

The Standstill Paradox
A Play by Oak Horton

CHARACTER LIST

ELLIOT Age 21-23. Non-binary. Uses they/them or he/him pronouns.

RENN Age 23-25. Non-binary. Uses they/them or he/him1 pronouns.

VOICES/STARS

SAIPH Saiph, Arabic for "sword "or "hilt," marks the right knee of Orion.

SIRIUS The brightest star in the night sky.

VEGA It gives beneficence, ideality, hopefulness, refinement and changeability, and makes its natives grave, sober, outwardly pretentious and usually lascivious.

SET

Water. Two (2) black boxes.

SCENE ONE

(Music begins. Lights up. ELLIOT is CS with his eyes closed. The VOICES enter the stage each with a bucket of water. They meet CS, raise the buckets and dump the water onto themselves. As they do this ELLIOT opens his eyes. He begins to speak.)

ELLIOT

I believe in the supernatural...the spiritual. Sirens, fairies, ghosts. All that nonsense...I get it. Well I don't get it...but I get- believing. It's that same belief that allows fear of monsters under your bed...or the tooth fairy, and soon you start believing in bigger things...conspiracy theories, climate change, religion. And you realize that if these new bigger things can be real, so can the monsters and the monsters are scarier than anything the world could do because they are inside your head. *(The STARS appear at the edges of the space.)* What do you do when the monsters live in your head?

And sort of over time...the monsters transform, they stop being scary...or maybe you stop being afraid. And getting them to disappear seems more and more viable. You obsess over it. You research it. You write about it.

VEGA

What is the point of talking when you know that the answer is going to be-----and everything will go down down and you will cry even though he maybe maybe loves you too.

VEGA/SAIPH

Does he maybe maybe want to tell you how he feels and how his arms will wrap around you. And how you will feel safe. When the bombs go off where do you want to feel safe. When the bombs go off where do you want to stay safe.

ELLIOT

You write about it.

SAIPH

What is the point of talking when you know the answer is going to kill you and everything will go down down and you will cry even though he maybe maybe is dead too.

SAIPH/SIRIUS

Does he maybe maybe want to tell you what he feels and how his heart is aching to love you. And how you will feel happy. When the guns go off where do you want to feel happy. When the guns go off where do you want to stay happy.

ELLIOT

You write about it.

SIRIUS

What is the point of talking when you know what the answer is going to be and everything will go down down and you will cry even though he maybe maybe is crying too.

VOICES

Does he maybe maybe want to cry with you and tell you he loves you too. And you will feel love. When the world drowns where do you want to feel loved. When the world drowns where do you want to stay loved.

ELLIOT

Poems. I wrote poems. About life, love, the importance of honesty and understanding. About him. He was not my love poem. He was my happiness.

SCENE TWO

(ELLIOT and RENN are drinking hard cider.)

RENN

You're stranded on a desert island with one book. What is it?

ELLIOT

Just one book? Can it be a collection?

RENN

Let me rephrase. One *story*, desert island.

ELLIOT

(Playfully.) Fuck you. I can't choose. *(Thinking)* What was that class we took together freshman year. The one with all the reading...

RENN

Yes, that narrows it down. *(Pause.)* It was called Shakespeare on the Modern Stage.

ELLIOT

I knew you remembered. What was that, 4 years ago? Professor Rhoades said I had a "refreshing voice for modern theatre".

RENN

That's only because you sided with her on that Mercutio and Romeo conspiracy.

ELLIOT

(All of the sudden very serious.) What "conspiracy"? They are 100% totally completely passionately magnificently and uncontrollably in love with each other.

RENN

Do you really believe that?

ELLIOT

No. I just like to fuck with heteronormative standards.

RENN

You're brilliant. So is that the book you choose? Romeo and Juliet?

ELLIOT

Nah.

RENN

Midsummer? Much Ado?

ELLIOT
Nope!

RENN
Othello? Henry V?!

ELLIOT
It isn't Shakespeare.

RENN
But I thought-

ELLIOT
I hate Shakespeare.

RENN
You hate Shakespeare?

ELLIOT
I-

RENN
Why did you take the class?

ELLIOT
It was either Shakespeare on the Modern Stage or Performative Slam Poetry and performing / makes my hands sweat.

RENN
Makes your hands sweat. I remember! (*Pause.*) So my question...

ELLIOT
What question?

RENN
One book, desert island.

ELLIOT
OH! Right. The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo. Did you know that the girl is based off of an adult version of what Pippi Longstocking would be like?

RENN
No way.

ELLIOT

Yes way. I like to think that that kind of change is possible for one person.

RENN

Is that why you like it?

ELLIOT

Pigtails to piercings...what more could I ask for?

RENN

Haha! Your turn.

ELLIOT

Okay, okay. What's your biggest fear?

RENN

Uh, I don't know. Clowns maybe? No, no hockey fans.

ELLIOT

Hockey fans?

RENN

They're so aggressive and loud like I *get* it. You're straight.

ELLIOT

Hey I like hockey *and* I like men. Are you scared of me?

RENN

-One question per turn! If you could have something named after you, what would it be?

ELLIOT

(Thinks) I don't know, dude.

RENN

Oh come on, if anything in the world could be named after you, what would it be?

ELLIOT

I...I don't think that I want *anything* to be named after me.

RENN

No, you have to choose.

ELLIOT

Uh...maybe a drink?

RENN

What like orange juice?

ELLIOT

No...like something upscale that only business women in their late forties drink on their lunch break.

RENN

Yeah...okay margaritaville.

ELLIOT

(Playfully offended) How dare you!

RENN

I only tell the truth. So really. What would you want named after you?

ELLIOT

It can be anything?

RENN

Anything.

ELLIOT

Okay. Okay... I guess if anything were to be named after me it would be...it would be...I don't know...a star.

RENN

Like the kind in the sky?

ELLIOT

Yeah.

RENN

Why?

ELLIOT

One question per turn.

RENN

Please?

ELLIOT

Fine...well, I guess stars...they're pretty. And they shine. And people always look up to them. No one can hurt them. And that's who I want to be. An untouchable beam of...energy. So maybe, having a star named after me...it might not be that bad...

RENN

An untouchable beam of energy. Wow. *(Silence.)*

ELLIOT

My turn. What's your favorite poem?

RENN

(Bursts out laughing.)

ELLIOT

What's so funny?

RENN

Just...it's Shakespeare...

ELLIOT

(blushing) Oh. Oh! I still want to hear it.

RENN

Okay ok. *(Pulls out wallet and a crumpled piece of paper with the poem on it.)*

That time of year thou mayst in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.
In me thou seest the twilight of such day

RENN/*SIRIUS*

As after sunset fadeth in the west,
Which by and by black night doth take away,

RENN/*SIRIUS/SAIPH*

Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.
In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire

RENN/*SIRIUS/SAIPH/VEGA*

That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
As the death-bed whereon it must expire
Consumed with that which it was nourish'd by.

RENN

This thou perceivest, which makes thy love more strong,

To love that well which thou must leave ere long.

ELLIOT
(Zoned out.)

RENN
Elle? Elliot?

SCENE THREE

ELLIOT

It's that one (*pointing to a star*), there.

SIRIUS

What is?

ELLIOT

The star he named after me.

SAIPH

It's bright.

ELLIOT

Yeah.

VEGA

Is that not a good thing?

ELLIOT

It's just... I feel like I'm in competition with it.

SAIPH

With who?

ELLIOT

The star.

SIRIUS

How can you be in competition with a star?

ELLIOT

The universe is so massive...so massive that that that- The amount of time that my star takes- it takes time for the light from a star to reach the earth. Not seconds, or minutes, or days, but years. My star...is nineteen hundred light-years away. Nineteen hundred light years ago my star created the light we're seeing right now. So essentially, essentially when we are looking out at space we are looking back in time and that...that stresses me out. When even was that?? Nineteen hundred years ago? Before stonewall, before WWII, before colonization, slavery, before the world could even breathe ...its seen everything-

VEGA

The assassination of Julius Caesar-

SAIPH
Nero's suicide-

SIRIUS
The death of St. Peter-

ELLIOT
Pompeii...how can I compete with that?

STARS
You don't.

(Pause.)

ELLIOT
I wish he'd never done this in the first place. He can't just...he can't just...

VEGA
You don't like it?

SAIPH
Look at him, he hates it.

ELLIOT
Hates a strong word. (Silence) I don't hate it. I just don't like the reminder of what we used to be. It wasn't just love, it was a connection. I knew that if I ever needed anyone, he would be there for me. And then he wasn't. And I needed someone. And he wasn't there. But that star, that star will always be there, and every night I will look up at the sky and lose him all over again. *(Pause)* Who do you think will run out of light first, me or that star? Or do you think that we will both keep on burning forever?

SCENE FOUR

(ELLIOT and RENN smoking a joint. Something with ELLIOT is “off”.)

RENN

You can't fight me on this one. Peanut butter and banana is better than peanut butter and jelly.

ELLIOT

But jelly gives good mouth feels.

RENN

“Mouth feels.” You're strange.

ELLIOT

But loveable?

RENN

Occasionally.

ELLIOT

Oh thanks. Your turn.

RENN

Okay I have a really tough one for you.

ELLIOT

I'm ready.

RENN

(Very seriously) If you were a dog, what kind would you be?

ELLIOT

(Immediately responding) Dachshund chihuahua mix.

RENN

You've thought about that a lot haven't you.

ELLIOT

Haven't you?

RENN

No.

ELLIOT

Why?

RENN

'Cause I'm a house cat.

(RENN passes the joint to ELLIOT)

ELLIOT

(Under his breath) Fucker. (Joint gets passed back, silence.)

RENN

What's up?

ELLIOT

Nothin.

RENN

You've been acting weird all night.

ELLIOT

I'm just tired.

RENN

(Contemplative moment.) Stand up.

ELLIOT

What are you doing.

RENN

If you're not gonna talk to me then we aren't gonna talk at all- (Presses play on his phone)

RENN

(A song comes on the radio.)

You remember this.

It's time to do it now and do it loud.

Killjoys

Make some noise

(Radio:

The future is bulletproof

The aftermath is secondary

It's time to do it now and do it loud

Killjoys

Make some noise)

RENN

Drugs, gimme drugs, gimme drugs

I don't need it, but I'll sell what you got

Take the cash and I'll keep it

Eight legs to the wall

Hit the gas, kill them all

RENN/ELLIOT

And we crawl, and we crawl, and we crawl

You be my detonator-

(ELLIOT and RENN dance, slowly ELLIOT loosens up. RENN and ELLIOT kiss. ELLIOT takes off RENNS shirt. RENN takes off ELLIOT'S sweatshirt revealing bandaged wrists. Everything stops except the music. ELLIOT rips his arms away hiding them behind his back.)

SCENE FIVE

ELLIOT

He didn't run. He just...held me. I had never met someone who made me feel...

VOICES

Feel like what?

ELLIOT

That's it. Just feel. Before him I never felt things. Happiness, sadness, guilt, pleasure. And still...I had to push to smile. He didn't make these feelings easier, he just made them-I had forgotten what happiness felt like. True, genuine, happiness. But I also had forgotten- I felt so sad. I felt so sad and yet I - I'm not making sense. Nothing makes sense.

(ELLIOT raises a knife to his wrist.)

SCENE SIX

RENN
Why do you do it?

ELLIOT
What?

RENN
Hurt yourself?

ELLIOT
I-

RENN
I'm sorry I shouldn't have asked that.

ELLIOT
No it's...it's okay. (Long silence) I used to be terrified of needles. Shots. I didn't like that they hurt. But I would have to get them anyway. I would sit there, frozen and wait for the nurse to count down from three. And all I could do amidst all that ridiculous fear was dig my nails into my leg as hard as I could and it would distract me from the needle. It would also hurt more than the needle. Soon I realized that as long as I hurt myself, nothing else could...I was wrong.

RENN
You don't deserve this.

ELLIOT
No. (*Silence*) My turn. Do you think it hurts?

RENN
Does what hurt?

ELLIOT
Dying?

RENN
That depends...

ELLIOT
On what?

RENN
On if living hurt you more.

SCENE SEVEN

ELLIOT

There's this moment right before the sun comes up. If you hold your breath it's like the world stops turning. Color peeks out over the horizon eating away at the night and the stars start to fade. And then you start to feel it...

SAIPH

It?

ELLIOT

The earth...it starts to move. It turns faster and faster and you lose all control. And everything seems so alive...except you...

SIRIUS

"When he shall die, take him and cut him out in stars"

VEGA

"And he shall make the face of heaven so fine"

SAIPH

"That all the world will be in love with the night"

ELLIOT

"And pay no worship to the garish sun." *(beat)* I hate Shakespeare.

SIRIUS

Hates a strong word.

(Music or rhythm begins)

ELLIOT

Do you hear that?

SAIPH

Hear what?

ELLIOT

The music.

SIRIUS

In your head?

ELLIOT

No...it's deeper than that.

VEGA
What do you hear?

ELLIOT
It's me.

SCENE EIGHT

ELLIOT

It's all too much.

RENN

What?

ELLIOT

Everything.

RENN

What can I do?

ELLIOT

Nothing! No one can do anything anymore. They can read my thoughts. They know things about me that I have forgotten. They make promises. They are loud when I'm tired and they...are angry.

RENN

Angry?

ELLIOT

At me.

RENN

What for?

ELLIOT

It's my turn to ask a question.

RENN

Okay.

ELLIOT

Would you forgive me if I killed myself?

RENN

...

ELLIOT

I'm sorry.

RENN

Don't apologize. Please. I don't want you to die. But I also...I can't...I can't stop you. I can't stop you and that terrifies me. I don't know what to do or say or how to make it better. I want you to be better! I want to laugh and joke with you. I want to hold you and make you my world and you won't let me and now we are here and I can't do anything. I can't ask you to be someone you aren't.

ELLIOT

This isn't who I want to be.

RENN

Then you don't have to be this person.

ELLIOT

How?

RENN

(pause) I don't know.

ELLIOT

You always want the best of me. And you deserve more than that. You deserve someone who is their best self all the time. I wish I could be that person for you. I want to be that person for you. But as you can clearly see, I am nowhere near-I don't know why you're here, why you're still here, why you ever decided to stay but-

RENN

Elliot.

ELLIOT

Yeah.

RENN

Am I your reason for living?

ELLIOT

I-

RENN

Elliot I can't- you can't ask me to-

ELLIOT

Then what Renn? What? I don't have what you have. I don't see things the way you do. I can't smile and just be okay. Do you think it's easy? Being this sad?

RENN

Listen to me Elliot. It doesn't matter. None of it matters. Look at me. Please, Elliot. Look at me. You have to have hope.

SCENE NINE

ELLIOT

I'm never going to see him again if I do this.

STARS

That's not your fault.

ELLIOT

Oh yeah? Then whose is it? *(Silence.)* That's what I thought.

SAIPH

It's going to be ok.

SIRIUS

You don't need him.

VEGA

Let him go.

ELLIOT

You say that like it's so easy to just delete someone from your life. I never got to say goodbye.

VEGA

Well now you do. *(Hands journal and pen to ELLIOT. ELLIOT begins to write.)*

*SIRIUS

The universe is so massive...so massive that that that- The amount of time that my star takes- it takes time for the light from a star to reach the earth.

It's that same belief that allows fear of monsters under your bed...or the tooth fairy, and soon you start believing in bigger things

I want you to be better! I want to laugh and joke with you. I want to hold you and make you my world and you won't let me.

*VEGA

Don't apologize. Please. I don't want you to die. But I also...I can't...I can't stop you.

Not seconds, or minutes, or days, but years. My star...is nineteen hundred light-years away. Nineteen hundred light years ago my star created the light we're seeing right now.

So can the monsters and the monsters are scarier than anything the world could do because they are inside your head.

*SAIPH

I believe in the supernatural...the spiritual. Sirens, fairies, ghosts. All that nonsense...I get it. Well I don't get it...but I get- believing.

I can't stop you and that terrifies me. I don't know what to do or say or how to make it better. and now we are here and I can't do anything. I can't ask you to be someone you aren't.

So essentially, essentially when we are looking out at space we are looking back in time and that...that stresses me out.

VOICES

I love you. I will always love you.

(ELLIOT rips out the letter and holds it tightly in his hand. Music begins.)

ELLIOT

My entire life I have tried to be different because being normal was too difficult for me. And trying to be different hurt me. I went crazy. The thoughts and voices, I couldn't control them anymore. They...you...wouldn't be quiet. And now it's come to this. These thoughts...they scare me. I just want to push them to the back of my mind and never think about them again. I want to feel normal. I want my heart to stop racing. I don't want to hurt anyone but I can't stop these images and thoughts turning in my brain. And you know what? People keep asking if I'm okay. I'm fine I'm always fucking fine, well you know what?! I'm *not* okay! I may never be okay. And I have learned to be okay with that. But no matter what I do, no matter how hard I try, people just leave. I was told I could be whatever I wanted to be, what if what I want to be, isn't-it isn't. (Composing self.) I'm doing this for me. For once, I'm doing something for me.

(ELLIOT takes the knife. He examines it and looks at his wrists. His eyes wander to the STARS who look at him calmly. ELLIOT raises the knife like he's about to slit his throat. At that moment RENN appears. ELLIOT does not see him. ELLIOT begins to cry and drops the knife. ELLIOT sees RENN. The stage goes dark except for on RENN and ELLIOT. As this happens, stars appear. RENN and ELLIOT stand holding hands, looking up at the sky. Blackout.)