

THIS VESSEL IS A FRAGILE THING

---

a play

by

Tristan B Willis

Tristan B Willis

[tristbwillis@gmail.com](mailto:tristbwillis@gmail.com)

[tristanbwillis.com](http://tristanbwillis.com)

Washington, DC

**THE BODY:** they/them/theirs, to be played by someone nonbinary or genderqueer  
(no exceptions)

and **AN ENSEMBLE WHO PLAY**

*People from The Body's hometown*

*The Body's partner*

*The Body's sister*

*The Body's grandfather and other soldiers*

*Futuristic interviewers, researchers, and research participants*

**Potential Doubling for Ensemble:**

Teen/Body's Partner (Any gender)

Kid/Body's Sister/Lab Coat (Woman or nonbinary person willing to play women)

Mr. H/Body's Grandfather/Participant (Man or nonbinary person willing to play men)

Mrs. H/Stewart/Figure (Woman or nonbinary person willing to play women)

Baker/Franz/Interviewer (Any gender)

**PLACE:** An interior mind, a hometown, an apartment, an interior mind, a war, an apartment, an interior mind, a futuristic research company, and then?

**TIME:** Now, then the past, and later the future

**CONTENT WARNING**

Physical and mental health (heart palpitations, gender dysphoria, body dysmorphia, fear of death); Natural disaster (tornado in a dream); War (unspecified, in a dream)

**NOTES**

*/ indicates an overlap in dialogue where the next line begins*

Productions should not live in an unrealistic land of all thin, able-bodied, cis and gender-binary white people. I encourage you to populate the stage and production team with groups historically excluded in your theatre and your region's theatre at large. In regards to casting, I suggest investigating what is considered "default" with my under-described characters and *working* to find people of varied backgrounds, instead of hoping one casting call will do the job. Regarding gender: characters that read as women or men can be played by trans and cis women or men, or gender non-conforming actors as long as the performer is comfortable.

## THE FIRST DREAM

*THE BODY gets ready for bed. Maybe this is fluffing the bedding, changing into pajamas, brushing teeth. Their monologue can be spoken to the audience, used as voice over narration as they get ready for bed, a mix of both, etc.*

### THE BODY

I've had heart palpitations for three nights now.  
The first night I turned into a tornado  
and destroyed my hometown

Actually.

Y'know...

The first sensation this moment should convey is fear,  
an unknowingness of being, the horror of bodies, a desire to be  
sucked clean from the skin.

Turning into a tornado sounds strong, but what I mean is  
I am scared. And I am lashing out.

Are any of you comfortable in your body?  
How many of you are completely comfortable in your body?  
Would it be uncomfortable if I asked you to raise your hands?  
Maybe not for you, but for the rest of us at least.  
Don't tell us, we don't want to know how wonderful you are.

I went out to eat with a friend. She wanted to know more about discovering my  
identity, my place outside of the American societal understanding of gender, the  
obstacles that come with otherness.

"When did you know?" she asked  
Know what? Who I am, what I am? I don't. Do you?

THE BODY (*cont'd*)

“No no” she said “that you were different at all. When did you suspect you weren’t what you had been told all your life?”

I told her many things, stumbling over variables that never quite reveal the whole equation. We settle on bodies. I never felt like I fit in my body. I feel separate, removed from it.

My body has always been against me. From diseases, to coughs, to my size, to my form, to the way society perceives and assigns meaning to those things.

I haven’t spent one day at home in my body.

But that’s everyone, I guess.

And she said

“No... I’ve never felt that way.”

It seems I am a transmutable thing.

So I turned into a tornado and destroyed my home town.

*THE BODY becomes a tornado and destroys their hometown.*

*This is not a moment.*

*This is a scene.*

*This is a lifetime. This is a town’s history and livelihood being torn asunder.*

*And then:*

*THE BODY appears to us as an angelic body, an Avenging Angel, a new thing not based in human anatomy and structure but familiar, terrifying, and magnificent all the same. There is a Golden glow about them.*

*And now:  
they see the residents of their  
hometown in the aftermath.*

*The residents talk quickly, almost over  
each other, weaving in and out of the  
multiple conversations and threads of  
thought.*

MRS H  
I saw

MR H  
No, you didn't

MRS H  
I did, before it touched the ground I saw

MR H  
Stop

MRS H  
Don't tell me what to do, you old

TEEN  
Mrs. H, I know what you thought you saw

MRS H  
Don't you talk down to me, I know your mother

*Pause.*

MRS H  
Probably do anyway.

BAKER

My... my

KID

My bed was on my ceiling.

BAKER

My... my

KID

For a whole minute,  
I swear,  
my bed was on the ceiling.  
I swear!  
I was peering out from the closet,  
things flying all over the place,  
but I couldn't take my eyes off  
my bed on the ceiling.

MRS H

I saw it, I know I saw it

KID

And then it was gone.

MR H

Yeah, yeah

KID

And it took the ceiling with it.

TEEN

I didn't think it'd be so hot, you know?

MR H

Did you know Bonnie and Clyde used to come here all the time?

MRS H

What?

MR H

Bonnie and Clyde. Clyde grew up round here. They were in and out of here all the time.

MRS H

I don't care about that, why should I care about that

MR H

Probably looked better then.

BAKER

My... my life, my... my

MR H

Better than this at least

KID

Roger's gone

TEEN

Who's Roger?

KID

Roger's my best friend.

TEEN

I'm so sorry

KID

He's a hermit crab. Mom says he's gone.

TEEN

That sucks.

KID

Yeah.

*Pause.*

KID

What *did* you see, Mrs H?

MR H

What?

KID

What did Mrs H see?

MR H

Nothing.

MRS H

You shut your mouth I did too

KID

What was it?

*Pause.*

MRS H

Maybe it's a bit much for a kid your age.

KID

This is all a bit much for a kid my age.

*Pause.*

MRS H

I saw an avenging angel.

MR H

You did not

MRS H

We must've incited the wrath of god

BAKER

My life, my... my shop

TEEN

It was so hot. I guess I'd never thought about what it'd feel like?

Being in a...

but I sure didn't think it'd be so hot.

MRS H

And how do any of you know

for sure

that isn't what happened?

KID

The sky looked like we were inside a yellow Easter egg coloring kit.

*Pause. Everyone looks to the KID.*

KID

I thought "this is how Easter eggs must feel when we color them."

TEEN

And then your bed

KID

Yes,  
and the ceiling.  
Gone.

BAKER

Gone.

MRS H

What?

BAKER

Gone.

MR H

Speak up  
speak up

BAKER

I went home early.  
I went home early.  
I went home early

BAKER (*cont'd*)

because I was  
scared.

The sky, it was...

I thought a storm, a bad storm.

And then the sirens

and I am home safe my daughters are clutched in my arms we are stuffed in a closet  
smothered in pillows and I am home safe with my family we are safe we are safe we  
are safe everything is fine it all ends with some trees in the road, nothing bad, it hurt  
others still it missed us we are fine

But

But my... my life spared...

A terrible trade.

My shop is gone.

My life spared but my livelihood

Gone.

All

gone.

*THE BODY AS AVENGING ANGEL is  
beginning to be redefined as human,  
to look like herself again.*

THE BODY (*to the BAKER*)

Do you have insurance?

*No response.*

THE BODY

Sorry to, I know this is a hard time,  
so sorry to bother you but

I just, I was curious...

Do you have insurance?

THE BODY (*cont'd*)

Can't your business be rebuilt?

BAKER

This section of the main road will be closed three years,  
no one can and no one will build here. The town will suffer,  
travelers will skip over us along the new loop in the interstate  
and the people who live here will now focus on their own livelihoods,  
buying cheap bread in grocery stores instead of chicken salad sandwiches,  
canisters of coffee grounds instead of fresh-brewed cups,  
baking kolache and klobasnicky with their grandmothers  
or maybe they will forget their grandmothers and just make do with a biscuit and  
jelly, and frozen sausages in buns.  
My children would have been better off with my death insurance.

THE BODY

Oh, that's...

MRS. H

Quit it with your whining, people died tonight and here you are, you're crying over  
bread.

THE BODY

Well, what did you lose, Mrs. H?

MRS. H

My goddamn faith in humanity's what I lost. That avenging angel's coming back for  
the rest of us soon. We've incited/the wrath of God.

MR. H

Shut up, old woman.

MRS. H

I have One More Thing to say and it is this:

*THE BODY wakes up from this dream with a gasp, their hand over their palpitating heart. A sleepy rumble beside them rolls over and becomes their PARTNER.*

PARTNER  
Your....phone... it's  
ughhhh

*It's true - the BODY'S cell phone is now buzzing or ringing. It wasn't a moment ago, almost as if the PARTNER's declaration made it so.*

*The BODY extricates themselves from sleep and finally gets the phone, tiptoeing away from their PARTNER to answer, as if their steps could be any more threatening to sleep than the unrelenting ringing.*

*Finally - they are able to hit ACCEPT. THE BODY speaks with their sister.*

SISTER  
Heeeeeey, hun

*THE BODY gives a grunt in response.*

SISTER  
You okay?

THE BODY  
Yeah, yeah, sorry. Hey, sis.

THE BODY (*cont'd*)

What time is it?

*As the SISTER answers, THE BODY realizes they can just look at their phone, and does so.*

SISTER

Noon.

Were you still sleeping?? Did I wake you up?

THE BODY

Nooooo, no, I was. I had just woken up before you called.

I had a really weird dream?

SISTER

Huh. Wanna talk about it?

THE BODY

Uh. No... not really. You go.

SISTER

Cool, so I was. Well.

I just got off the phone with mom a bit ago and...

Sorry, this is awkward, but we have to talk about it.

THE BODY

Oh no

SISTER

She called me, like, thrilled,  
excited out of her mind,  
because she thinks you're...

Well, she said she talked to you and she thinks you're thinking about,  
you know, like... God. And heaven. And/shit.

THE BODY

Shit, I knew it.

Guuuuuh, I knew it.

SISTER

And she asked me to pray for you. And I just,

I feel so uncomfortable? In the middle of this.

I know it can't be true, I mean... is it? Is it true?

THE BODY

It's not true. And I didn't! I didn't say anything like that to her; I never even implied I was interested or thinking about...

God, I can't believe she asked you to pray for me

*The PARTNER is mostly awake and listening now.*

SISTER

Yeah. I felt.

So awkward.

I'm always in the middle of this stuff.

And like, I'm not gonna break her heart for you, like...

THE BODY

Yeah, no, I...

I getcha.

GOD, I didn't even.

Ugh.

I talked to her yesterday and told her

I was just... thinking about death and time

and how I never used to be scared of the first,

at least... not in the same way I was scared of the second,

and now it's like a a a... flip has switched. Y'know?

And she just

I mean, you know what she does.

SISTER

Yeah

THE BODY

She started talking about God and I just couldn't get a word in edgewise. I really didn't want to hurt her feelings by cutting her off. We're finally at a... I mean, an okay place.

SISTER

I mean/did she

THE BODY

She basically just said *she* believes in God because she's terrified of hell. How could I know that would turn into... well... this.

SISTER

Yeah. Yeah,  
that's.... rough, hun.

THE BODY

I mean, believing in God  
or an afterlife  
or whatever  
won't give me what I need.

SISTER

What do you need?

THE BODY

A fucking break, that's what I need.  
Or maybe just....  
Time?  
I think?

SISTER

Isn't that what everyone wants?

SISTER (*cont'd*)

It seems a little...  
hubristic to think you deserve it more?

THE BODY

No one thinks they deserve it.

SISTER

I wouldn't know about that.  
Anyways. You need to talk to her.

THE BODY

No.  
No, I think I'll just... avoid it.

SISTER

Hun...

THE BODY

Look, it's not my responsibility to break her heart either,  
she decided this for herself without any of my help.

SISTER

Maybe your silence was help?

THE BODY

I'll just... I promise I'll be more clear.  
If it ever comes up again.

SISTER

Ha. If.

THE BODY

Yeah. Ha...  
Well...

SISTER

Yeah, yeah, I'll let you go.  
Love you.

THE BODY

Love you, too.

SISTER

Oh!

*A small laugh from THE BODY - this must happen every time they're on the phone with SISTER.*

SISTER

I know I know  
I always do this  
I'll be quick  
Did you take the big longhorn mugs when you moved?  
I was going to grab one from mom's when I visited but we couldn't find them.

*Does the PARTNER bring THE BODY coffee in one of the longhorn mugs?*

THE BODY

....no.

SISTER

Are you lying?  
...It's okay, I know you love them.  
I just didn't want to keep looking if they weren't there.

THE BODY

They're just the perfect size for too much coffee!  
And I feel so attached to them.  
Even though...

SISTER

I know. It's okay.

Well. I'll let you go. Finally.

I love you, hun.

THE BODY

Love you too.

SISTER

Bye.

THE BODY

Bye.

*A comforting gesture from PARTNER.*

PARTNER

Your sister?

THE BODY

Yeah.

PARTNER

Sounds like your mom is....

THE BODY

Yeah.

PARTNER

I'm sorry.

THE BODY

Yeah. I mean.

It's okay.

It's not a big deal?

Just. Frustrating.

PARTNER

She loves you a lot.

THE BODY

My sister?

PARTNER

Your mom.

THE BODY

You know... you know she used to tell us her list of most important people to her?  
Her order of who she loved most?

1. God

2. Us

If she was Abraham and I were Isaac, I'd be dead before God could tell her to stop.

PARTNER

I think your mother loves you more than god.

THE BODY

But she'd see it as a moral failing if she ever admitted it, which is almost as bad.

PARTNER

You can make up a negative take for anything. People don't find that charming anymore, you know. Cynicism. Self-hate.

THE BODY

But you find me charming!

PARTNER

I love you. It's different.

THE BODY

Oh, *really?*

PARTNER

No, you little shit, come here.

*They kiss and hold each other.*

PARTNER

I really am sorry. It must be so hard to navigate that.

THE BODY

It is what it is.

PARTNER

Well, just remember you don't have to do it alone. I'm here. And....

THE BODY

And?

PARTNER

I do find you charming.

*Another tender-teasing moment.*

## **THE SECOND DREAM**

*THE BODY holds a very large mug with a longhorn image (think a ranch logo, not a mascot) on it. The mug has a chip and crack in it, but still seems useable. They fiddle with the mug, and even try to finish some nightly tasks with it in hand - maybe turning down the bed, putting on or taking off slippers, etc.*

## THE BODY

I've had heart palpitations for three nights now.

The second night I joined my grandfather in war.

My last grandfather, the last of the grandparents, the whole of my grandparent experience, or at least the only one I could remember.

I've always felt disconnected from my ancestors, from my, uh, literal forebears.

I didn't know my great-grandparents' names, their parents' names.

My friend actually has a book? This book of genealogy spanning back centuries, all written down, and the first time I saw it, I cried.

I thought no one knew their family history, I thought that was a false product, an experience in books or movies, and here was a long gold thread, a strand of my friend's DNA stretching through centuries and recorded, trackable, searchable, knowable, ownable.

But my grandfather.

My grandfather was a pillar, he was unbeatable, he held all the weight of my need for a connection to the past. And he carried it well.

He was a strong man and so settled in his skin and bones and muscles, a farmer who at sixty years old would trip, fall, and roll out of it like nothing happened.

At eighty he was still walking miles and getting on a tractor every week.

His body worked for him up until the very very end. Suddenly he was dying and in a few weeks he was dead, his body finally taking its due.

I was the only person in my family who wasn't there when he died.

My mom told me this was his mug. That he had two. And he loved them. He *loved* them. And I get it. This mug easily fits two normal cups of coffee, probably more, which means I can steal half a pot in one go.

I dropped it. You can probably tell - here. God, I cried so fucking hard. I was inconsolable. It's still usable... But I felt like I had killed him, like he died all over again.

And then, recently, my sister told me these mugs are actually from some family friends, were never grandfather's, that she's not sure why my mom keeps thinking

THE BODY (*cont'd*)

they were. And in that same conversation she told me that she's seen our *family tree* - a small thing, but going back a few generations.

I spent so much time feeling this loss. And there was no reason to.

*Pause. An unspoken thought: does the lack of reason make the pain, the loss untrue, fake, affected?*

I would've found something else to be upset about, I guess.

But I still really love this mug. It still makes me feel connected to my grandfather.

*THE BODY'S GRANDFATHER appears in vague military dress. Members of his unit join him. Their dress and weapons are varied. It's impossible to place them in time or location. But this is war, they're in the trenches.*

*The battle hasn't begun yet.*

GRANDFATHER

Put on that helmet, kid, unless you're keen on walking around with shrapnel sticking out of your head.

STEWART

Like a Christmas tree with a star on top.

GRANDFATHER

Like a dead Christmas tree with a star on top.

*THE BODY is in military dress. The mug in their hand has become a helmet. THE BODY puts it on.*

*The unit laughs and begins checking their weapons and supplies.*

THE BODY

Where are we?

GRANDFATHER

The war.

THE BODY

Which war?

GRANDFATHER

It's just... the war.

THE BODY

I... don't want to be here.

STEWART

You didn't jump at the prospect of being maimed, killed, and crushed by the weight of other bodies?

GRANDFATHER

Now, Stewart, they know what a war is, you don't need to make it worse. Don't got time to deal with more deserters.

STEWART

Point is, ain't a goddamn one of us wants to be here, so what. You special?

THE BODY

Well, uh... I don't believe in war.

*STEWART looks around.*

STEWART

Well, uh, surprise, it's here.

THE BODY

No, I mean... I mean, on a moral level, I am against war.

STEWART

You'll be wanting to talk to Franz then. Franz!

*FRANZ is mid-argument with another unit member, preaching:*

FRANZ

Who should decide the fate of the workers but the workers themselves? One ruler, a few, cannot control the existence or destiny of the many. They should not keep us under their heel, at their mercy. The people are strength, in solidarity we bear more power than any dictator, any war lord, any CEO!

STEWART

Franz!! There's a new recruit with "moral integrity"

*FRANZ bounds over.*

FRANZ

A Marxist??

THE BODY

A... something-ist...I mean  
yeah  
probably? I don't read enough.

*FRANZ shakes THE BODY's hand enthusiastically.*

FRANZ

Let's start by discussing / your stance on

THE BODY

I was just wondering, I mean,  
this is war

FRANZ

Yes.

THE BODY

You're against that...

FRANZ

I'm against many things!

THE BODY

So, what do you do?  
Like, here, in war. If you're against it.

FRANZ

I won't kill another soldier, if that's what you're asking.  
They are our comrades,  
our siblings.  
Shackled to their leaders,  
who don't even know them,  
who couldn't tell you their names,  
these soldiers have been forced  
into the fight just as we have.

THE BODY

How do you survive the battles?

*STEWART and GRANDFATHER start laughing. FRANZ gives them a proud and pointed look.*

FRANZ

I haven't seen one yet.  
But I stand by my position.  
I will not kill.

GRANDFATHER

Sure, sure. Get back to your post, Franz.

*FRANZ returns and the unit begins prepping again. THE BODY stands and watches, unsure of what to do. Finally, Grandfather notices.*

GRANDFATHER

Get over here, kid, help me with this.

*THE BODY joins him and helps with his task.*

THE BODY

Grandpa?

GRANDFATHER

Yeah, kid?

THE BODY

Do you ever think "I am a terrible person?"

GRANDFATHER

You're not that bad.

THE BODY

No, I mean, do you ever find yourself sitting staring into space thinking about, whatever, who knows what and then the words "I am a terrible person" just... like... float to your head?

GRANDFATHER

Are you a terrible person?

THE BODY

No! I mean... I don't know.

GRANDFATHER

You don't know?

THE BODY

I don't think I am!

GRANDFATHER

Well, something in you sure does.

THE BODY

What?

GRANDFATHER

Some... part of you must think it's true if you're thinking it 'bout yourself.

THE BODY

I meant if *you* thought it!

GRANDFATHER

About you?

THE BODY

No not about me, like if you thought it about yourself

GRANDFATHER

But you're asking me because this has happened to you before,  
right?

THE BODY

Grandpa

GRANDFATHER

I'm just trying to help!

THE BODY

Forget it.

I was just trying to ask a question

*Pause.*

GRANDFATHER

Yes

THE BODY

Yes what

GRANDFATHER

Yes, I've thought it.

THE BODY

It's happened to you too?

GRANDFATHER

Yeah, it's happened to me too

THE BODY

I was just embarrassed

GRANDFATHER

Yeah.

THE BODY

What do you do to... to...

GRANDFATHER

To make myself feel better?

THE BODY

Yeah, I guess.

GRANDFATHER

Think about the things I've done that a terrible person wouldn't do.

THE BODY

Like help people across the street,  
give money to charities?

GRANDFATHER

Kinda.

THE BODY

Does it work

*Pause. The sounds of battle are  
beginning.*

THE BODY

Does it work

GRANDFATHER

I heard you

THE BODY

Well does it work

GRANDFATHER

No it doesn't fucking work does it work for you

*Pause.*

GRANDFATHER  
Sorry, kid.  
Come on, brace yourself,  
it's about to start.

*The battle begins.  
FRANZ does not shoot to kill.  
GRANDFATHER does.  
Everyone else might. Or might not.*

*THE BODY sinks to the ground and  
puts their hands over their ears. They  
dramatically blink twice, trying to break  
themselves out of the dream. No luck.*

GRANDFATHER  
Get up, kid!

STEWART  
I think, I think they're

GRANDFATHER  
Have they left their positions?!

*Some affirmative answers from the  
unit.*

GRANDFATHER  
Grab your shit! AND FORWARD

*They move forward to face the enemy.  
And when they finally see them...*

*They are facing themselves - A  
FRANZ to a FRANZ, a STEWART to a*

*STEWART, a GRANDFATHER to a GRANDFATHER. But our BODY faces only a void. A lack. A nothingness. This enrages them.*

*The parties mirror each other for a moment and then, as one, charge at each other. The noise is deafening, it's all bright then dark, muddy, and hard to follow. THEN:*

*THE BODY gasps and wakes up, hand over palpitating heart.*

*They sit, reflecting. A long, long moment of interiority. Let the audience shift in their seats, I don't give a fuck.*

THE BODY  
Babe?

PARTNER  
Coming!

*The PARTNER enters with the huge longhorn mug of coffee. PARTNER moves carefully, trying not to spill.*

PARTNER  
Thought I heard you moving around.  
Got your fave mug and  
as much coffee  
as I could possibly fit.

*No response.*

PARTNER

You ready for it,  
or want me to set it down  
...someplace?

THE BODY

I'll take it, thanks.

PARTNER

Sure, of course.

*PARTNER sits next to them and hands  
over the mug.*

THE BODY

I had... such a weird dream.

PARTNER

Yeah? A nightmare?

THE BODY

Yeah. I think. I was with my grandfather. In a war?

PARTNER

Any particular war?

THE BODY

Just "The War"

It was like...

I mean, I've only seen one or two war movies so it probably wasn't like the actual  
thing at all. I dunno, it probably was a stand-in for...  
well, for something.

PARTNER

Oooo, dream metaphors

THE BODY

Shut up

*They almost have a loving scuffle, but the coffee is precious and in danger of spilling.*

THE BODY

He used my right pronouns in the dream. I mean, obviously he never knew them in real life, but it felt... nice.

PARTNER

Yeah, I'm sure. Affirming.

THE BODY

Yeah. Even if it's just a my-brain-accepts-my-gender-even-when-I'm-sleeping thing.

*Pause. Sip of coffee.*

THE BODY

It's funny you brought me this mug.

PARTNER

Ohhh, yeah, I'm sorry.

THE BODY

No, it's okay... It still means... *something*, you know.

PARTNER

Sure.

*Pause. Sip of coffee.*

THE BODY

I think  
actually the mug

THE BODY (*cont'd*)  
it's a pretty good stand-in  
for my relationship with him

PARTNER  
Hmm. How so?

THE BODY  
Well...  
I loved him  
I *do* love him, or I still love who I thought he was?  
A lot.  
But I also think he was probably a terrible person.

PARTNER  
So your understanding of both the mug and your gramps was...

THE BODY  
Out of context?  
And I don't know...  
I mean, I can't possibly know  
how I would've felt about each  
if I had known. But I think I might've  
still cared about them.  
Both him and the mug.  
And I don't know what that says about me?

PARTNER  
We gotta work on your coffee intake.

THE BODY  
Come on,  
I just mean...  
Well, think of it,  
would you love me?  
Even if I was a terrible person?

PARTNER

If?

THE BODY

Har har.

PARTNER

Look, I can't possibly answer that question.

But if you were a terrible person, you wouldn't be you.

And you are the person I love.

THE BODY

Even if I sometimes do terrible things?

PARTNER

Even though you are not *always* kind and sensitive.

THE BODY

I love you too.

PARTNER

You better!

*A moment. It's nice. Then:*

THE BODY

I had a weird dream night before last, too

PARTNER

Something you ate? Too much weed before bed? Too much coffee before bed?

THE BODY

I'm trying to be serious

PARTNER

Sorry.

PARTNER (*cont'd*)

I'm really  
sorry. I'm listening.

THE BODY

And both times I woke up with my heart thumping wildly, harder than I've ever felt,  
and maybe even skipping a bit?

PARTNER

That sounds scary

THE BODY

Yeah.

PARTNER

Do we need to take you to a clinic? I have tomorrow off.

THE BODY

I dunno, maybe.

*Pause.*

THE BODY

How do you cope with suddenly realizing  
for the first time  
you really *really* don't want to stop existing

PARTNER

Babe?

THE BODY

I mean, do you remember the first time you realized you didn't want to die? Like the  
first time you were scared of death?

PARTNER

Not the first time, no...

I think...

well, I've always known death could be just around the corner for me. I didn't really have the luxury of a peaceful, safe childhood... But that means I've lived with that fear for a long time. It still scares me sometimes. But it's a fear I know. Sometimes there's a comfort in the feeling you've known? It's still terrifying but you've discovered methods of living with it, because what else can you do?

THE BODY

Yeah, you're right.

And I'm sorry. That...

That makes sense.

PARTNER

Where's this coming from?

THE BODY

I just

I've been thinking about it recently.

Just that...

I spent so much time wanting to be separate from my body, and even even my mind sometimes if that... makes sense

So much time thinking it would be okay to just not exist,

even when, even when I didn't actively want to die, nothingness

seemed... fine. Nothingness just seemed like an opportunity to finally take a break.

And now... I don't just want to live. I want to live as me, and keep existing.

Forever maybe.

PARTNER

Live as you? Like you now?

Like out?

Or have you been thinking about

THE BODY

I don't know.

PARTNER

Sure. Which  
I don't think I've directly said it before but  
obviously whatever you need,  
anything affirming for you,  
I am a thousand, thousand  
percent behind

THE BODY

Yeah. I don't know. I don't know that it's as simple as a transition for me. Not that  
that's... simple. I just.  
I mean, I'd still have the body... just... different. I don't know.  
But  
Thanks. Thank you. I've... I've been scared. Before. And sometimes I still am.  
That...  
Well. You've just always been so accepting.

PARTNER

It's a bare minimum, really.

THE BODY

I love you.

PARTNER

I love you, too.

THE BODY

You better!

*They share a tender moment. The PARTNER has something they want to say. They aren't sure how THE BODY will respond.*

## PARTNER

I know it might be difficult to find the right person but I'd be happy to help you find someone to talk to about this. It's been awhile. And I think it would help. Especially if you aren't sure of any path forward.

## THE BODY

Yeah.

Probably.

I don't know.

## PARTNER

You can't avoid your questions forever.

And, like, you're an adult, I won't,

I'm not gonna...

push you into it unwillingly.

But I'm right here, telling you I'll help, I'll do as much of the work as I can, if you'll start to face these questions and decisions. If you'll at least try to grapple with them.

*No response. A tender touch, then  
PARTNER leaves.*

## THE THIRD DREAM

*THE BODY, alone. A long long long  
long long long moment. Interiority.  
THE BODY does not want to have this  
conversation. Then:*

## THE BODY

I've had heart palpitations three nights now.

The third night I...

You know, I didn't want to tell you about this night.

I thought...

well, maybe we could stop everything now?

Would you like to go home? I would...

*Looks off stage.*

The people in the wings are waving their hands emphatically.  
I think they're very proud of this next part and would be upset at me if I stopped here. I really don't like people being upset at me.

I want them to like me.

I want you to like me.

I *want* you to think I'm a good person, a clever person, a strong person, even if you can't understand me.

I know... well, some of you may find it hard to identify with my experience. And that's fine. I can't understand all of you, I'm sure. But to try and clarify... a little of how I feel... Here are some of my daydreams.

A daydream: tattoos are just a step  
away from a nose job just a step away  
from tits or no tits just a step away from  
trading arms with your twin...

A daydream: big metal legs.  
And they make me two feet taller.

A daydream: my body phases and  
Me the Mist seeps imperceptibly through  
my apartment.

*Pause. Finally, as ready as they'll ever  
be:*

So -  
I've had heart palpitations for three nights now.  
The third night I was in the future...

*Pause.*

And I refused to wake up.

*THE BODY is in a clinical room with a table and two chairs facing each other. It is uncomfortable, familiar, and frightening - like finding yourself on a sci fi set you recognize.*

*They aren't sure how they got here and look around the room before settling in a chair. They look around again - are any of the walls mirrored glass? - and try the other chair. Then back to the first.*

*Finally, an INTERVIEWER enters, wearing a lab coat in a way that implies they are too good for lab coats, that this inconvenience is more for your sake than theirs. While flipping through a file, or scrolling through an unseen screen in front of their eyes:*

INTERVIEWER

So... who... are... you

THE BODY

Uh. My name's

INTERVIEWER

Not your name! That taints the recording.

THE BODY

Uh. Okay...

INTERVIEWER

What's the serial number you received?

*THE BODY looks at a stamp or something similar on their hand.*

THE BODY  
number 7177\$C

*The INTERVIEWER sits across and stares out at the BODY, hitting a very specific type of shark-eye look.  
Silence.  
Then:*

THE BODY  
I'm kind of nervous when I take tests

INTERVIEWER  
Please don't move.

THE BODY  
I hate doctors

INTERVIEWER  
I'm not a doctor.

THE BODY  
Actually I'm not sure/that's better?

INTERVIEWER  
Okay, it's ready. I have limited time to conduct this interview. Please answer the questions quickly and honestly...  
What color is your shirt?

THE BODY  
Blue

*THE BODY looks down to double check.*

THE BODY  
Yeah, blue

INTERVIEWER  
Do you prefer sunrises or sunsets?

THE BODY  
Both?  
Or... neither?

INTERVIEWER  
What was the first thing you thought when you looked into the mirror this morning?

THE BODY  
The last time I stood here I looked the same. And the time before that. But I'm not sure about the time before that.

INTERVIEWER  
What was your last dream about?

THE BODY  
I don't remember.

*A lie.  
The INTERVIEWER knows this.  
THE BODY knows the INTERVIEWER knows this.*

INTERVIEWER  
Are you a good liar?

THE BODY  
What do you think?

INTERVIEWER

Do you have any scars?

THE BODY

Don't you?

INTERVIEWER

Do you hold grudges?

THE BODY

You don't need to worry about any of them.

INTERVIEWER

Describe only the good things  
that come into your mind  
when thinking  
about your mother

THE BODY

My mother?

INTERVIEWER

Yes

THE BODY

Let me tell you about my mother:  
When my mother was a child she fell  
out of a tree and broke her arm twice.  
Her mother said the doctor would cut it off  
the next time.

*They both sit in that a moment. Then,  
as if just now remembering:*

INTERVIEWER

One word! You're only supposed to use one word per good thing

THE BODY

You didn't say that

INTERVIEWER

I *did* say only *good* things

Did this

*The INTERVIEWER asks someone listening in.*

INTERVIEWER

Is this recording still acceptable?

I really don't want to start over.

*An affirmative from an unseen coworker.*

INTERVIEWER

Good, let's move on.

What type of modification would you be looking for?

THE BODY

I... I can discuss the specifics with...

well, with someone who might be more knowledgeable

than me... I mean, I'm trying to say I'm...

well, I'm a *little* flexible on the form.

If I have to be.

But I've been really drawn to...

maybe I'd like to be a mist? If that's even possible.

INTERVIEWER

I had you pegged as one of the cat people...

Alright... did you read through all the terms and conditions in the lobby?

THE BODY

I skimmed...

INTERVIEWER

Good enough. If you were chosen would you rather be studied in our facility or in the open?

THE BODY

I haven't decided yet... it's a big decision.

*INTERVIEWER begins searching for something in their file (or pockets if the file is "virtual.")*

INTERVIEWER

Of course.

We've actually created a pamphlet to help anyone making the decision...

where...

now where would I have,

where did I...

ugh, one second.

Actually could you just bring it to me?

THE BODY

....what?

*INTERVIEWER holds up a finger and turns to the side.*

INTERVIEWER

I don't want to break this up, we're almost done. Can you just bring it in?

*INTERVIEWER shark-smiles at THE BODY.*

*They wait in silence.*

*Finally someone who belongs in a lab coat enters, glances a couple of times at THE BODY with a smile, trying to be friendly, before quickly depositing the pamphlet in front of INTERVIEWER.*

*To THE BODY:*

LAB COAT

Thank you for choosing The People's Bodies Unlimited, Incorporated.

*The INTERVIEWER makes a face and LAB COAT exits quickly.  
INTERVIEWER hands THE BODY the pamphlet and gets up to leave.*

INTERVIEWER

Here we go. So take a look over this while you wait for your results and if you're chosen, make sure to come in ready with your decision. We don't have time to discuss it with patients ourselves. Have a good day. And uh

*Begrudgingly:*

INTERVIEWER

Thank you for considering The People's Bodies Unlimited, Incorporated.

THE BODY

Wait! Look, I... I know I must've been a bad interview but... this would mean so much to me, I hope

INTERVIEWER

I don't take bribes / I don't need them

THE BODY

Oh! Of course not! I just

INTERVIEWER

Look, these interviews are a formality. There's a bit of judging your psychological aptitude to physical modification, but you really can't mess the interview up. We want as many variables in human type as possible so you being.... snippy... might've even given you a better chance.

I can't say you'll be chosen.

But I don't see a reason you won't be.

THE BODY

Thank you. That's reassuring,  
I really appreciate it.

*INTERVIEWER nods and begins to leave, but turns back for a moment.*

INTERVIEWER

Just. Read everything. In the pamphlet and the paperwork. Before you sign. If we can give you something you've always wanted, needed, that's great. But know the cost first.

THE BODY

Of course.

INTERVIEWER

There's no company cares about your happiness.

*The interview table is a kitchen table.  
THE BODY sits with a mug of coffee,  
thinking. For a moment they notice and  
wonder about the sudden setting  
change.*

*But then their PARTNER enters with  
the pamphlet, not sure yet what it  
means, but angry already.*

*This is not quite the PARTNER we know and love.*

PARTNER

What the fuck is this?  
Where did you get it?  
Have they started passing them out?

*THE BODY stiffens - can they get out of this argument by just saying yes? Probably.*

THE BODY

I don't know...  
No. No I... I got it. At their building.

*PARTNER sits down at the table, or walks away for a breath, or looks through the pamphlet, or hangs it somewhere, or throws it away.*

PARTNER

At their building.  
I'm.  
So.  
So I guess I'll just assume if you were there for anything else you would've told me.

*Long pause as affirmation.*

PARTNER

What are you thinking,  
I can't  
I can't read what you're thinking  
and I hate it / I fucking hate it

THE BODY

I think... I don't know  
what are you thinking

PARTNER

No! No, you can't send this back to me  
no more 'I don't knows'  
you went there, you asked for the pamphlet

THE BODY

Well  
it's... a bit more

PARTNER

What did you do

THE BODY

Nothing! Nothing,  
yet.  
But I did...  
I went through the interview.  
And I think they'll accept me for the trial.

PARTNER

They are shitty, they are evil.  
You know this is just another way for them to get their claws into us, to  
institutionalize us, to make money off of us; you're basically giving your body, or your  
your mind to, like, Amazon

THE BODY

I haven't done it yet!

PARTNER

Will you?  
And... what would you choose?

THE BODY

My form?

PARTNER

No... That's not, that's *not* what I care about. Would you... where's the

*The PARTNER picks the pamphlet up from wherever it landed and rifles through.*

PARTNER

'Participants are free to choose between two options to ensure the success of their modification and fulfill the research parameters of this study. Once the trial is underway you will not be able to change your decision, so please read thoroughly before informing your Transition Specialist of your choice.'

THE BODY

Yeah...

PARTNER

I've seen those things / wandering

THE BODY

Things!?

PARTNER

You know what I mean! The memory-less wandering around, blank eyes, relearning everything, they're barely left with their own languages. They're husks!

THE BODY

That's only in some cases! And, and why the hell does language have to matter so much?

PARTNER

It doesn't!

THE BODY

Then why the fuck / do you care

PARTNER

You'd forget *me*! Don't be obtuse, you *know* you'd forget me!

*No response.*

PARTNER

And you've seen the way they're treated, people abuse them on the street

THE BODY

Nothing that isn't already / happening to

PARTNER

And the alternative isn't much better! Keep your memories but stay in...

*Looking back through the pamphlet.*

PARTNER

'Our state-of-the-art research facility with all needs provided as we continue monitoring your condition and response to external stimuli'? They'll keep you in a cage!

THE BODY

It's a pod

PARTNER

It's a fucking advanced cage and I won't be able to see you. I'll never be able to see you again.

THE BODY

There's socializing!

PARTNER

With corporate scientists and other...

THE BODY

What? Experiments??

PARTNER

Yes! / And Not Me! I'd have to, shit, I'd have to *join* to see you!

THE BODY

Oh, fuck you.

FUCK you

PARTNER

I want... I want the best things for you,

I want you to have what you need, and what you want, but

but why

does it have to be like this?

You won't be able to *live*. You'll be reduced to just... your form. That's still all they care about... what you look like. If it's acceptable, if it's sustainable.

This is ridiculous.

*No response. A shift. The PARTNER is more like the PARTNER we've seen previously.*

PARTNER

You have to wake up. THIS is your ideal fantasy, THIS is the best you could come up with? You can't even imagine a world without misery? And you want to *stay*?

Wake up!

THE BODY

What?

*Shift back.*

PARTNER

So? What are you going to do? What do you want?

THE BODY

I-i...

PARTNER

What do you want?

THE BODY

I don't. I don't want this, I don't want to argue, I don't want to choose! I just want it to fix itself, I just want to get away, or have it all or or or.....or

*A FIGURE enters or appears carrying a large book.*

*The PARTNER is gone.*

*A procession.*

*THE BODY tries to reach THE FIGURE but it's hard to move at a reasonable speed, like they're being sucked into the floor.*

THE BODY

Mom?

*THE FIGURE slams the book down on a table or pedestal and begins to read:*

FIGURE

The book of the generation of The Body, the child of a mother, the child of a grandfather, who was probably a terrible person.

THE BODY

Mom?

## FIGURE

The book of the generation of The Body,  
the child of, the child of?  
They begat they; and they begat they; and they begat they and their kin;  
And they begat her and him of there; and she begat they; and they begat him!  
No lies lie here, this is built of truth:  
As below, so above, and as above, so below, here to perform a singular miracle.  
Just as every speck of being came to be through one focus,  
so every speck is re-created through one focus, a singular thing.  
The sun is their father,  
the moon their mother,  
they have been carried in the gut of the wind and nursed from the breast of the  
earth.  
All natural perfection is here.  
They are most whole when transformed into earth.  
Split them.  
Break the earth from the fire,  
pull apart the structure from the essence,  
carefully, with complete attention.  
And then, from earth to heaven, they rise,  
And then, from heaven to earth they fall,  
and in this they draw the power of all types.  
In the witnessing of this, you can bear the understanding of the whole world  
and lose any uncertainty.  
This is true mind, true guts, true nerve, this conquers the structure and reveals the  
essence.  
So were they made. So were you. So was the whole world created.  
And with this knowledge, through this process, magnificent adaptations may be  
produced.  
I am I and I have said all I came here to say.

*THE FIGURE lifts the book and teeth  
pour out of it, crackling against the  
floor. So many teeth, at the end many  
of them glittering gold.*

*THE FIGURE slams the book shut and leaves, still in procession.*

*Then suddenly:  
THE BODY is walking through the research facility, mid-conversation with the LAB COAT.*

*The teeth can stay. Or not. Your choice.*

LAB COAT

There's a little kitchen that way. You won't have access or really need it right after the transition, we'll take care of nutrition for awhile. We'll take care of everything for you. Anything you could possibly need or want while you're here, just ask me!

THE BODY

Uh. Oh. Okay. Hi?

LAB COAT

So, you took off any metal, rings, necklaces...

THE BODY

Uh, yeah, left them in...  
in... ?

LAB COAT

Storage

THE BODY

Storage. I figured I wouldn't need them after this anyways.

*LAB COAT laughs too eagerly.*

LAB COAT

You've fasted since Saturday?

THE BODY

Yeah. What happens if you don't?

LAB COAT

Nothing! It's fine! Just a precaution!  
Let's sit here, we'll wait for the others.

THE BODY

Others?

LAB COAT

You'll be with a group of three other...

THE BODY

You can say test subjects.

LAB COAT

Participants! For the duration of your stay.

*Uncomfortable silence.*

LAB COAT

You know... we've only had two mists before you. It'll be exciting to see your progression!

THE BODY

I shouldn't feel... nervous... about that?

LAB COAT

No!! Oh, no, their transitions went without a hitch!

THE BODY

Are you even allowed to talk about them?

LAB COAT

It's fine! I won't say their names.

THE BODY

I'm not sure that's how it works.

LAB COAT (*too cheerily*)

That's how it works here, everything's fine!

THE BODY

So they both...

LAB COAT

Their transitions were perfect, beautiful really!

THE BODY

But how were they... did they... did they choose to stay here or go out?

LAB COAT

You know, everyone should choose for themselves but I think staying in here is really the best choice, I'm glad you picked it! We'll take care of every need you have!

THE BODY

Sure. Okay.

LAB COAT

I'll check where the others are, we should be getting started soon.

*LAB COAT exits. THE BODY considers looking around the space but before there's even a moment to start, LAB COAT reenters with three others. One is the PARTNER.*

LAB COAT

Here we are!

*THE BODY notices PARTNER.*

THE BODY

What are you doing here?

LAB COAT

We're running a bit behind so I'd like to introduce everyone.

THE BODY

I'm sorry, one minute.

*THE BODY pulls the PARTNER to the side, away from the group. The others sit awkwardly in limbo as they wait.*

THE BODY

What are you doing here??

PARTNER

I've joined the study, I'm so glad we're in the same group!

THE BODY

You hate the study

PARTNER

I just didn't understand before, but I've had time, I thought on it.

THE BODY

What do you want?

PARTNER

What?

THE BODY

What do you want to be?

PARTNER

I... I'm not sure.  
But I know I want a change.  
And I know I want to be here with you.  
Can that be enough?

*No response.*

PARTNER

What would you like me to be?

*This is uncomfortable for THE BODY,  
and increasingly so.*

PARTNER

I could be a mist too?  
Or something else?  
What would you like me to be?  
We'll just start over.  
Or we can skip ahead.  
What would you like?

THE BODY

I. Really don't like this. This is  
this is too much.

*One of the other PARTICIPANTS  
approaches THE BODY and pulls  
them aside.*

PARTICIPANT

Let me tell you about my mother:  
When my mother was a child she fell  
out of a tree and broke her arm. She fell  
out of a tree and broke her arm twice.  
The doctor said he would cut it off  
the third time.

THE BODY

Why are you making me think about these things?

PARTICIPANT

Are you a terrible person?

THE BODY

I don't want to think about these things!!

PARTICIPANT

Wake up!

*LAB COAT rushes the PARTICIPANT away, apologizing.*

LAB COAT

I'll fix it, we'll fix it, I'm sorry

*A cacophony of I'm sorrys - everyone but THE BODY is apologizing and leaving. It's unsettling, like one being with multiple mouths speaking at different times. THE BODY is caught up in it, hating it. Suddenly, the lights go out.*

THE BODY

Hello? What's happening??!

*Lights up on THE BODY as MIST, or perhaps suspended in mist, becoming a mist.*

*Everything is Golden. They are peaceful, serene, not all conscious.*

*After a moment, SISTER enters.*

SISTER  
Are you in there?

*Silence.*  
*THE BODY attempts to speak.*  
*Pause.*  
*Attempt.*  
*Pause.*  
*Breathe.*

THE BODY  
Words cannot express  
consciousness.

SISTER  
Hun?  
...hun?  
Can you even remember me?

*Pause.*

THE BODY  
I remember my memory,  
still it gets a little hazy.  
Especially now?  
Especially now.  
My existence is taking its toll on me.  
Everything takes more effort  
making decisions takes more effort  
going outside takes more effort  
seeing people takes more effort  
not seeing people takes more effort  
I just  
want  
to sleep.

SISTER

I know.

I know you do.

Do you know where you are?

THE BODY

Nowhere.

No.

Where?

Research facility?

SISTER

Do you know where you really are?

THE BODY

I could teach you how to sleep...

I'm not saying you need me to,

I'm just saying I could,

if you wanted to,

if you ever got tired,

if you needed an escape.

Just if

that ever

happened...

I could teach you how to sleep.

SISTER

You've created an interesting world here.

Not as happy as I would've expected.

But maybe this is the best you could come up with?

A place where you can finally cloud over, escape from us all, find your version of peace.

THE BODY

Who are you? I remember my memory,

still it gets a little hazy.

SISTER

You know, I pegged you as a quiet forest person,  
but I guess dystopian sci-fi works, too.

*Pause.*

SISTER

You have to wake up, hun.  
It's not perfect,  
it's not easy,  
it's not fair,  
it's rarely enjoyable,  
but here, this place is just an escape, a fantasy  
twisted to keep you from the real problems,  
your real questions. In here there is just you,  
refusing to look out.

THE BODY

I'm just trying to sleep.  
Everything takes more effort.

SISTER

I know. Maybe, huh,  
maybe it doesn't feel perfect in here  
because the body is still fighting,  
still out there waiting,  
waiting for you and your mind,  
wanting to know what your choice is,  
content with anything if you'd just wake up and face it.

THE BODY

I could...  
I could teach you how to sleep?  
Everything... takes more effort.... these days.  
Going outside takes more effort....

SISTER

Sure, I know, hun. It's easier not facing it, it's unfair that you have to.  
But those real world problems,  
and your internal ones,  
won't just disappear. They won't stop just because you're in this fog.  
And the longer you're in here,  
the more you're hurting yourself and others out there.

*Pause.*

SISTER

Leaving this dream will take strength and power.  
There will be fear and suffering from within you  
and from the world around you.  
I know it's painful  
but  
let's not escape.  
Let's not run away.  
Let's face everything together.

THE BODY

Together?

SISTER

Together.

*SISTER reaches out, offering her hand. THE BODY begins to struggle against the sleep, to reach out, and finally they are able to grasp each other. Maybe just their hands, or maybe their whole selves clinging to each other.*

*AND THEN:*

*The dream is falling apart.  
The sound of teeth falling, backwards?  
A large book snaps shut?*

*War and peace?  
A town rebuilding?  
A tornado, dissipating?  
A child being born?*

*AND THEN:  
THE BODY gasps and wakes up, hand  
over palpitating heart. PARTNER  
enters.*

PARTNER  
Are you okay??

THE BODY  
No. I don't think so.

PARTNER  
Can I do anything?

THE BODY  
Can you hold me?  
And then... maybe...  
maybe we could talk about what I need to do next.

*PARTNER sits next to THE BODY.  
They cling to each other.*

*End of play.*