get. But not that.

FOUR

So we just have to believe we can get out?

TEN

Like the power of positive thinking?

ONE

There's a difference between believing and knowing, right? When you believe something, you don't have all the facts, so that belief is based on faith as a concept. We could believe that we all have the super power to walk through walls, but that's not going to work.

NINE

Aw, come on, give it a try! I bet you'll walk right through this wall. I believe in you! But back up a little and get a good running start.

FIVE

But you said faith--

ONE

I said faith as a tool, not as a belief system. Redefinition of the term. This I believe is the puzzle we're meant to solve. It's so hard to describe. It's like it's being poured into my head, and I have to talk about it to let some out or I'll overflow.

EIGHT

This is so confusing.

(To SIX)

I wish s/he'd go. Make him/her next. S/he's taking up all the oxygen in the room.

NINE

Ya kinda are.

ONE

First, we need to place our faith in a force bigger than ourselves.

ELEVEN

Like God.

FOUR

I guess I'm out.

ONE

It can't be something that we've already had experience with. We have too many prejudices, it would dilute the process. We have to create a framework around which we can wrap our unwavering faith, and with that we will be set free. (To FIVE) Give me your bag.

FIVE

Why?

ONE takes FIVE's bag and dumps it on the ground.

FIVE

What are you doing?! That's my stuff! I don't give you permission to just trash my stuff. I need that for class!

TEN

What's your major?

FIVE

I... don't remember.

(To SIX)

What's my major?

SIX

I don't know. I'm still working on it I think.

ONE

I don't have time to convince you I'm right. You'll thank me when I'm done.

ONE sorts through the contents of the bag,
considering his options.

SIX

(re: ONE)

I'm being such a jerk right now. Sorry about that guys...

EIGHT

What if we aren't meant to escape? Or question this whole experience? What if they want us to be pure vessels, content with this situation, so they can fill us with....

NINE

With what? Chocolate? What are you even saying?

EIGHT

I don't know. I don't. I'm sorry. I'm just trying to work it out. I'm having the same thing, like someone is whispering it in my ear, but they're actually screaming. It just feels true.

ONE finally he takes a book and rips eight pages
out, which he lays out on the floor four across,
two down.

FIVE

Hey! Are you kidding me?! That cost me real money!

FIVE tries to stop ONE, but ONE shoves
him/her aside.

FIVE

Ow! Hey!

ELEVEN

Okay, that's enough! You can't just shove people around in here.

TEN

Just let him/her do hi/hers thing! Either it works or it doesn't.

NINE

I vote for doesn't.

TEN

Either way, s/he's trying. Your book is a small fee for getting us out of here.

SIX

And it's kind of boring, honestly. I'm surprised I even kept the memory of it.

ONE finds a tape roll among FIVE's belongings, which s/he uses to tape all the torn pages from the book into one large piece of paper.

NINE

Whatever you're doing, hurry up. That light's going to go off soon.

(To SIX)

Hey, do you think the blackouts are actually you regaining consciousness, and when the lights come back on you're unconscious again?

SIX

Whoa, good one! You really think so?

NINE

No.

ONE finds large marker among FIVE's belongings, or other object that can leave a mark, and draws a large shape on the paper. The shape should not evoke any kind of religious imagery –no crosses, Star of David, etc. Round and asymmetrical is probably best.

NINE

Very artistic.

ONE takes his/her new piece of art and tapes it to a wall.

ONE

There!

A beat as EVERYONE stares at ONE's creation.

SIX

Anyone still think he's a government mastermind?

NINE

Anyone still think he's part of your brain?

FOUR

What is it?

ONE

The object of my faith.

Blackout.

Lights up. FIVE has disappeared.

ONE

One, two, three, four –

FOUR

We started out with twenty, thirteen have disappeared leaving us with seven.

NINE

Oh, shut up! It was the kid with the bag.

ELEVEN

So you got him riled up, and now s/he's gone. Would I be off base thinking I've recognized one of your tactics?

TEN

I doubt that had anything to do with it.

ONE

We can't assume the reason for one person staying is the reason another person disappears. I can't control the decisions made outside of this room. I can only control this.

Gestures to the art on the wall.

EIGHT

This is insane.

TEN

I'm getting there. Help me.

NINE

I think you got that kid yanked out of here. And you're B.S.ing us because you're actually in charge.

SIX

Impossible.

NINE

Maybe you have multiple personalities. Maybe we're all battling it out in your mind, and s/he's winning.

SIX

Oh, God...

ONE

I'm not in charge. I'm just the conduit.

Points to the art on the wall.

This is my savior –

EIGHT

If you are in charge, I apologize.

ELEVEN

(RE: the art)

I'm very uncomfortable with that.

ONE

I don't mean my spiritual savior. I mean what's going to save me from this situation. I keep telling you--keep religion out of it.

EIGHT

This was so calm before you started talking, talking, talking, just noise coming out of you nonstop. We're meant to stay in this room. I hear the voices, too. And they're saying, "Stay in this room. Learn to like it. It will be easier."

ONE

I'm just trying to help you save your life. You don't have to participate.

TEN

Just sit over there and be quiet!

ONE

I put all my faith in this object. Every ounce. Every tiny particle of faith I possess that this drawing will save me from this situation.

TEN

I want to help.

TEN walks up to the art, takes out a marker, or lipstick, or some other way to leave a mark, and adds to the drawing.

TEN

Okay.

TEN holds out the marker to the others.

NINE

Now we have two artistic geniuses.

FOUR

I don't know. It's a drawing.

ONE

Exactly. It's whatever you want it to be. There are no ties to it. The way we're using it is pure craft.

SIX

Where do I come up with this stuff? I'm fascinating!

ELEVEN

I'm... I'm really trying to get on board with this, because Lord knows, I'm desperate to get out of here. But this is a false idol, pure and simple. Please, either make this work for me, or stop. This is very upsetting. I don't want to stand by and watch you draw others into this...sacrilege.

EIGHT

I agree. Anybody else.

FOUR

Maybe...

ONE

(RE: The art piece)

This is not sacrilege. This is not sacred in the biblical sense. And it's not meant to be. I have taken religion, and spirituality, out of faith and am using what's left as a tool.

TEN

Like taking a hammer out of the package!

NINE

Do hammers come in packages dot dot dot question mark? I'm pretty sure they just hang there.

TEN

Off the rack then. The hook. God, you're the worst!

EIGHT

(To NINE)

How about you? Ready to ask the finger painting to get you out of this room?

ELEVEN

Wait! It's happening to me! I feel it! Like someone holding me under, like I'm drowning. The information is flooding me. This is a test! This is the last test!

Blackout.

Lights up. EIGHT is gone.

ELEVEN

I'm still here.

SIX

You know, I've forgotten what most of them looked like. I remember the one with the bag, and the last one, but not really anyone else.

NINE

Would you knock it off?! You're not asleep. You're not in a coma! We aren't part of your subconscious and this isn't happening in your brain!

SIX

Alright, alright! You're right.

NINE

Thank you.

SIX

I'm in the last stages of Alzheimer's and this is my dementia.

NINE

Shut up!

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