

NEGATIVE SPACE

By Amanda Cobb

CHARACTERS

CAYLIN RHYS: 29, entrepreneur, artist, workaholic.

SETTING

The room in picture DSC_0008 and DSC_0006 for the MUSES project: A messy desk, next to a window and a door with a covering hanging over the blinds. Paintings and other hand-made art adorn the walls. There are books and papers lying all about, and a jacket thrown over the back of the cushy desk chair. It is cluttered and homey, and obviously much lived-in. There should be at least one paintbrush on the desk, of medium size.

SCENE ONE

(Lights come up on CAYLIN, sitting in the desk chair, hands folded in her lap, blankly staring at the computer screen or perhaps the door. She remains like this for a few moments. Eventually, she comes out of her reverie and notices the audience. She addresses them.)

CAYLIN

(blinking owlshly, then abrupt)

Does anyone have the time?

(without waiting for an answer)

Oh, nevermind. It doesn't really matter, does it? You're here, I'm here, that should be all that matters.

(pause; her thoughts have gone in a different direction)

Funny thing time. One minute it seems you have all the time in the world, to do anything you want, and the next – pfft! You're about to turn 30, and start to wonder, to question what exactly it is you've been doing with your life. Mid-life crisis, isn't that what they call it? Ok, so apparently I've screwed up that part, it's a bit too early for me to have one of those. At least, I hope 30 isn't my mid-life point. I fully intend to live to a crotchety 110.

(pause)

Well, at least sometimes I hope to live that long. Other times I look around and think, what would be the goddamned point?

(CAYLIN gets up from the chair, stretches, maybe walks a little bit to wake up her legs. She should halt so that the paintings on the wall are in her view.)

She puts a hand on her hip.)

CAYLIN

(points)

See those? I did those. Different ages of course. I think that middle one maybe when I was 4 or 5. Why my mother kept it, I still don't know. Maybe as proof I was meant to be an artist.

'Caylin, I always knew you were meant to be an artist, even when you were still really little' – that's what she always said to me.

(considers it)

I think it's horrible, quite honestly. I'm not much for finger-painting anymore.

(tilts head to side)

What is it even of? Me and her on a kind of. . . seesaw? It could just as easily be a rainbow, or a squid, or a bowl of spaghetti. 5 year olds will imagine some odd things. I will say the use of colors is interesting - at least I had that much of an innate eye.

(back to facing the audience)

I like certainty, see. I like to know what a thing is, and that a thing is what it appears to be, that a thing is as it should be. You can see that progression here.

(points to each painting in turn)

This is quite clearly a landscape, if a bit blurry. This is easily identifiable as a bunch of different birds, and drawn with a clearer line. And this, this is the best of the bunch. A still life, a pitcher and some fruit. No ambiguity, but still using beautiful colors. You can see the brush strokes, but there's no doubt about the subject matter being portrayed.

(CAYLIN sighs and returns to sitting in the chair)

CAYLIN

This is where the trouble started. Someone – I don't know, a fan of my work – made an offhand comment to me about an artist's own life being the greatest masterpiece they can create. And I started looking at my own life like I do these paintings. The colors, the shapes, the composition. The content versus the negative space.

(nods at audience)

Yeah, negative space. The empty places where nothing sits. I found, to my dismay, that my life had far too much negative space, and not enough content. A lot of negative space is great for minimalist paintings; not so great when it's your life. Granted, a lot of it is white space, still waiting to be filled. But far too much of it is black space, permanently empty with missed opportunities. And I had to ask myself a really hard question – how did I let this happen?

(sighs and swivels a bit in the chair, gathering thoughts)

My mother was right, I have always been an artist. Now, I'm a professional artist. And if you think it's easy to live off of nothing but your artwork by the time you're 29, think again. It took a lot of hard work, and rejected paintings, and trying again, and damn right I'm proud of myself to have made it to this point so young.

(pause)

Ha! So young. A blink of the eye, and I'm already almost 30.

(eyes the audience)

Some of you may think I'm making a big fuss over nothing, that 30 is still young. Well, in some ways, you're right. But when I have that big expanse of black negative space looking at me, I feel anything but young.

(pause)

What is that saying? The future is always beginning now? I've been so focused on getting here, to this point, this future that I wanted. . . I didn't pay attention. I missed all of the Now moments, the fleeting details to fill in the backdrop and the little spaces around the edges. Quite a sin, for an artist, to let details escape her.

(pause, then quietly, almost to herself)

How much have I missed?

(Longer pause as CAYLIN contemplates. Her gaze wanders about, and settles on the paintbrush on the desk. She picks it up, runs the bristles through her fingers. It's obviously a tool her hands are familiar with.)

CAYLIN

(once again at audience)

I love being an artist. I love creating with my hands, and bringing the things in my head or the things I see in front of me to life on paper or canvas. And I'm damn good at it.

(quick glance into audience, as if she heard a snicker)

Don't let the finger-painting fool you, I've gotten better since then.

(a smile, which fades as she resumes her train of thought)

I don't want to give this up. But I don't know how to be successful at it without doing as I've always done – pour all my time and effort into it. Which sounds passionate, not like a bad thing at all – except I can see that black space growing on my canvas. And the thought of that hole eating up my life terrifies me.

(long pause, then looking directly at the audience)

So. The hardest question yet: what do I do now?

(She waits, as if expecting an answer, her hands gone still around the paintbrush. The lights slowly fade to black.)

THE END