

the body

a one-act play by andrew zadel

[1.1]

*The sound of breathing.*

*JUDY lies alone on her bed, drawing herself up slowly.*

JUDY:

This isn't my body. I want to throw up until my stomach comes out. I want to cough up my own lungs.

I'm replaying the night in my head, trying to splice it together, trying to make it make sense.

I remember wiping down the counter in the restaurant. The chef left early and my table stayed late. I remember Ray standing alone with the keys, waiting to lock up. "C'mon Judy, let's go."

And now he's here, in my apartment. I can hear him in the kitchen, looking in my fridge. He pours himself a drink and clears his throat. He goes out the kitchen door, closing it softly, careful not to break the latch. But he's not leaving. He's standing in the garden.

What are you waiting for? I did everything you told me to. Just go. Please go.

This is not my body. He's standing with his back to me, not afraid because he was deep inside, rotting my guts with his hunger and sweat. But that body's gone, the hot St. Laurence rising up to swallow my skin, washing it down to forgetful places. I'm giving my flesh for steel, a human steam train that fights like Brad Pitt and talks like Laurence Olivier. And I'm shovelling coal into its womb, purifying with fire, boiling flawless waters.

*JUDY takes the hammer and attacks him, knocking him down.*

Nobody will ever hurt me again.

I remember him offering to walk me home. Usually I take a cab, but the money wasn't good tonight. "C'mon Judy." I remember thinking it would be okay. Ray's my manager. At my place, he said he needed to make a phone call. He said it'll just take a minute.

I don't want to touch him, but I can't leave him out here. I roll him onto the bed and he's not so scary anymore. One eye open and one eye closed, skin rough like burlap.

[1.2]

I saw a movie one time about a slaughterhouse, a black and white documentary from the fifties.

Paris opens up, clothed in liberation, lovers' lips meeting and the camera cuts away. A whistle brings the cattle car, the pilgrims fall in line, horning and hoofing at the fettered gates of hell. They die efficiently, a hammer between the horns. This is not cruelty. This is work to be done.

*JUDY passes the saw through "the body."*

A bull is not an animal. It is many cuts of meat, strung together in defiance of the blueprint. There's a fat woman who never wipes her blade, a seamstress of skin taking out old stitching. This is women's work as it's always been, tidying up the dirty things behind closed doors.

*JUDY puts his pieces in a suitcase, two plastic bags and a box.*

And the movie's over. It's me now. I'm packing up his pieces, cleaning up my floor. I'm gonna get rid of him and not leave anything behind, not one piece of straw.

I remember him asking for a drink. "Is this your bedroom, Judy?" I remember asking him to go.

I'm going to see my mom. She works at a car plant in Oshawa. It's far but I'm not tired. All I have to do is load up the trunk.

Sometimes, to put things together you've gotta take things apart.

*Scene change: JUDY can be seen loading the bags, box and suitcase into the car.*

[2.1]

*A party. Eighties music.*

BECKY:

He's totally looking at you.

Alice, he is not an airhead. He was in my lab group yesterday and he knows how to spell "titration," which is more than I can say for some people in this conversation.

Gag me with a spoon, okay? Mega hunk Cooper Colson is staring at you and he hasn't got a date for grad and it's already February so I suggest go with the flow. Follow my lead.

Wait. Do not talk about the Challenger disaster because that was so last week and even I am over it now, got it? Carpe diem.

Hi. Cooper, right? Hi. I was just chilling over there with my friend and then we just kind of decided to move over here for no reason at all, really. Like a proton to metal hydroxide, right? Right. This is my friend, Al...

Your last piece? Thanks. Watermelon's my favourite. Oh, sorry, Alice. [pointing to her mouth] You want some?

And everybody's looking at us: Becky "never had a boyfriend" Deckard, and Cooper Colson, the guy who scored the league-winning goal when our team was one man down. And he wants to know if I want to go for a ride in his dad's Pontiac Grand Prix. And Alice says "drinking and driving can kill a friendship."

I'm watching his lips, the way they curl when he says "power play." And he asks me again.

*BECKY gets into the car.*

[2.2]

He turned left at the Mac's which means we're stopped north of town somewhere, at the side of the road. A car goes by and the headlights flash inside his blue eyes. And he tells me that I'm beautiful. Nobody ever said that to me. Just mom, but that doesn't count.

He tastes like watermelon, like some kind of bubblegum angel. And I guess I taste like that to him, too: pink and hot and perfect.

*He kisses her. He gets more aggressive, touching her.*

C'mon Cooper, that's grody. Let's go back to the party.

But he says he'd rather stay here with me. He says that I'm beautiful. He kisses me again and it's nice. And he's kissing my neck and his hands are everywhere, all over me.

Hey, Coop, chill out.

Hey. I don't like this. Get off me.

And I punch him in the face and he stops. The only person I've ever punched is my brother Brett, but that doesn't count.

*He punches her.*

Everything's okay. I'm outside now, just watching.

Watching him open the door and pull some girl out into the dirty snow and lift up her skirt. Watching him slam her into the ground, again and again, until she stops kicking and goes limp.

But it's not okay. This is really happening. There's something inside me, and I know my life is different now but all I can do is wait.

I'm sick and dizzy, walking away from him through the snow.

"Let me drive you home, Becky. It's not safe out here. Becky, please."

He says Becky like it's a dog's name. It makes me want to barf. It's dark and I don't even know where I am.

In the car, I don't say anything. I don't even cry. He asks if he can call me sometime.

[2.3]

*BECKY sits on the bed.*

I used to sit on dad's bed on Saturday mornings, 'cause I needed him to help me build my model rocket. I wasn't allowed to wake him up, so I'd

just wait, slowing down my lungs until we were breathing at the same time. I should go. The sheets are so clean and I'm so dirty.

It's just me, dad. I'm just... My toothbrush was in your bathroom.

Got a lift. A friend of mine.

It was okay. Same as every party. I'm gonna take a shower. Goodnight.

*BECKY hesitates.*

Dad? Something happened.

Something bad.

Wait. Don't wake up mom. Just let her sleep.

In the hospital, some man puts something inside me and another man takes pictures. A police officer is combing my pubic hair, looking for something. He holds my panties up to the light bulb.

Yes. That's a new stain.

No drugs. I don't want anything.

I said "no." Can I get off this thing now?

Dad's in the waiting room. I can't talk, but he always knows what to say. He does the toasts at grandma's birthdays, always gives the eulogy.

He says, "I'll bring the car around."

[2.4]

*BECKY sits at the kitchen table.*

Outside our kitchen window, the snow's gone and there's a scarecrow standing in the grass. That farmer gave it to me after the trial, to take care of me. On the stand he said he was walking his dog that night and he heard me screaming. Cooper went to jail. I'm not going to school anymore. On my locker it says "Becky Deckard is a dirty whore."

The doctor says I'm pregnant.

Mom's got the radio on 'cause a nuclear reactor blew up, somewhere called Chernoba or something, and all that radiation went into the

ground. And kids not even born yet are gonna live their whole lives deformed.

Mom says I already suffered enough. She's talking about university, about throwing my life away. She takes the cross off the wall and walks out. The soup's boiling over. I haven't really eaten in weeks. But there's another person inside me, and it's not Cooper Colson. It's somebody else, and she needs me to eat. Totally helpless, and nobody can save her but me. I'm going to call her Judith.

Outside our kitchen window it's summertime, and dad comes home with a box and him and Brett are laughing, trying to figure out the instructions. It took two hours to set it up in my room. A new crib.

[2.5]

*BECKY opens the door and returns to the kitchen table.*

Judy? Did you just drive all the way out here? What time did you leave Montreal?

You should've told me you were coming; I'm just about to leave for work. Anyway, I've got some lunch, sit down. I thought you worked on Tuesdays.

Seriously? I thought you loved that job.

Well, it's June anyway. You should be hanging out with your friends in your backyard, especially after I fixed it up for you. How's my old scarecrow doing holding up?

Close your mouth, Judy, you're grossing me out. Hey, listen. Alice's son picked us up from the plant yesterday, 'cause he's in town from Waterloo, and I'm telling you he's getting a lot cuter these last few years. Maybe you...

Okay, don't freak out. I'm not saying you need help. Don't be so touchy.

Don't ask me that. Can't we just sit and talk like a family?

Yes, we are. Two is more than one and that's enough for a family. I've been trying to make it three, you know, but there's not a big market for damaged goods these days, especially thirty-seven year old single moms.

He's not your "father". I don't care where he is and you don't either, so stop asking. He's got nothing to do with us.

I called the parole board when he got out. He went to Manitoba, a place called Steinbach. They've got a ban on alcohol. I guess he still blames it on the beer. That's all I know and that's all you need to know.

But you're okay, right, Jude? Promise me you'd tell me if something happened.

Alice is here. We're going in early today. There's a new machine for the Grand Prix assembly line and they're explaining it today. It's supposed to be for supervisors, but I think it's interesting.

Hey, that would great. Garden's too big for me now that you're gone. The shovel's in the shed. Pack some compost on the roses – it's supposed to cool off tonight. I'll see you when I get back. Bye.

Remember when you got in trouble for picking on that girl at school? Only time I ever laid a finger on you. I was thinking of him, Judy. I could see him in you. Forget about Cooper Colson – you're as close to him as you should ever be.

*Scene change: JUDY can be seen burying a bag.*

[3.1]

*JUDY is driving in the car.*

JUDY:

Steinbach is just across the Manitoba border, about fifty k below the transcanada. On the map it looks like it doesn't belong there, just a place to crash land if you don't make it to Winnipeg. The car's a lot quicker now – less stuff to carry. If you emptied the trunk you might even fly.

Crooked bay, Horseshoe Lake, Parry Sound, Estaire. No radio. Windows closed. Asphalt becomes ink and I submarine into its hypnosis. Canada's just a dirty river: everything settles at the bottom, worshipping the gravity of the American border. But up here, things are thinned out, everything's in sharp focus.

I turn my head and take it in, the Sudbury landscape, the traveling shot on black and white film: mountains of backfill, huge conveyors sucking at the Earth, cleaning out her guts before starting on her bones. Its grayness flows down the highways, fouling every ocean – the fountain of age.

[3.2]

*JUDY gets out of the car.*

Yeah. Fill it up.

Manitoba. Steinbach. I'm visiting somebody.

Whenever I want. He doesn't know I'm coming. But I want to get there quick.

What? Sorry. I'm from Montreal, but I'm coming up from Oshawa.

Six hours. And I didn't really sleep last night.

Had to do some emergency gardening.

Shit. I didn't even notice it was flat. I didn't feel a thing.

Yeah, that'd be great. They don't teach you how to change tires in film school. The spare's in the trunk.

*JUDY starts to open the trunk, then slams it again.*

Wait. It's okay. I'll do it myself.

I said forget it. I'll do it. Here, keep the change.

[3.3]

Espanola, Sault St. Marie. Highbeams on; highbeams off – a dance in deference to people I've never met, curing their blindness with courtesy. My eyelids are flirting. I'm in a WalMart parking lot in Marathon, Ontario, cranking back the seat. Fade to black.

Under sunrise I break the Manitoba border, Ontario's rough skin smoothing into level prairie. Earth and sky meet like plane geometry, milk and oil poured together, courtship without marriage.

Steinbach is a concrete life raft on an ocean of gold. A windmill saws the air, remembering Mennonites and a horse-drawn plow. Factory workers check their watches, dreaming lazily of impending hockey seasons.

*JUDY enters a shop.*

I'm in a newspaper shop. It's small, but everything's in neat little stacks, right where it should be. The guy at the cash has got big eyebrows, hanging down over his eyes.

Hi. Have you got a phonebook I could borrow?

Cooper Colson – moved here about fifteen years ago.

He thinks his kid had a hockey coach named Colson, years ago, the year they won the league. He wipes the dust off the phonebook and starts reading out loud. Calder. Cameron. Campbell. Carr.

Two high school kids are looking at a magazine cover, arguing which girl is the hottest. "Skin and bones, the way it should be," somebody says.

Clarkson. Cohoe. Coldwell. Cole. He looks up from the phonebook and asks me what church he goes to.

I don't know. I've never met him. I just need to ask him something. It's just business.

The other kid grabs the magazine. “C’mon, man, she’s got fucked up teeth”. Behind them is Brad Pitt on a glossy cover, square jaw and perfect teeth.

The eyebrow guy doesn’t say the name out loud, he just points with a long fingernail. The words look so normal, in there with everybody else: same size, same crease running through it. It didn’t look like that in the newspaper clippings.

How do I get to Old Tom Road?

So, back where I came from, and right on Loewen.

Thanks for your help.

The first kid grabs the magazine again. “Back off, man – this chick looks like my grad date. And I’m gonna get lucky, I’m telling you. This will be my third grad and I get laid every time. I’m gonna give it to her good.”

You’d better ask her first before you fuck her.

You heard me.

Fuck you!

[3.4]

Right on Loewen. Left on Old Tom. I park my car at the side of the road. The driveway’s so long. I don’t know if I can make it.

I saw a movie one time, an old documentary about spirit possession. They made it in Africa, some British colony.

*Lights change. JUDY is “possessed” as she moves towards the house.*

They set alight the blighted dryness, irises erased in fire, clairvoyant in their blindness. New bodies shudder up, obscene, backward bent their broken knees, lions or lepers or something in between.

I’m halfway to his house, my steps getting farther apart every time.

They march and salute and God Save the Queen. Their hanging lips are beyond words. With bare hands they kill a dog, untying his pieces, boiling him in sullied soup and eating with a smile. It tasted like teatime, the backside nectar of civilization.

*Lights change back. JUDY becomes herself again.*

If you are beaten by a body, make it your own. Anyone can be strong, but power is strength without morality.

*She knocks on the door.*

He's not here. Nobody's been here for a long time.

*She digs with the shovel and buries the suitcase.*

The Earth fills back easier than it came up, flatness rising fast to swallow memory and cicatrix.

I'm too far ahead. I've gotta go to Joliette prison, where Cooper was. Somebody will know something. Sometimes, the quickest way to get somewhere is to walk backwards. That way you can see where you've been.

[4.1]

*ANNIE sits alone in a bar.*

ANNIE:

There's only one other guy in the bar. He keeps goin' over to the payphone, slammin' it down a little harder every time. He tells his wife he ain't gettin' drunk, but Eddie says there's no more Jack Daniels, and I don't never drink when I'm workin'.

Another rum and coke, Eddie – hold the rum.

You shouldn't never be alone when you're angry, precious. Anger's a gift, you know – you gotta give it away. My name's Annie. I got a place upstairs.

You look like you can afford me. Don'cha know the law of gravity? Your problems can't make it all the way to the second floor.

*They go to the bedroom. ANNIE takes out a condom.*

The rubber makes it alright, like he can look at your insides, but he can't touch. But with my boyfriend, it was different. I wanted to give him everything, and he gave me back a baby – a going away present, just before he disappeared.

*She offers him the condom.*

Don't forget to fasten your seatbelt, honey.

Sorry, you gotta put it on. If everybody went bareback, I'd get pretty dirty pretty quick. You can put a lot of filth in the human body... and a whole lot more in the human mind. So tell me, which pieces does your wife keep to herself?

*They have sex.*

There's a big mirror at my place, and I'm just watchin' him rough me up.

Take it easy, precious. You break it, you buy it.

Hey, calm down, I said. Hey, where's the condom? Put it back on. Get off me.

He's got his hands around my throat. I remember talking to Deb one time, wondering how we're going to die. I said it doesn't matter, as long as it's before my little girl.

Then he makes this sound – growling, kinda, but like a person, 'cause animals don't hurt nobody just to hurt them. And I feel his junk inside of me, like a soft bullet right in my guts.

And I know I can't do this anymore. Deb says it ain't sellin' your soul, you just rent it out for while, let them wipe their feet on it. But some stains don't wash out.

And he takes off. Doesn't leave nothin'. Just bruises.

[4.2]

There's a few of us with kids, so we take turns at night – one girl sitting and the rest of us work.

*ANNIE arrives at a door and knocks.*

Hey. It's Annie.

Yeah. I'm done for the night. Where's Katie?

It's nothing, Deb. I don't feel good, that's all. Katie, get your sneakers on.

I got dinner at home: macaroni and cheese.

That's all I got, precious, but you can have it with ketchup? Your favourite.

No, Katie.

'Cause mommy's got no money, okay? Come on.

And she just goes to bed and doesn't give me a kiss. Even when she's sleeping, she still looks hungry.

Downstairs, Eddie's feeding the last of his tips into the poker machine. He says he can't stand the look on my face and he gives me a rum and coke, the real thing, on the house. Eddie says a woman needs a dependable friend. He goes behind the bar and he passes me a gun. On the house. Anger's a gift, right? Give it away.

[4.3]

*ANNIE gets into the car.*

I'm on the highway, goin' nowhere. Deb gave me a copy of her car key, for emergencies – 'case something happens to Katie, you know? I'm already in Kingston and I don't remember leavin'. I pull onto Division Street like you always do, just off the 401, with the Swiss Chalet and stuff. Never been up this early. At home, Katie's just wakin' up, turnin' on the TV – doesn't even know I'm gone.

I walk into Harvey's. There's a bunch of families in here, hitting the road early. There's a kid eatin' scrambled eggs with ketchup.

And the gun's real heavy in my pocket, falling forward almost, towards the counter. But it feels good. Feels like I got something everybody wants. Like turnin' a trick used to feel.

*She takes out a gun.*

Hey, chick. Stick 'em up, or freeze or whatever.

No, wait, I got it, I got it: "Any of you fucking pricks move and I'll execute ever motherfucking last one of you."

I wanna see everybody making out with the floor. Slip her the tongue.

Open the till, kid. Just give me the pennies, nothing else.

Sorry, just kidding. Give me everything. Put it in a takeout bag.

*ANNIE picks up the bag of money.*

Hey, aren't you gonna ask me if I want fries with that?

And for once in my life I feel fucking amazing: nobody telling me what to do, nobody giving me extra cash if do the right things...

And there's ten cops in the parking lot. Fucking Harvey's on Division Street is next to Tim Horton's – best insurance policy in the world.

[4.4]

*Inside the jail. ANNIE walks into the visiting room with a chair.*

Who are you? I ain't expecting no visitors. If this is some kinda criminal research shit, you can forget it.

Deckard. Judy Deckard. Do you know me?

Yeah, I know Colson. He used to live in my cell, when this was a guy's prison. He visits sometimes. Who told you, anyway?

Fuck, the guards love to talk around here. So, what do you care, Deckard?

Shit. Cooper's your dad. Well, forget it, kid. He doesn't want to see you.

'Cause he told me. He ain't the same guy that hurt your mom.

Yeah, I know exactly where he lives, but I ain't tellin' you. I don't want you fuckin' up his life with your little identity crisis. He's all I got – haven't seen my own daughter in a year.

They stopped bringing her. Foster parents said it wasn't good for her. Said she's telling kids at school that her mom died in a plane crash. But I know they're just saying that. I'm out in two years and they don't want me to get her back. They don't take my calls no more.

What's the point? If they got mail from me, they'd just tear it up.

Bullshit. You're gonna bring her a letter for me? What's in it for you?

I said he doesn't want to see you, kid. You're just a bad memory. Just 'cause you're breathing doesn't make you any less of a mistake.

Alright Deckard, it's a deal. Cooper's in Sudbury. I'll give you the address when we finish my letter. You got a pen?

I can write just fine, but I want you to make it nice for me. It's part of the deal.

Dear Katie,

If they say I don't love you, it's a lie. Mommy's gotta take a time out, but I'm coming to get you real soon. That woman ain't your mom. You

came from my body, precious. You're a little piece of me, and nobody can't never change that...

*Scene change: JUDY can be seen burying a bag.*

[5.1]

*JUDY drives.*

JUDY:

The subtitle reads “Sudbury.” Establishing shot of a girl in a parked car, a neatly trimmed hedge and a red brick house. This is the address Annie gave me. The house looks blurry, like I’m not sure it’s there. Shallow depth of field.

I saw a movie one time, about an army captain who had to go up a river in Vietnam. He had to kill this colonel that went crazy, who forgot his wife and kids and built a new life with the natives.

And the further he goes upriver, the less things make sense. But he can’t go back ‘cause the end of the river is where he belongs: it’s where he’s from, but he’s never been there.

He thought when he saw the colonel, he’d know what to do, but now he can’t decide. And the natives sacrifice a bull, but he doesn’t separate neatly. His meat comes apart where it wants to, not where it should.

[5.2]

*She arrives at the door and knocks.*

A woman answers the door.

I’m looking for Cooper Colson.

“He’s at the neighbours’ house,” she says, “working on their truck, but you can wait inside.”

I’m sitting at the kitchen table and she puts coffee in front of me. She’s staring, trying to figure me out. “Where do you know Coop from?” she asks me. “Teachers’ college?”

We go back a long way.

There’s pictures on the wall behind her: some guys at a golf tournament, this same woman at Niagara Falls, a kid’s birthday party. A five-year-old sits down at the table. He’s ignoring me and drawing with red crayon, a smiling face with a moustache.

“Wait, I know where we met before,” she says “at his mom’s place, right? At the lake?”

Yeah. Probably at the lake.

The kid finishes drawing and prints something with his little fist. It says “dad.”

I gotta go. I’m really sorry, but I can’t wait. I can’t be here right now.

*JUDY tries to go out the door, but Cooper is there.*

And there he is, trying to wipe off axle grease with a rag. Some stains don’t wash out.

Hi. I’m Judy. Judith Deckard.

Like a soft bullet, right in his guts. He tells the woman he’s got to go.

“Cooper, what’s going on? Who is this chick?”

[5.3]

*They get into the truck.*

Words are beyond his hanging lips as we get inside his truck. We drive out of town, suburbia becoming industria: prairie grasses rotted, undone under juggernauts and ore-gorged iron vampires. Railway tracks arrive in hard parallel, exhausted, never touching, crossing here at last with a glimmer and a sigh. We stop.

Tongues reach out to us from inside a cattle car. Famished eyes flash in twilight, awaiting their execution like Buddhist monks, born to die. They’re just standing, trapped. They don’t know what to say.

*JUDY gives him the letter.*

This letter’s from Annie. For her daughter. It’s about the mistake she made. She thought her daughter should know why she left her behind.

I can see myself in the rearview mirror, black swallowing green as my iris spreads herself to drink the setting sun. But the mirror’s pointing backwards. Those are his eyes, waiting.

Maybe you can deliver it, Cooper. The address is on there. Maybe you can explain for somebody else.

And he's talking now, like a flood: getting sober, coaching the team, meeting his wife, finishing school, finding a job, building the house, teaching his kid that no matter how bad you want something, you can't just reach out and take it, 'cause everything you want belongs to somebody else.

"I am not my mistake," says Cooper Colson.

That's right. I'm your mistake. And I'm making a damn good life out of it.

He's crying now, pleading with me not to tell his wife, his kid, the school principal; not to erase his second life, a sculpture made of scratches, a tapestry of lint. And he's so weak, this man who bent my mother on a winter roadside, his fragile existence in my tiny little hands.

I think I understand how it feels. I think I understand a lot.

Mom? She's happy. She's really happy.

And then it passes, flowing out of me like dog soup. I gave my anger to the empty wind in a Sudbury rail yard, darkness drifting down to the cracks of human settlements.

*JUDY gets out of the car and shows him the box.*

I've got something else for you.

It's the only thing holding us together, and we don't need it anymore. You got your life. I've got mine.

*JUDY opens the box and turns it over. It is full of straw.*

Just go. I'll take a cab back to my car.

He drives away, baptizing me with his dust. And I see Brad Pitt and Laurence Oliver, following his truck, walking away from me. I found it in a stagnant pool of oil and filth: the body I left in a Montreal bed, the river's heat dragging it here, where purity and pollution are one, and the end starts to look like the beginning.

C'mon, body. We're going home.

[5.4]

The next morning, I'm back in Montreal. The car moved quick 'cause nothing's weighing it down.

My apartment's like I left it, a holocaust museum for one person. The only thing missing is my mother's old scarecrow. He wasn't my protector, so he got to be something else: a sacrifice, a ritual slaughter with a hammer and a saw. I put my pain inside him and I gave him to the ground: Oshawa, Steinbach, Joliette, Sudbury. Everywhere but here. Everywhere but home.

At the restaurant, they say they'll give me my job back. Ray's not around. He's been hiding out for a week. Says he feels sick. He's gonna feel a lot sicker after I make my report, after the police show up on his doorstep. It'll only take a minute. This is not our little secret, Ray, and I'm a lot stronger now. I met a couple girls that taught me how to fight.

*JUDY returns to her apartment and makes the bed.*

When the police finish at my apartment, I clean it up. I put it back together, piece by piece. I found the last piece by the bed, already off the hook.

*JUDY picks up the phone and dials.*

Mom, I was raped.