

THE CONTROL

by

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FADE IN:

INT. COLLEGE CLASSROOM - DAY

ALEX RITTER (50) addresses a dozen seated (college age) STUDENTS.

ALEX  
As scientists --

The students' faces show attentiveness.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
-- we must evaluate --

Alex's right hand waves toward the right and remains at shoulder height.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
-- before we can discover.

Alex's left hand waves toward the left and lingers, parallel to the right hand.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
We observe, evaluate and then  
discover.

Alex's wristwatch rings, on the hour. Students bolt for the exits. Alex glances at his left wrist.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
I see the hour is up --

The classroom is almost empty.

A MALE STUDENT drops a piece of paper.

Without looking down at the paper, the student finds it with his foot, drags it toward the door and exits.

A FEMALE STUDENT struggles to release the strap of her shoulder bag entwined in a chair.

She keeps a blank gaze at Alex as she frees the strap and sets it on shoulder, picks up her laptop, exits.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
-- for today...

EXT. CAMPUS - DAY

Alex carries a briefcase as he hurries past flowering trees, down a flagstone pathway between buildings.

STUDENTS sit on the lawn and look at their cell phones.

Two middle aged men, MALERD AND FILO, chat as they walk a few feet ahead of Alex, on the pathway.

MALERD

Like Sartre famously said, "Hell is other people"... Sartre? Camus? Sartre.

Filo shakes his head.

FILO

Purgatory, maybe. Purgatory is other people. Utter isolation, that's hell.

MALERD

(sarcastically)

So Sartre's wrong. You're right and Sartre's wrong.

FILO

If Sartre ever experiences utter isolation, he'll know.

MALERD

Sartre's dead!

FILO

Then he'll never know.

MALERD

Unless he's gone to hell!

FILO

Nobody goes to hell. Nobody really goes to hell when they die.

Alex reacts with a start and quickly, determinedly, catches up to the other men.

ALEX

(sternly)

You might want to be more careful --

Alex has to catch his breath.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
-- about saying such things around  
impressionable minds.

Malerd and Filo look over and laugh, surprised.

FILO  
There's very little danger of my  
students listening.

MALERD  
Or of anyone listening!

ALEX  
(annoyed)  
I was listening.

MALERD  
Yours is hardly the impressionable  
mind of a student, Alex!

Malerd smiles, intending his statement to be praise.

Alex frowns, walks past the other men, quickly.

INT. LAB - DAY

Alex turns dials on a microscope at his work station.

The lab: long white acrylic tables, computer screens built into  
some tables, complex looking microscopes on some tables.

A few SCIENTISTS work silently at their separate work stations.

At the farthest corner from Alex, THEO SMITH (35) sits at a  
work table, peers through a microscope and pets a small cat in  
his lap.

Alex glances in Theo's direction, frowns impatiently.

Theo rocks very slightly back and forth, toward the microscope  
and away from it.

Alex turns in his chair away from Theo. The quiet of the lab  
is disturbed by small sounds from the cat.

Alex winces, tries to control his breathing, tries to  
concentrate.

Theo leaves his work station, walks toward Alex, stands back,  
just to the side.

Alex struggles to avoid acknowledging any distraction.

Chimes sound, Alex retrieves a cell phone from his pocket. Alex stands with his back to the others in the room. He takes a step to turn further toward privacy, then speaks loudly into his phone.

ALEX

Dr. Alex Ritter, here...

Alex looks at his phone and shakes it. He puts the phone back to his ear, grimaces, shakes the phone and reaches toward his left shoulder with his right hand.

As the force of the reach makes his upper body turn, Alex falls to the floor. Light from the cell phone, on the floor, bounces from wall to wall.

INT. HOSPITAL EMERGENCY ROOM - DAY

Alex, in a hospital bed, stops breathing. Monitor screens show straight lines.

A MISTY VERSION OF ALEX sits up, looks around.

Alex's unmoving body remains in the bed, receiving emergency care from DOCTORS AND NURSES.

MISTY ALEX'S POV

Time in the emergency room looks to be slowing down, anything moving looks like a stretched out accordion of copies of itself.

BACK TO SCENE

DOCTOR

(yells)  
Clear!

MISTY ALEX'S POV

The outermost level of each moving thing glows bright then disappears.

BACK TO SCENE

The emergency room activity continues; busy Doctors and Nurses attend to Alex and other PATIENTS.  
Various machines and monitors blink and beep.

MISTY ALEX'S POV

The emergency room is a knife shaped image which replicates, opens out like the folds in a paper fan.

BACK TO SCENE

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

(yells)  
Clear!

On a monitor, Alex's heartbeat registers again.

MISTY ALEX'S POV

Other MISTY VERSIONS OF ALEX observe the scene and then disappear, like popping bubbles, until there are none left.

BACK TO SCENE

Alex opens his eyes, looks around, frantically.  
Doctors and Nurses speak to Alex and to each other, their voices sound calm but their words are garbled.  
Alex looks confused.

INT. LAB - DAY

Alex (thinner, paler) returns to his work station in the lab.  
He moves slowly, carefully.

CAMILE (60), a co-worker, enters, stands in the doorway.

CAMILE

It's to be expected. The melancholy.  
Alex struggles to keep his mouth shut.

ALEX

Mickamackamoo. Ickayackayoo.

CAMILE

Or malaise. Melancholy, most likely.  
Alex tries to work, looks uncomfortable.

CAMILE (CONT'D)

Nash, down the hall. He had the  
same problem. You should talk to  
Nash.

Alex looks up, questioningly.

CAMILE (CONT'D)

Why should hearts be forced to start  
working, again...

Camile exits.

Alex slowly pulls himself to his feet. As he struggles, he  
speaks.

ALEX

Mickamackamoo. Ickayackayoo.

INT. ANOTHER LAB - DAY

Alex approaches NASH (30), who stares into a multi-lens  
microscope at a work station similar to Alex's.

Alex waits, hands in tight fists, teeth clenched.

Nash looks up with staring, watery eyes.

ALEX

With regard to a version of Foreign  
Language Syndrome...

NASH  
I see melancholy --

Alex shudders and takes a half step back.

NASH (CONT'D)  
On you, it's... on you, man.

ALEX  
It's to be expected...

NASH  
It is. Yes.

ALEX  
But why?

Alex is uneasy.

Nash stands and moves away from his work station, pushes Alex toward a corner of the large room.

Nash speaks with quiet excitement.

NASH  
Question. Is a near-death experience near anything else? Obviously, yes.

ALEX  
Near?

Nash brushes dust from the shoulder of Alex's lab coat.

NASH  
Nature abhors a vacuum. All hell breaks loose.

ALEX  
Death is a vacuum?

NASH  
Nearness. By its nature, nearness is... multifaceted.

Nash thrusts his ten fingers into the air.

ALEX  
You look like a conductor, just then.

NASH  
That's what I'm working on, conductors and semiconductors.

ALEX  
I meant --



Alex opens his hands in the empty air.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
-- like a maestro...

Nash matches Alex's pose, then Nash's arms stroke the air in curving sweeps that droop, slowly down.

NASH  
Exposed to alternate realities, it stands to reason. One would miss them.

ALEX  
If. If one is...

NASH  
If they are perceived and then no longer perceived, well then, a grieving --

ALEX  
Perceived absence, perhaps.

NASH  
Grief. Or, akin to grief.

ALEX  
Mickamackamoo. Ickayackayoo...

Alex turns away, exits.

INT. HALLWAY BETWEEN LABS - CONTINUOUS

Alex shivers as he walks down the hallway.

NASH (O.S.)  
Grieves for oneself, possibly. One's other --

Alex murmurs to himself.

ALEX  
One's other selves.

INT. ANOTHER LAB - DAY

Nash sits at his work station, he looks up from a microscope.

Alex paces slowly, near the table.

NASH  
Misses them. That's how I think of it. Misses them.

Alex manages a self conscious laugh.

ALEX  
One should *aim better*?

Alex laughs again, nervously.

Nash grabs Alex by the arm, suddenly.

NASH  
Tell me everything, it's not so vivid  
to me, anymore. Tell me.

ALEX  
It was like a paper fan. Like a  
Japanese fan...

NASH  
Flowery?

ALEX  
No, folded. Everything was...  
folded...

NASH  
Now you're just making me forget  
even more. Quit it. Don't tell me.  
Take it back.

ALEX  
Alright, I --

Theo stands in the doorway.

Theo holds the cat against his chest, he keeps passing the  
cat from his left hand to his right hand.

NASH  
Continue, perhaps, another time.

ALEX  
Discussion. Another time.

Nash spreads glass slides on a table, studies them intently.

INT. HALLWAY BETWEEN LABS - CONTINUOUS

Theo walks back toward the other lab, looks over his shoulder  
to Alex, following. Theo slows down, waits for Alex,  
continues to lead him back.

ALEX  
Mickamackamoo. Ickayackayoo.

INT. LAB - MOMENTS LATER

Alex stands near his work station.

Theo returns to his own work station, sits back down in his chair, still holding the cat.

THEO  
You recall my work with cells and  
cell walls?

ALEX  
Mickamackamoo. Ickayackayoo.

Alex regards Theo cautiously, Theo shows no reaction.

THEO  
Aloe vera. The cells and cell walls  
of aloe plants.

ALEX  
(uncomfortable)  
I remember there were leaking aloe  
pieces around the lab...

Theo nods as he places the cat on the lab table, turning the cat gently, picking at tiny bits of debris in the fur.

THEO  
One night... I accidentally left a  
small portion of cat fur on a cut  
portion of an aloe plant.

Theo continues grooming the cat, carefully.

THEO (CONT'D)  
The plant, being a succulent,  
nourished the fur and the fur began  
to grow.

Alex rubs his forehead as if his head hurt.

THEO (CONT'D)  
One morning I realized that the fur  
had formed into a portion of a small  
cat; everything except one front  
leg, the neck and head.

Alex leans on a chair back and then sits. Listening seems to make him weak.

THEO (CONT'D)  
The back end of the cat moved  
slightly, shivered, so I covered it  
with paper towels.

FLASHBACK

INT. LAB - DAY

A pale green glow radiates from the white walls and lab tables.

Theo tucks a paper towel around the partially formed body of a tiny cat attached to an aloe plant.

LATER

Bathed in pale green light, Theo's hands hold a tiny, new born cat and segments of a large glistening aloe.

THEO (V.O.)

The next day the entire cat had been formed, still attached to the plant by a gooey gel.

END FLASHBACK

BACK TO SCENE

THEO

Since the cat seemed to be struggling, I separated it from the plant and the cat began to breathe air.

FLASHBACK

INT. LAB - DAY

Pale green light saturates the air.

Theo watches as the tiny cat sleeps on a work table.

THEO (V.O.)

When the cat slept, tiny brown fibers would attach him to surfaces...

Theo gently breaks apart tiny fibers in the cat's fur. The cat mews, tries to pull himself from the tiny roots.

A small drop of blood shows in the cat's fur, when each brown fiber is broken.

Theo uses the tip of a thread to apply a dot of antiseptic to each tiny wound.

END FLASHBACK

BACK TO SCENE

INT. LAB - DAY

Alex watches Theo gently search in the cat's fur and occasionally pull free a small, twig-like fiber.

Theo's voice in the background becomes audible.

THEO

-- if we are constantly freeing  
ourselves from these tiny roots, are  
we constantly bleeding --

ALEX

Attachments?

THEO

To surfaces, or to moments... it  
might explain the feeling of "life  
passing one by".

The cat bats at Theo's fingers, plays at stalking his hand.

ALEX

It might make one... feel the loss.

Theo reaches in a drawer, brings out a paper bag.

THEO

One might... say goodbye to moments,  
passing.

Alex looks startled.

As Theo opens the bag the cat bats at it with all four paws.

THEO (CONT)

Everything is reducible to some  
sort of greeting. Hello, goodbye.

ALEX

One zero, zero one, either one .

Theo's cat dashes into the open bag, circles inside, draws the opening closed, peeks out.

ALEX

Hello goodbye.

A cat paw grabs at Theo's hand. When Theo drums his fingers on the table, the cat pounces from the bag, wrestles the fingers, looks up to see Theo watching, retreats to the bag, pounces out and wrestles again.

ALEX

One is a beginning. Either one.  
Plus the nearness. Which becomes  
or is unavoidable. Evidently.

A second cat walks along the table near Alex's microscope,  
curls up, sleeps.

Alex returns his attention to his work station. The cat  
opens one eye. Alex tickles the cat. The cat bats at and  
licks Alex's fingers.

FADE OUT:

THE END