

**“BODY LANGUAGE” PILOT AND GENDERED LANGUAGE IN MODERN
CANADIAN TELEVISION**

by

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis I draw on deconstruction theory and queer theory to analyze the current representation of sex, gender, and sexuality in Canadian television. Through this research I found that although Canadian television is portraying an increasing number of queer genders and sexualities, misinformation and stereotypes continue to perpetuate a one-dimensional characterization of people.

This research pertains directly to my creative thesis: a pilot episode of a TV series in which fraternal twins, Jed and Theodora, grow up with the ability to switch into one another's body. I dive directly into the correlation between sex and gender and the lived experience of being in a body that does not necessarily represent gender. The show will both create a new gendered "construction" as well as question the need for gender identifications.

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INTRODUCTION

Language, for many, is part of everyday life in a benign, intuitive manner. Its purpose is simple – to communicate (Miller 2). However, language is not stagnant, but rather formed and reformed; words are added when needed and forgotten when found ineffective; and unconsciously people create and perform their identity through their language (Dovchin 316). Language can help communicate geographical origin, convey class or associations, or reveal deeper emotional insights. Language is a tool that can be controlled and manipulated. One such manipulation is the construction of linguistic gender.

My research will focus on the creation of gendered identity through verbal, written, and visual language. Specifically, I will be focusing on the English language in relation to gender identification and how these identities are created, perpetuated, and stereotyped in television. I aim to understand how the English language uses gender to characterize and create identity, and better understand how this characterization is represented in Canadian television – both to celebrate and affirm non-normative genders and to perpetuate stereotyped gender roles.

Furthermore, I will be exploring the construction of gender. By analyzing the creation of gender in language, I will inherently also be analyzing sex and sexuality as subsets of this. This research will be implemented in a sixty-page pilot episode script of a television series focused on fraternal twins with the ability to switch into one another's bodies. Through this ability they will experience living in the bodies of both sexes and therefore gain an understanding of the degree in which gender is performed, and the fluidity gender can have. One twin, Theodora, will feel her gender is displaced when inhabiting the male body, while the other twin, Jed, will naturally shift between the two and feel at home within both physical forms. Theodora will represent a societal "normative" or "cis" gender and sex, and normative heterosexuality as a straight female. In

contrast, Jed will use their and Theodora's body to explore queer or non-normative relationships and obtain a certain freedom through their ability to shift between genders and therefore experience the spectrum of sex and sexuality. Through these characters' exploration of gender, they will become aware of the stereotypes and gendered language afflicting them, and – in Jed's case – seek to work against these stereotypes. The series aims to bring higher representation and affirmation to underrepresented genders in television today, as well as to invite viewers to consider that gender is a social and linguistic construct.

It should be noted that initially my title and everything thereafter perceived gender, sex, and sexuality as three separate yet co-existing units that interacted to form one subset of human identity. However, through scrutiny and investigation I have chosen to remove both the terms “sex” and “sexuality” and focus on “gender”. Without gender, sexual identity may evolve to be characterized racially, by age, by weight, or by any other physical characteristic. Although attraction to certain ethnicities, ages, and weights already play into sexual preference, terminology such as “bisexual” may change to mean liking both slender and plus-size bodies, instead of liking both male and female bodies. However, due to our current language system, the terms “sex” and “sexuality” retain their linguistic importance through their relationship to gender.

My non-binary colleague, Shelby Wright, contests the idea of sexual preference coming from gender rather than physicality, saying, “My personal experience shows that regardless of my gender presentation, a potential partner will still (almost always) want to know what genitals I'm bringing with me—which is natural.” This enforces the idea that people tend to care more about the physical body, than how it is interpreted through gendered language and performance.

CHAPTER ONE RESEARCH AIMS

Drawing on deconstruction, feminist theory, queer theory, and gendered language research, I will examine the construction of gender identity in language in modern Canadian television. Specifically, I will be analyzing the misconception that “words are real, bodies are not” and the societal practice in which we force our bodies to fit language instead of changing language to fit our bodies (Wilchins 125). For example, the symbols on washrooms often depict women in skirts and men in pants. Another example is the practice of surgically manipulating ambiguous genitalia in order to force a body to fit into a polarized gender category. In my script, I challenge this by using non-binary pronouns for Jed and by showing how Jed and Theodora act performatively when inhabiting each other’s bodies.

Methodology

I will be investigating the scripts and screen adaptations for one or more episodes of the following five shows: *Degrassi*, *Bellevue*, *Mary Kills People*, *Schitt’s Creek*, and *Kim’s Convenience*. The earliest Canadian show I will be investigating is *Degrassi: The Next Generation* “My Body Is A Cage” part one, and part two which aired in 2010. The most recent pilot episodes date to 2017, so I consider modern television within the range of the past decade. In relation to gender I will be analyzing the degree and variation in representation, the physical descriptors, characterization, stereotypes, agenda, and dialogue. I hypothesize that queer genders and sexualities will be under represented and over stereotyped and that dialogue will reflect the gendered identities of the characters. I hypothesize that even when queer genders and sexualities are present, they will have less screen time and lack other facets of their identity.

The data collected will be incorporated into my screenplay. The screenplay will act as a creative illustration of how and why language can be contested. For instance, I will analyze how

Canadian television shows, like *Degrassi* and *Bellevue*, are currently representing queer genders and sexualities. In my script, I endeavour not to replicate stereotypes and have imagined alternative scenarios in which my fictional characters can entertain new ways of seeing and being in the world. Screenplays are written with the intention to be reinterpreted into a recorded visual performance of the text, making it the ideal medium for broad representation of gender identity (Berbary 186). The nature of the screenplay invites open interpretation from both visual media creators and viewers which allows for complex analysis of the data collected as well as space for counter arguments and juxtaposing understandings (Berbary 188).

CHAPTER TWO THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Deconstruction and Feminism

To understand the degree to which the English language can express identity, I seek to deconstruct it. In defining deconstruction, I must first consider what it is not – structuralism. Structuralism assumes that the signifier (what is written, spoken, drawn, signaled, etc.) is of equal value to what is signified (the physical object or the intellectual idea) (Giddens 196). From that definition, it can be understood that deconstruction argues that the signifier and signified are not of equal value, but vary in value depending on culture, time, location, stereotypes, or any number of other factors. Derrida, the founding father of deconstruction, further defines deconstruction by what it is not – method, or analysis, theory, or critique and that there is no “correct” act of deconstruction (Derrida and Caputo 274-275). Derrida states that, “Deconstruction takes place, it is an event that does not await the deliberation, consciousness, or organization of a subject, or even of modernity” (Elam 12). Derrida believes that the signifier and signified are always held at different values, and do not need to be consciously deconstructed in order for deconstruction to take place or to be realized. In *Margins of Philosophy*, Derrida further defines deconstruction in the passage,

Every sign, linguistic or nonlinguistic, spoken or written (in the usual sense of this opposition), as a small or large unity, can be cited, put between quotation marks; thereby it can break with every given context, and engender infinitely new contexts in an absolutely nonsaturable fashion. This does not suppose that the mark is valid outside its context, but on the contrary that there are only contexts without any center of absolute anchoring. This citationality, duplication, or duplicity, this iterability of the mark is not an accident or anomaly, but is that (normal/abnormal) without which a mark could no

longer even have a so-called “normal” functioning. (320)

This passage on deconstructing linguistics can also be applied to gender. The fluidity of gender may be described as a facet of identity “without any centre of absolute anchoring” (Derrida *Margins of Philosophy* 320). By deconstructing gender in my script, when Jed and Theodora exchange bodies, I celebrate the uncertainty of a gendered label such as “female” and illustrate how it may be applied differently by every person who identifies with it. For instance, when Theodora inhabits Jed’s body, she continues to identify as female even though her external genitalia or how people treat her may not reflect that. In contrast, Jed’s ability to switch between bodies has encouraged a non-binary identity, in which they neither categorize themselves as male or female exclusively.

In terms of gender identity in language, deconstruction and feminism run alongside one another, and share many similar insights. Although at first glance, feminism is a political revolution, while deconstruction is a philosophical idea, both demonstrate how a question like “*what is woman?*” will always have an indeterminate answer (Elam 1, 22, 27). Furthermore, deconstruction can aid feminism by providing alternative ways in which to define gender by dismantling binary norms and demonstrating that “the relationship between sex and gender is a continuously self-deconstructing one which produces structures that are called natural only because we have forgotten that they are structures” (Elam 20, 50). Therefore, in my research I will be using a deconstructive feminist stance to examine language in order to understand how stories and narratives create sociocultural gendered identity (Schiffrin 167). As a feminist I do not want to propose a prescriptive structured solution to gender inequality. Rather, my focus is to imagine new possibilities, which are by no means comprehensive. It is my hope that this television series may not only entertain, but also educate and raise awareness of viewers. By

learning from diverse people and their real-life and media representations, viewers may realize the importance of mutual respect.

Gender and Language and Gendered Language

Derrida points out that Western society often over-privileges language to the point that the signifier is mistaken for the Actual or Real. This gives the impression that what is not signified has no existence (Wilchins 44). In the English language, for example, the stereotyped creation of gender through language is based on chromosomal variation which gives rise to physical, biological differences (Elam 43). The drawback to basing gender off biological formations such as the possession of a penis versus the lack of a penis is that it is as arbitrary as eye or skin color, which are also expressed through chromosomal variation. Furthermore, being born with a penis that is later removed does not automatically mean the individual is now a female, unless that is how they want to be perceived. I argue that gender differentiations are performed based on social and cultural expectations, not biological elements. Consider ambiguous sexes in which medical procedures are meant to construct the “true sex” of the baby, in order to correct nature, instead of question language (Elam 56). Reverting back to Derrida’s point, the biological “Real” must be altered in order to match an arbitrary signifier “male” or “female”, for a third ambiguously unnamed gender is not allowed to exist. In a poem by Tracy K. Smith, entitled “Sci-Fi”, she articulates this sentiment eloquently: “Women will still be women, but / The distinction will be empty” (798). From my interpretation, Smith is saying that the signifier “women” or “female” will still exist, but its distinction in terms of biological or cultural gender will no longer be in opposition to “man” or “male” because its instability will be realized, and the signified will hold higher value. Unfortunately, the title of her poem, “Sci-Fi”, gives the impression that a society which accepts the differentiation between what is language and what is

Real is a far cry from today's climate, and perhaps only possible in fiction. At the same time, it is often through fictional media and entertainment, such as television, that gendered identity and identifications can be re-examined and liberated to be more inclusive. Therefore, it is through this framework of fictional media that cultural and linguistic change is possible (Jacobs 20).

Furthermore, language and gender do not simply interact on separate plains but are intertwined uniquely depending on the language and dialect spoken, which is expressed through different degrees of gendered language. Studies have shown that masculine-generic inflection within a given language can affect communication performance and understanding between genders (Vainapel 1513). Variance in gendered language changes the construct of gender-based stereotypes as well as reflecting and perpetuating them (Vainapel 1513). Therefore, it is important not only to understand how the signifier is valued in correspondence to the signified, but the degree to which the language is gendered, and how masculine and feminine properties are associated with gender-neutral objects and ideas.

Queer Linguistics and Performing Language

The word "queer" within theory incorporates anything that contradicts the norm, allowing for a heterosexual male to be queer if he is in a room made up entirely of homosexual females (Giffney 3). Although "queer" is often applied as an identity, it is also a critique used to decipher relationships dealing with gender and sexuality within the context of other identities such as race, ethnicity, class, and religion (Giffney 3,7).

Queer linguistics is a linguistic approach within queer theory that draws on deconstruction, feminism, and gendered language and on post-structuralist scholars like Foucault, Butler, and Derrida in order to better understand the gendered language discourse (Motschenbacher 149). Queer linguistics seeks to reveal the imaginary relationship between the

gendered language that forms identity and the existence of the biological person themselves (Leap 558). By discussing the relationship between language, gender, and sexuality, it challenges and critiques the heteronormative status quo developed through language (Motschenbacher 149). Furthermore, queer linguistics attempts to deconstruct and destabilize the power of binary language (Motschenbacher 157). Binary language is language comprised exclusively of two things, and in the case of gender, these denoting terms are “male” and “female”. Destabilizing these linguistic gendered categories helps empower minority genders who do not identify under the “male” / “female” umbrella. Therefore, queer linguistics seeks to evolve language into a more inclusive means of communication.

The English language resists validating and affirming non-normative genders, which is why there are many derogatory words to describe such identities (Wilchins 43). The word “queer” was originally a term synonymous with “weird” or “strange” that morphed into “a swear-word for referring to non-heterosexual people [but]... has undergone a resignification process,” in which those who identify as queer wield the signifier proudly, and therefore have changed it to a neutral or even positive term (Motschenbacher 152). By changing the word “queer” from derogatory to complimentary, the signified, or the queer people affirm themselves. Post-structuralists in queer linguistics, such as Foucault and Butler, argue that the construction of identity within language is self-perpetuating and unstable (Motschenbacher 153). Therefore, identities like “male” and “female” should not be treated as self-evident, but rather given, created, and refutable (Motschenbacher 153).

Post-structuralists see gender as performed in language and therefore people are not being their gender but rather performing their gender. Judith Butler, a scholar, feminist, and modern-

day philosopher, has in many ways paved the current understanding of gender performativity.¹

Butler states,

The view that gender is performative [seeks] to show that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body. In this way, it [shows] that what we take to be an ‘internal’ feature of ourselves is one that we anticipate and produce through certain bodily acts, at an extreme, an hallucinatory effect of naturalized gestures (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv).

In the preceding passage Butler illustrates the way in which people act and react is not “unconscious” but rather a learned performance encouraged by societal “norms”. Ironically, even though “queer” is in contrast to the norm, queer people may still act performatively within their identity.

How gender is performed depends on how it is perceived within a culture or society, and what expectations guide the activities and expressions that are deemed masculine or feminine (West and Zimmerman 126). This begs the question as to why people are forced to make a linguistic identity out of their sexual biology at all (Foucault 106)? Foucault argues that gender identifications are constructs of Western society. He demonstrates how some non-Western cultures did not traditionally use gender distinction within their language but are now beginning to do so due to the globalization of Western culture and discourse (Foucault 83, 109)². Such is the case from the 1940’s to 80’s in Lima, Peru when the city was linguistically transformed to incorporate gender agreement in sentence structure due to the large migration of Spanish

¹ Butler expands on and further contextualizes gender performativity in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*.

² Foucault expands on and further contextualizes sexuality in language in the four volumes of *The History of Sexuality*.

speaking people who all but wiped out the indigenous language (Klee and Caravedo 12).

Therefore, if Western culture can influence linguistic discourse, then Western television programs can influence gender identity in language and inspire affirmation and celebration.

However, in order for this to occur, there must be an awareness of queer linguistics and the acknowledgment of the performative connection between gendered language and biological structure.

The problem with queer-linguistics post-structural approach to gendered identity in language, is that by arguing that there is no connection between constructed gender and biological form, the history of women's oppression can be invalidated (Alcoff 419). If "female" does not exist as a gender, then gendered violence may go unrecognized. Therefore, although linguistically it is important to differentiate the signifier from the signified, historically "man" and "woman" should remain acceptable constructs. When it comes to unifying under a shared umbrella of identity for a particular political or social agenda, "strategic essentialism" can be useful (Spivak 11-12,45). Strategic essentialism recognizes that a group like "woman" classifies a diverse array of people with different values and perspectives but allows them to unite for a cause that affects them all, even if it is to varying degrees (Colebrook 561). Furthermore, within political paradigms like women's oppression, it is important to understand the degrees to which a gender is being oppressed and acknowledge that not all women are oppressed in the same way (Elam 31). A signifier like "woman" is not one encompassing identity; there are diverse components within any given identity. Moreover, gender and race lead to different experiences of oppression and marginalization.

Sex and Sexuality

Due to working within the constraints of the highly gendered English language, it is

imperative to understand the relationship between sex, sexuality and linguistics. What pronouns will I identify Jed and Theodora with when they inhabit the other's body? Will I identify them by their chosen gender or their given biological sex? Does it matter? Charlotte von Mahlsdorf, a cross-dresser who lived through both the Nazis and Communists, claimed that it should not matter if she is a boy or a girl, because once she is shot, "dead is dead" (Wright 27). However, if it does not matter whether I assign my characters a sex or a gender, what does that mean for their sexuality?

Because the act of sex is perceived as a means for pleasure and the preference of sexuality as a gender-based attraction, the degree to which language constructs sex and sexuality goes largely unrecognized. Before Greek mythology gave rise to Christianity which constructed the act of sex in relation to mortal sin within written and verbal language, sex was a basic human need like food or shelter (Wilchins 57). Consider the two genders "male" and "female" in the biblical representations of Adam and Eve. What is problematic is the linguistic depiction of these genders as opposites that can exclusively be paired (Wilchins 57). Smith's poem "Sci-Fi", portrays her longing for the societal and linguistic construction of sex to change back to its original, physical purpose of gratification when she writes, "Sex / Having outlived every threat, will gratify / Only the mind, which is where it will still exist" (798).

Due to the rigidity in language and how it is used to enforce masculine stereotypes on "men" and feminine stereotypes on "women" there is an inequity in relation to the physical act of sex. This gendered inequity stigmatizes rape. While gendered violence remains a reality for many women and is highly underreported, the act of being raped is not inherently feminine. This notion of feminized rape is often perpetuated through gendered archetypes in traditional and contemporary storytelling, in which men play conquerors and warriors, and women are portrayed

as the damsel in distress and the man's sexual conquest. For example, consider stories of Genghis Kahn or fairy tales like *Sleeping Beauty*. At first glance this archetype appears to be specifically problematic for women in terms of representing them as powerless and dependent. However, by stereotyping men as conquerors, society fails to acknowledge male rape, which forces some men to hide their assault in order to maintain their masculinity (Bantard et al. 225). Because rape is an act of power over another or others, and Western culture reinforces the male patriarchy, some men may have less sympathy for male victims of sexual assault (Davies and Rogers 369). Moreover, gay male victims of rape are judged more harshly than heterosexual men or women, contributing to a misconception that a person's sexuality corresponds to their blame in the assault (Davies and Rogers 371). This is important when accurately representing stereotyped assault in television while continuing to challenge status quo.

Language continues to form our perception of sex and sexuality, once again creating an imbalance in the value of the signifier and signified. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the verbal topic of sex and sexuality was silenced (Foucault 3). Censorship was imposed which created a culture of modern prudishness and enforced restriction in language (Foucault 17-18). The act of confession forced people not only to divulge their sexual encounters, but to feel guilty for their pleasure. This led to the transformation of physical pleasure into shame. Furthermore, the physical act was deemed just as sinful as the thought of the act, the signifier as dangerous as what it signified (Foucault 19). Over the last three centuries, silence has given way to multitude of devices meant to analyze and record the way in which sex is spoken about (Foucault 34). The acts of sexuality that are "right" and "wrong" are still greatly debated, and sex has in no way been reduced back to a basic pleasure. However, it is now understood that by talking about sex, there is a political linguistic power that helps reinforce what people should do, rather than simply

communicate a description of the acts without attached connotations (Foucault 38).

CHAPTER THREE SCRIPTED IDENTITY IN TELEVISION

Media, such as television, plays an important developmental role in gendered identity and creates a common dialogue for viewers. Therefore, when gender or sexual identity is stereotyped, everyone suffers (Jacobs 20; McInroy and Craig 38). Media cultivates social and cultural experiences and informs behavior through characterization and representation. One such stereotype cultivated by media is the notion that a woman's value lies in her beauty. Television, for instance, primarily focuses on the physical appearance of female characters, and when a character lacks beauty, she often suffers from depression (Jacobs 21). Although it can be argued that television did not create the societal pressures for women's appearance, by perpetuating this gendered experience it reinforces the status quo instead of challenging it (Jacobs 23).

Furthermore, in 2011, a study on television advertising in Canada found that 47.3% of the time males were the prominent character (30.3% female and 22.4% both) and 81.6% of the time males were used for voice-over narration (18.0% Female and 0.4% both) (Paek et al. 200). This shows the extreme discrepancy between male and female gender representation in advertisements, with males being significantly over represented. Unfortunately, this study does not take into account the queer genders which are typically under represented to an even larger degree than females.

The representation of gender on screen has been historically analyzed by scholars like Laura Mulvey using psychoanalytic theory, feminist theory and film theory to enable "feminist thought on women's oppression" (Mulvey 606). Mulvey states that cinema acts as a point of "recognition / misrecognition and identification, and hence of the first articulation of the 'I'"

(Mulvey 10). Through that passage it can be understood that by finding representation and recognition in cinema, people are able to reaffirm their identity and placement in the world.

In Mulvey and Backman Rogers' 2015 book *Feminisms: Diversity, Difference and Multiplicity in Contemporary Film Cultures*, Mulvey analyzes the Danish crime thriller *The Killing*, which, like in *Body Language*, brings females to the forefront of detective work. Mulvey writes, "Distinct categories of victim and heroine may uncomfortably blur, but the gruesome cases more often than not involving sex crimes... brings forth a female investigator who challenges beliefs and attitudes toward representing the feminine" (Mulvey and Backman Rogers 31). In *Body Language*, the blurring of victim and heroine is brought to life in characters like Jed and Theodora, who are simultaneously victimized through the rape on Theodora's body, and simultaneously bring their arcs of heroism through their justice / revenge plot. Because these characters have individual gender identities, viewers and readers can find representation within each. The viewers articulation of the "I" is facilitated through dual protagonists of Jed and Theodora (Mulvey 10).

Along with under representation, identity in Canadian television is especially stereotyped for queer sexes and genders. Although there has been an increase in LGBTQ characters in modern Canadian television, many of these characters are negatively stereotyped as comic relief, mentally ill, or villainous (McInroy and Craig 34). Gay males are portrayed as hyper-masculine and "still in the closet" or hyper-feminine and "out of the closet" while lesbian females are either butch and unfeminine or passive lipstick-lesbians. This creates a one-dimensional and self-perpetuating characterization as to how LGBTQ people should perform their sexuality (McInroy and Craig 39-40). Furthermore, homosexual characters are more likely to die violently by the end of television shows and movies than heterosexual characters (Wilchins 68). For example, in

Degrassi: The Next Generation, a Canadian television series for teenagers, the main transgender male character dies in a tragic car accident. Although arguably realistic, dismal ends leave little hope for transgender people who watched this iconic character and viewed them as a surrogate for their own life. For these reasons, it is important to create LGBTQ characters in television that have agendas and identities that do not relate solely to their gender, sex or sexuality.

CHAPTER FOUR RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY

Gender roles have always fascinated me. Through this research journey I continue to analyze my gendered performance and my body ideals. For example, I have come to question the money funneled into manicures and brow tints and the time spent learning skills typically associated with domestic housewives such as cooking and sewing. Are these my genuine interests or am I replicating gender stereotypes? I decided to be more self-aware in all facets of my life, including my proposal to my fiancé.

On the 23rd of January 2021, in protest of traditional gender norms, I proposed to my boyfriend, Lyndon. We had just crested the short hike up to Grassi Lake in Canmore. He was wistfully looking over the canyon, his back to me, when I got down on one knee, my great great grandmother's engagement ring in hand. When he turned around, I proposed. He stammered an excited "yes" and slid the ring onto my finger – an engagement like no other. Although asking the question put me in a vulnerable position in which Lyndon had the power of accepting or rejecting, it also empowered me to take charge and be the instigator in our relationship. It also gave me an appreciation of the vulnerability that men may well feel when they propose. By being proactive, I also communicated my desire to marry him. This was an extremely empowering experience for me. The flip side of this was the awkward encounters that came after. When telling my friends about the engagement, the automatic question was, "how did he propose?" Constantly clarifying that I proposed often brought confusion or laughter. The very idea of a woman proposing is, for many, still laughable. These responses further inspired me to write a script in which characters need not be constrained by stereotypes.

My fascination with a story in which a biologically male and a female person can switch between bodies and experience what it is like to operate and perform as both genders, comes

from my inability to do so. As a cis-woman, I feel comfortable in my body and many of the stereotypical gender roles that come with it. Therefore, I am writing this piece as an ally to all those that have not always felt comfortable in their body or the societal gender roles they face. I am writing from a place that seeks further understanding, and therefore have asked an advisory-group made up of trans and queer gendered people to read my work and consult. This will help ensure my writing does not perpetuate the very stereotypes which I seek to reveal, but rather acknowledges and subverts them. This will also add to the community of unique voices I am hoping to bring to life. While writing a novel is often a one-person band, film-making takes an entire orchestra, and therefore collaborating from page one of the script will make for a stronger work.

Furthermore, in danger of becoming an identity tourist, I want to clarify that I am intentionally writing this story to ensure that the characters' gendered identities are not their pivotal characteristic. Rather this story takes two characters who initially stand outside the binary gendered norms and puts them in a murder-mystery situation in which the pivotal theme is that people can only get justice for themselves. The characters are Canadian and their race – which is unidentified – does not play into their problems or motivations. I write from the perspective of a white Canadian, however that does not, and should not dissuade a person of color from directing, producing, or acting in this piece. Furthermore, I am a writer without a visible disability. I write Theodora, a woman who becomes paralyzed due to an assault, as a symbol of strength and allyship. I recognize that I cannot bring all under-represented characters into this script, but I hope my series paves the way for further diversity in television.

CHAPTER FIVE RESEARCH OUTCOMES

Limitations

Although quantity in terms of gender representation and screen time is more objective, perceived stereotypes reflect my bias of Western culture, which may limit or alter outcomes. Because I perceive my gender as female, I may be more inclined to notice female gendered stereotypes than male or queer ones.

Furthermore, I will not be investigating the entirety of every show, but rather pre-determined episodes, most of which have been selected due to their representation of queer genders and sexualities. This means that my results will be slightly skewed to portray a larger representation of non-normative genders and sexualities than a randomly chosen episode. This was necessary in order to investigate the stereotypes and depictions of varying gender identities.

Moreover, only five modern and relatively popular Canadian television shows are being investigated. The small sample size could skew results in either direction. However, by choosing Canadian shows that are widely watched both within Canada and internationally, the results will illustrate some ways gender identity is stereotyped and perpetuated, and therefore the possible effects this can have on gender performance and behavior.

Results

Table 1. Gender and Sexuality Character Representation

	Male	Female	Queer Gender	Heterosexuality Revealed	Queer Sexuality Revealed
<i>Degrassi</i> “My Body is a Cage Part One”	9	8	1	12	0
<i>Degrassi</i> “My Body is a Cage Part Two”	9	10	1	12	0
<i>Schitt’s Creek</i> “Pilot”	5	6	0	5	0
<i>Kim’s Convenience</i> “Pilot”	12	4	1	3	4
<i>Bellevue</i> “Pilot”	11	10	1	5	0
<i>Mary Kills People</i> “Pilot”	6	8	0	8	2

Table 2. Queer Gender Screen Time

	Queer Gender Screen Time
<i>Degrassi</i> “My Body is a Cage Part One”	17 minutes and 8 seconds (76%)
<i>Degrassi</i> “My Body is a Cage Part Two”	11 minutes and 12 seconds (50%)
<i>Schitt’s Creek</i> “Pilot”	0%
<i>Kim’s Convenience</i> “Pilot”	1 minute and eleven seconds (5%)
<i>Bellevue</i> “Pilot”	0 minutes and 43 seconds (1%)
<i>Mary Kills People</i> “Pilot”	0%

Degrassi: The Next Generation “My Body is a Cage” Part One

The episode title “My Body is a Cage” aptly describes how biological sex can act as an imprisonment on identity. This episode, which exhibited an extremely high length of screen time for their trans-male character, Adam, focuses on how he must transcend his female body to be accepted within his male identity. The episode centers around Adam as he enters Degrassi High, determined not to let the other students know that under his fashionably male aesthetic, he hides female anatomy. The script uses “he/him” pronouns for Adam, describing him by identity, not by his physical sexual organs.

The first thing revealed about Adam outside his non-normative gender is his desire to leave remedial gym and play football like one of the guys (Grassi 1). However, after page one, this desire is not pursued and other aspects of Adam’s identity such as class, race, culture, religion, and goals are not revealed.

Before he starts his first day at Degrassi High, Adam’s mother, Audra, says, “Someone’ll find out, Adam. And when they do, they could hurt you” (Grassi 1). Although well intentioned, this type of motherly “protection” perpetuates victim blame instead of affirming Adam’s identity. Audra then goes on to explain that Adam’s grandmother will be visiting, “And it would be nice if Gracie could come for dinner” (Grassi 2). By dead-naming Adam, Audra is insensitively forcing a false identity onto her child, and expecting him to perform the female gender, rather than asking the grandmother for understanding and acceptance. Adam retorts that he will not be “playing dress up for anyone” which is a positive message for viewers to self-affirm their own identity even if it goes against the viewpoint of loved ones (Grassi 2).

Adam is revealed as heterosexual when he says, “I get to flirt with cute girls,” during his remedial gym class (Grassi 3). He singles Bianca out and says, “You gotta admit she’s hot,”

which is a common physical descriptor used in dialogue throughout this episode by both Adam and other students to objectify both female classmates and teachers (Grassi 4). Adam's friend Eli tells him that he has "machismo" which suggests that to be male you must act aggressively "masculine" (Grassi 4).

In remedial gym, Adam learns how to ballroom dance. In this instance, division of gender becomes pertinent, as males are supposed to dance with females. Adam leads Bianca in the dance, reinforcing his male identity. His baggy "male" clothes are contrasted by Bianca's ultra-feminine appearance of high-heels and makeup. Later Adam pursues Bianca romantically and Bianca responds with, "Bro. You're not my type," which suggests that sexuality can be refined further from gender to specific physical and intellectual attributes (Grassi 22). When Bianca discovers that Adam is wrapping his chest to cover his breasts, Bianca calls him a freak, perpetuating the notion that what is non-normative or queer is inherently disgusting and bad.

Adam's biological secret is threatened to be revealed when a classmate catches him with tampons. Before he can be bullied and ridiculed, he turns to his friend Clare and says, "Clare, pick up your stuff. Nasty." Clare covers for Adam and quickly takes the tampons, but not before another classmate calls out "gross" which further insinuates that the female reproductive system is regarded as something disgusting and shameful (Grassi 23).

Later, Adam reveals to Eli and Clare that he is trans. They are immediately accepting, although curious as to how he knows he is not a lesbian or tomboy. Adam's answer, which is in the script but does not make it to the aired episode, is that he knows he is a boy the same way he knows what he feels like eating. He cannot explain why he craves pancakes, it is internal and his desire for pancakes cannot be proven outside of how he acts on it. His analogy is both persuasive and thought-provoking, and his friends immediately understand him better (Grassi 19).

The episode ends with Adam being shoved out of the boy's washroom by other students for not having biologically "male" body parts, which suggests that the presence of a penis or lack thereof denotes gender. The last action description line of the episode describes Adam as "helpless and emasculated" (Grassi 28).

Degrassi: The Next Generation "My Body is a Cage" Part Two

Before starting his second day of school, Adam's mother Audra forebodes, "Do you know what happens to trans kids in high schools?... Harassment, assault, bullying! Death threats, Grace—Adam. You could really get hurt" (Grassi 1). This comment reveals that his mother is more concerned over his physical wellbeing than his mental wellbeing. It also insinuates that all transgendered teens share the same high school experience.

Due to the harassment Adam received the previous day, the principal tells him that he must start using the handicap washroom for his own safety (Grassi 2). However, this new rule does not make Adam feel safe, but rather makes him feel as though his gendered identity is a handicap. Adam is also escorted through the halls by a teacher for his safety, further ostracizing him from the other students. When contemplating when everything will go back to normal, his friend Eli commends him for being a "brave warrior" which reinforces the masculine archetype of strength in an unexpected and positive way (Grassi 4).

Back in remedial gym, Bianca refuses to dance with Adam, stating that she is not a lesbian (Grassi 6). This reinforces society's value of biological sex over gendered identity, Bianca's fear of being othered through means of a queer sexuality, and the baseless notion that who someone dances with dictates their sexuality. She goes on to tell Adam that he needs therapy, implying that being transgender is a mental disorder (Grassi 7). Due to his identity, Adam becomes isolated both in his school and home life. Refusing to dress as a girl for dinner

with his grandmother, Audra tells Adam not to come to the dinner, insinuating that he can only be part of the family if he conforms to the gender roles (Grassi 9). Adam later appears at the dinner, dressed as Gracie for the sake of his mother and grandmother's approval (Grassi 13). His willingness to be someone he is not for the acceptance of his family is symbolic of conformity across society in order to receive acceptance. Part of the script which did not make it into the television show is Adam talking to his grandmother about his favorite book – *Mulan*. His grandmother describes the book as “the story of the young woman who dressed as a man to honour her family” (Grassi 15). This description gives Adam hope that his identity can bring honor to the family instead of shame.

The next day Adam returns to school dressed as his former female identity – Gracie. In remedial gym, Bianca says, “You make one ugly girl” which reveals that he will not be accepted as either gender (Grassi 19). Although Adam tells the other students to call him Gracie, the pronouns used in the script's action description continue as “he” / “him”, staying true to his male gendered identity.

At the end of the episode, Clare catches Adam cutting himself to “let the anger out” (Grassi 22). Clare realizes that Adam needs to be accepted within Degrassi as a male in order to be happy. Clare and Eli host a bonfire in which Adam burns his old Gracie identity such as female clothing and photographs. His mother Audra joins them, admitting that she does not understand but she is willing to accept for Adam's sake. At the last moment Adam decides not to burn one final photograph of himself as a child, but rather give it to his mother saying, “It's still me” (Grassi 27).

Mary Kills People “Pilot”

First, I would like to note that the *Mary Kills People* pilot script I received for analysis is

not the final script that went into production, but rather the original script Tara Armstrong wrote that landed her a seat in the Bell Media Prime Time TV Program.

The pilot episode of *Mary Kills People* follows Dr. Mary Harris, a divorced mother of two who illegally works as an end-of-life facilitator for terminally ill people. The first-time gender roles are explicitly reversed occurs when Mary interacts with her ex-husband, Kevin. Mary is revealed to be the parent making more money, and therefore paying Kevin alimony. Kevin calls himself the “pioneer for stay-at-home-dads” while asking Mary for more money (Armstrong 14). The portrayals of the woman who is successful in her career and the man who is a stay-at-home parent, financially dependent on their ex, are refreshing reversals in stereotypical roles.

When Mary meets Kevin’s new girlfriend, Lauren, whose character descriptor reads, “long blond hair, cleavage, tasteful botox” Mary asks Kevin, “What is she, a real housewife?” (Armstrong 29). Kevin replies that she’s a lawyer, which is another nice reversal from the stereotype of “blondes who have more boobs than brains.” Mary, feeling insecure over Kevin’s new girlfriend, decides to attack Kevin’s gender identity when she says, “Isn’t it a little emasculating? Having your ex-wife pay for your girlfriend” (Armstrong 30). By defining what is masculine, Mary plays into gendered stereotypes, none of which she personally conforms to in her life.

When Mary goes to the hospital to talk to Annie, the nurse who directs her to the terminally ill patients, they further discuss the sexism of gender roles. Annie says that some nurses were talking about “a rogue doctor out there offering death” but that they obviously didn’t know the identity of the doctor since they kept say “he”. Mary replies with, “Well, good to know sexism is still alive and well” (Armstrong 18). The irony is that sexism is protecting Mary and

her practice instead of hindering her.

Sex is a highly discussed topic in this episode. Mary's assistant, Manny, constantly encourages her to have sex, telling her that "a sexless life is an unhealthy life" (Armstrong 26). This perpetuates the idea that asexual people or those who choose not to have sex are unhealthy. Manny goes on to tell Mary to sleep with Ben, a man whose life they will be ending soon due to brain cancer. When Mary says it is unethical to take advantage of Ben in his current state, Manny replies that, "Women can't take advantage of men sexually. It's biologically impossible" (Armstrong 44). Manny's take on biological sexes is not unique but reflects the current societal understanding of how physical bodies relate to ability. His statement both dismisses male sexual assault by women and women's ability to assault.

At the end of the episode, Mary has sex with Ben and realizes shortly after that he is an undercover cop. To escape the situation, she plays "damsel in distress" and garners his pity (Armstrong 59). By playing a stereotypically feminine role, Mary is able to manipulate a man into getting what she wants. Therefore, Mary shows that there is power in being aware of gender roles and how to use them.

In terms of non-heterosexual relationships, there is one lesbian relationship between Mary's daughter, Sonny (named Jess in the produced show), and her best friend, Naomi. Their relationship is mostly platonic, interspersed with sexually charged kisses, although little romance takes place. Sonny claims that she is in love with Naomi. However, further on in the first season, Naomi shuts Sonny down, calling her a "dyke" and ending their queer relationship (Armstrong 22).

Kim's Convenience "Gay Discount"

The pilot episode of *Kim's Convenience* called "Gay Discount" opens on Appa telling

two gay men, Roger and Kevin, that he will not hang their gay pride parade poster in his shop because the poster is “messy” (Choi and White 1). Roger asks Appa if he is homophobic and Appa tells him that he has no problem with gay people but he has a problem with the parade (Choi and White 1A). Appa says, “If you is the gay, why can’t you be quiet, respectful, gay. Like Anderson Cooper, y’know? Neil Patrick Harris, y’know? They is all the gay, but they don’t telling to me they is the gay” (Choi and White 2). This line of questioning is both humorous and problematic. Of course, not all gay people should act the same or celebrate their sexuality the same way. After Appa realizes that he will lose valuable customers if he does not support gay pride week, he offers a fifteen percent discount to gay people. He claims that he has a “gaydar” and can one hundred percent guarantee if someone is gay or not (Choi and White 3).

This becomes further problematic when Enrique, a customer claiming to be gay, asks Appa for the gay discount. Appa tells Enrique that he is not gay and therefore can’t have the discount (Choi and White 7). Enraged, Enrique returns to the store with a “boytoy” in tow, arguing that this is his boyfriend which proves his sexuality. The boyfriend mentions that Enrique once dated a lesbian and proposes that Enrique might be on the “almost-gay” spectrum. Appa agrees with the “boytoy” and continues to refuse Enrique’s discount (Choi and White 19). This perpetuates the idea that an individual must be on a polarized side of the spectrum in order to have a true identity – leaving Enrique in a grey zone of neither straight nor gay.

Later, a man comes into the store and Appa gives him the gay discount even though he claims to be straight. Appa’s answer is, “It’s okay. Sometimes gay takes time” (Choi and White 17). Appa’s response is both humorous and accepting, although questionable since there is no legitimacy to his “gaydar.” Appa then meets Therese, a drag queen, and openly asks “Why you like that?” Therese understands that the question is honest and not judgmental and replies, “It

feels like me. Feels like home. Always has” (Choi and White 21-22). This answer allows for all identities, no matter if they are normative or queer, to be legitimate and valuable.

Appa and his friend, Mr. Chin, discuss their confusion over gender and sexuality. Mr. Chin asks where all the gays came from – “Immigration? Refugee?” (Choi and White 12) Which is ironic since both Mr. Chin and Appa are immigrants to Toronto. Appa and Mr. Chin can’t figure out the difference between transgender and transsexual and neither one ever comes to a conclusion within the episode. This felt realistic, as misinformation over gender and sexual identity is common due to the rapid progression of identity and identity terminology. When Appa tells Mr. Chin about his gay discount, Mr. Chin says, “What? That’s illegal. Anti-straight” (Choi and White 13). He brings up an interesting point, that Appa is discriminating against heteronormative sexualities, but due to the history of homosexual oppression, it is unlikely for anyone to take offence to Appa’s discount.

Umma and Janet’s storyline navigates the dating expectations that traditional Korean families put on their daughters. Umma is pushing Janet to find a “cool Christian Korean boyfriend” which perpetuates the expectation for heterosexuality (Choi and White 5). Janet tells Umma that anyone who is “cool, Christian and Korean” is a girl (Choi and White 5). Janet’s sexuality remains strictly heterosexual throughout the show.

Schitt’s Creek “Our Cup Runneth Over”

The pilot episode of *Schitt’s Creek* follows the Rose family, Johnny and Moira, and their children, Alexis and David, after they are stripped of all their belongings and forced to move to a small, hillbilly town in the middle of nowhere. What I found most wonderfully surprising about this script, is its complete lack of gender assignments overall. Gender stereotypes are practically non-existent both within dialogue and action description. One subversion of gender naming

arrived with the female character Stevie Budd, who, if not for the actress chosen to play the role, would not suggest the gender of the character. Although the show had no explicitly queer genders, it did not have explicitly normative genders either. The data collected in Table 1 comes from the casting of the show after production, not the naming of genders within the script.

Bellevue “Pilot”

In terms of breaking gender barriers, the entire first season of *Bellevue* has a lot of potential due to the show’s premise focusing on a detective named Annie in search of a disappearing transgender girl named Jesse. However, due to the token trans character being missing from the inciting incident of the pilot episode, this character gets little to no screen time and the least character development overall. Furthermore, even though the show makes it quite clear that Jesse is a girl born inside the body of a boy, it continues to use the action description and dialogue male pronouns of “he” / “him”. Writing male pronouns for a character that identifies as female works directly against the thematic premise of the show – opening the minds of small-town, bigoted communities.

None of the characters, including Annie, have a strong grasp of how to be politically correct or generally informed when talking about transgender women. Annie’s co-worker Brady claims that Jesse is “into weird shit” and Annie describes Jesse’s gender identity as “the feminine thing” (Maggs 15, 37).

Furthermore, the case of the missing transgender girl is worked into the script as a plot point for horror instead of a thematically meaningful message. The most terrifying scene is when Annie discovers a Shepard Boy in an old church with half of his face painted with “feminine makeup” to symbolize the statue as half-female (Maggs 30). This is a misrepresentation of transgender identity because it assumes that their gender is non-binary or confused. By making

the audience feel scared when Annie uncovers transgender nativity scenes, the show perpetuates phobias towards queer genders.

The protagonist, Annie, is refreshing in her portrayal as a female detective. Annie is strong, bitter and a bit of a loose cannon. However, although the show portrays Annie as an exceptionally smart detective, she continues to use her female body and sexual acts to break cases instead of her wit and puzzle-solving skills. Therefore, Annie's characterization as intelligent is negated by her decisions as she chooses to act in the stereotyped role of seductress. This is made obvious in the first introduction to Annie, where she seduces a drug-dealer in order to get the name of his supplier (Maggs 1-3).

In contrast to Annie, most of the other female characters are characterized by their maternal nature. The mayor of the town is referred to as "Mother" by everyone who knows her. Annie's daughter, Daisy, is introduced in a scene where she describes the death of another woman in parallel with the virgin Mary, and Bev, a receptionist at the police station is described as "motherly" (Maggs 9, 11, 14).

Discussion / Implications

Starting with Table 1. Gender and Sexuality Character Representation, it is clear that within all the selected television episodes, there is never more than one character with a non-normative gender identity, and often all characters are gender normative, such as in *Schitt's Creek* and *Mary Kills People*. The characterization, motivation and agenda of the token non-normative characters in *Bellevue*, *Degrassi* and *Kim's Convenience* all revolve around their gender, and therefore the characters lack other aspects that make them dynamic and real. Only *Kim's Convenience* and *Mary Kills People* features characters with non-heterosexualities, although later on in *Schitt's Creek*, David is revealed to be pan-sexual. Overall, there was a higher representation of gender male than female.

In Table 2. Non-Normative Gender Screen Time, only *Degrassi* features a queer protagonist with more than fifty percent of screen time. *Schitt's Creek*, *Kim's Convenience*, *Bellevue* and *Mary Kills People* all feature queer characters for less than five percent of their run time or not at all. This extremely low representation is especially detrimental for *Bellevue* which promoted its show with the following description: "When a transgender teen goes missing, Detective Annie Ryder dives in to unravel the mystery, casting suspicion around her small-town and bringing back a mysterious man from her past" (Google Play 2021). Because the first character introduced in the description is "a transgender teen," it is expected by viewers that this teen will have substantial air time, even if they are not the protagonist. The plot point, of this teen being missing, is a convenient way to ensure this character receives as little screen time as possible.

Bellevue also falls short when considering pronouns. The character Jesse, a transgender girl, is referred to in both action description and dialogue with male pronouns. This is in

juxtaposition to *Degrassi*, whose transgender male character, Adam, is always referred to with the male pronouns of their chosen identity, rather than their biological features. This observation has affected the writing of my own character, Jed Dakin, and the addition of gender-neutral pronouns in the pilot episode of *Body Language*.

The television shows *Degrassi*, *Kim's Convenience*, and *Bellevue* all feature queer genders and sexualities that are bullied, ostracized, or “othered” due to their divergence from societal gender norms or heterosexuality. In *Kim's Convenience* and *Degrassi*, the characters are given hope by the end of the episode through the surrounding of friends and allies. In *Bellevue*, the non-normative character is made out to be hopeless, when Jesse is revealed to be the victim of a heinous murder. This analysis has brought to light the importance of giving queer characters hope in order to foster a viewership that supports the spectrum of genders and sexualities in real life.

Finally, I found the entire lack of gendering in the *Schitt's Creek* pilot episode to be both refreshing and unique compared to the other scripts I analyzed. When gendering is not necessary for the plot, stereotypes are infrequent and character voices are more dynamic.

CHAPTER SIX BODY LANGUAGE

Series Bible

The Nitty-Gritty of the Premise

Jed and Theodora Dakin are fraternal twins growing up with the incredible ability to switch into one another's body. As kids they seem to have all sorts of abilities that are chalked up to being nothing more than "a twin thing" so when they discover they can exchange bodies, they keep it quiet from parental figures. As the twins grow older they start using their ability to their advantage; they take tests for each other, hang out with each other's friends, and Jed even gives up Theodora's virginity while in her body. But other complications arise with adolescence, such as periods, wet dreams, facial hair, pregnancy scares, the gendered experience of being stuck in a physical body that doesn't correlate to their perception of their gender. These take tolls on the characters and shift their perspective of the world in terms of sexuality, privilege and equality.

The story line follows the twins into their adult life, unwrapping the mystery of why Jed went completely nuts and attempted to murder their best friend and Theodora's husband-to-be, Slater. Is Jed a lost cause? Can Theodora trust them in her body? Sometimes, there's only one way to find out.

Thematic Considerations

Thematically the show will be broaching some difficult subjects and raising morally vague questions to the audience. Is it right to have sex while in someone else's body? Or is that a sexual violation? If you kill while in your sibling's body, do they go to jail or do you? Who is really accountable? The body or the mind? Neither? Both?

What is gender and how is it performed linguistically? The characters will become aware

of contradictory gender expectations when in each other's bodies, and Jed will work to challenge the system, while Theodora will try to adhere to it.

The show will investigate unique relationships within the trans and LGBTQ community, as well as the prevalence of sexual violence among this group and the limited resources for help, especially in small, conservative communities. Episodes should get the audience talking about morals and values, religion and sexuality, rights and freedoms and their limitations.

Genre

Body Language is an amalgamation of many genres, as all our favourite movies and TV shows are. Backwoods, biblical red-necks walk straight out of westerns, heart throbs infuse their romance, quirky characters drive the comedic relief, but above all, the episodes ensnare the audience within the thrills and chills of suspense, mystery and horror.

Think *Behind Her Eyes*, *Ratched*, *Altered Carbon* or *Stranger Things*. We have young yet exceptionally capable protagonists that take on the supernatural, uncanny and detective work with the confidence of a seasoned professional, driven by love and justice.

Tone

The show deals with abuse, sexual violence, murder and other dark subjects while being constructed in a way to incite urgency and excitement for the heroes to succeed, rather than the anxiety, stress and hopelessness found in movies like *Saw*.

Dark and horrifying moments instilled with gut-wrenching terror will be de-escalated through character reactions (like the children bluntly swearing in *It*). The object of the show is not to simply scare the audience through macabre imagery, but to have them question everything from society, gender privilege, gender roles, and familial hierarchy through the backdrop of a crime thriller.

Half this Half That – Setting

The Dakin's reside at 4420 Burden Street, which sits exactly halfway on either side of Alberta and Saskatchewan in the small, conservative town of Lloydminster. Population: 31,000. The town is named after George Lloyd, an Anglican Bishop and theologian who helped found the city, setting its roots in Christianity, with sustaining beliefs that foreigners and gays are alien mongrels.

Although the show will mostly take place within the Dakin house, the landscape of this town and its split identity plays into the understanding Jed and Theodora have of their split genders, and the constraints of living in a town still highly influenced by non-progressive ideals.

Within the house itself, rooms and roles are gendered. The kitchen and garden, for instance, are for the women, while the study and basement are for the men of the house. Within the given rooms, comes the expected roles, which are easily defied when the twins switch bodies.

Ease of Recognition

The Script: When Jed and Theodora are in their given bodies, their names will be read per usual. However, when Jed is in Theodora's body and vice versa, their names will be denoted with an Asterix: Jed* and Theodora*

This is both in action description and dialogue.

On Screen: Jed is born with one blue eye and one brown. This is both symbolic of their split gender identity, and their yearning to have access to all genders, and sexes. Jed is both male and female, and neither male nor female. The viewer will always know who Jed is by their one blue and one brown eye. Even when Jed switches into Theodora's body, they take with them their blue and brown eyes. (The switching of eyes will be noted by friends and family but swept away by a doctor's diagnosis of a rare chromosomal variation – a twin thing.)

Characters

Theodora Dakin

“There’s nothing wrong with knowing what you want. And taking it.”

Theodora has the ambitious, tireless, focused mind of an all-star athlete and the body of... well, a woman. Although her body seems to be working against her athletic goals, she’s determined to adhere to gender constructs. After a track and field “accident” leaves her paralyzed she finds herself under the lock and key of her husband Slater. Theodora must realize that her femininity isn’t a weakness, and now that she can’t run, she must fight.

Jed Dakin

“Just because it happened in your body, doesn’t mean I have to tell you about it.”

Hopeless romantic, Jed Dakin, has looked a long time for their fairy-tale ending, who knew that they’d find the love of their life in the form of a parole officer? Jed would like nothing more than to skip town with Officer Ramsay and never look back – unfortunately, Jed is stuck with a disturbing chore first. Get rid of Slater without Theodora discovering that her husband is worse than your average cheater... he’s a rapist.

Arro Dakin

“You’re either naïve or weak. Either way, you disgust me.”

From rags to riches, Arro knows the work it takes to build your own empire, and wouldn’t mind seeing the family show a little more appreciation for the two story, marble and teak wood mansion in which he houses them. Every dollar fed into his bank account just adds to his bitterness and inner chaos egging him to destroy it all. Leave the family. Hook up with some young hot thang and be done with it all. He just wants Jed, his protégé, to come with him.

Cynthia Dakin

“I was happier when you lied to me. It helped me lie to myself.”

Misery is granted company in the form of Cynthia, the mother to Jed and Theodora, and not a very good one at that. When she’s not gambling or on the bottle, she’s complaining to Arro about the help or complaining to the help about Arro. Her children don’t pay her enough attention, forcing her to manipulate them with her over dramatics. She wants to be a better mother and wife, but needs to clean up her act first.

Rose Ramsay

“Cliché or not, I won’t rest till this small-town is in my rear-view mirror.”

Rose is as pretty as her name and as prickly as a thorn. But she has good reason to keep her guard up. Being a lesbian raised by a small-town officer, her only respite is when she’s hauled up with Theodora, who accepts her just as she is. Rose has always been Theodora’s ally, but even the strongest of friendships can break when body parts start appearing.

Ben Slater

“In the nuanced words of President T himself, ‘grab em by the pussy.’”

Nobody is both despised and admired to the same degree as Slater, douche-bag teen turned even douchier adult. Being outlandishly hot with an exceptional ability to scrape by in all his endeavours, he’s managed to land himself a cushy job and a beautiful lady – Theodora. A little swinging from time to time isn’t really such a ridiculous request. Slater still hasn’t figured out why his former best friend, Jed, turned so murderously against him. Some things remain mysteries.

Luxx Hannigan

“My knees are bruised from repenting. How about yours?”

The only thing worn in about Luxx is her Bible, practically falling apart from its use. She lives her life with conviction for the Lord and has been raised to believe the worst sin is straying from heteronormativity. However, Luxx has a change of heart after an assault leaves her pregnant, putting her at odds with the church she once called home.

Officer Roland Ramsay

“This town needs protection. Sometimes from itself.”

Roland, known by some as an officer and others as Rose’s father, has done his best as a single parent. One night, his daughter’s best friend, Theodora, corners him in his own home and claims something horrible has happened to her but won’t say what. Ten years later, severed body parts start showing up at the Dankin’s door, and he’s certain the two events are somehow connected.

Season and Episode Breakdown

1 hour, 8 episodes, mini-series

Each episode is titled after a room in the house in which something pivotal happens. The episode teaser is one to three pages and sets the stage for the title of the episode through a flashback of Jed and Theodora as young children. For example, if the episode is entitled “Bathroom” the opening scene may have Jed in Theodora’s body the first time she gets her period and show Theodora in Jed’s, showering and accidentally (habitually) shaving their armpits. They meet after their awkward bathroom experiences, ready to confide in each other when they hear a crash. Running to their parents’ ensuite they find their mother on the bathroom floor, convulsing after an intentional overdose. The teaser should always start off light and somewhat funny before turning cryptic.

Opening credits and then straight into present day ~ The twins are in their late twenties and dealing with the problems like marriage, finances, work and “Should we tell our significant other that we can switch bodies? Would they believe us?” If the episode is entitled “Bathroom” then it’s important that this room in the house is the focus “problem” for the episode, literally or not.

In the first episode the audience is introduced to the season’s overall mystery “Why did Jed turn into a deranged murderer the night of graduation?” and in each episode, Theodora gets a step closer to answering that question through the specific room in the house. It’s not until the last episode entitled “Basement” that Theodora discovers what happened to Jed while in her body, that changed both their lives forever.

Pilot Episode Breakdown

Dining Room

Teaser:

In a diner, Theodora (17) and her boyfriend Slater (17) leave their prom night early to grab a bite. However, when Theodora lowers her menu, Slater falls to his knee and proposes. Theodora practically screams ‘yes’, but her scream of excitement turns to fear as Jed (17) enters the diner, his shaky hand gripping a gun. Jed’s first shot misses, hitting a waitress, and before he can get his second shot into Slater’s chest, Officer Ramsay tackles him. Jed is carted off to juvie and Theodora is locked into marriage.

Main Episode Beats:

Theodora (30) is living with her husband, Slater, and her Alzheimer ridden mother, Cynthia (60s), in her childhood home on Burden Street when Jed arrives. Released on parole. Had nowhere to go but home.

Theodora presses Jed to explain that fateful night but the most she can get out of him is, “Your husband isn’t who you think.”

Theodora and Slater argue over gender roles, Theodora wants to join the police academy, Slater wants a baby more than anything. Stress will only decrease their chances.

Jed resumes his original goal. Kill Slater.

Tag: Slater and Theodora open their anniversary gifts. One present contains the severed hand of a newborn baby.

Episode Guide

Pilot: Dining Room

Introduces Jed and Theodora, their muddy relationships with their parents. Jed’s attempt to murder Slater at seventeen and their release from prison at thirty. Theodora’s yearning to return to work, Slater pushing her to stay home and continue to try for a baby. Jed resumes their plan to off Slater while Theodora tries to uncover what happened that fateful night that left Jed blood thirsty and her paralyzed. Discovery of the severed baby hand.

Episode Two: The Garden

When Theodora is a child, Cynthia teaches her about “the birds and the bees” while gardening and Theodora’s womanly duties. Present day, Slater is convinced that Jed has something to do with the baby’s hand. Jed is released from prison and suddenly they’re dealing with body parts. Can that really be a coincidence? Theodora wonders if this is some type of message for her and her infertility. Jed gets a job in Slater’s advertising office – Jed is infiltrating Slater’s world. While gardening – Theodora finds a baby’s foot.

Episode Three: The Bathroom

Theodora finally gets a positive pregnancy test. Is the happy family of Slater's dreams finally coming true? Jed and Ramsay declare their love for each other. Police are stationed outside the Dakin house to watch for whoever is planting the baby body parts. That's when Slater receives a package at work. It's an ear this time.

Episode Four: Boiler Room

Past: Young Jed is in the boiler room with Arro, learning how to adjust the settings and maintain the boiler. Theodora enters and asks if she can learn too. Arro brushes her away, saying this is no place for a girl. Theodora decides to come down in the night and learn by herself – the next day the boiler explodes and kills Arro. Present: Test results come back from the police, the disembodied baby shares genetics with Slater – it's his daughter. Theodora is horrified, how is that possible? The boiler stops working – it's been clogged. By a baby's head.

Episode Five: Study

Young Jed and Theodora are in their family's massive study / library reading a book on brain and spinal cord swaps as a possible procedure to allow for body swapping. In the back of the book they find a wad of cash and discuss their father's less than legitimate business. Present Day: Jed decides to tell their parole officer, the man they're in love with, the truth about how they can switch bodies. Slater is under arrest as they question him about the disembodied baby genetically related to him. While Slater is gone, Theodora slips into his study and applies for the police academy.

Episode Six: Attic

As kids Jed and Slater would play in the attic and exclude Theodora. Now when she enters she finds one of Jed's old plastic light sabers, discarded with dried blood splattered. Jed uncovers their dad's cooked books in the attic – this is how Jed's going to frame Slater. A lifetime sentence in prison is worse than death – Jed knows this.

Episode Seven: Bedroom

Luxx is revealed to be the one planting the body parts – it was a message for Slater to atone and Theodora to run. Slater had assaulted Luxx and the still born baby was the result. Theodora decides to get an abortion and divorce Slater – she's no longer desperate to be a mother, her dreams have long since transformed. Slater returns home and reminds Theodora that everything is now in his name and he's the one making money. If she divorces him, then he'll take her for everything she owns. Jed releases the cooked books to the police.

Episode Eight: Basement

Theodora discovers the truth – the night before prom, Slater assaulted Jed while in her body with the light saber in their basement. That's why Theodora had a slipped disc during her track and field championship that led to her paralysis. Theodora kills Slater, avenging herself and Jed. Rose helps to cover the murder as suicide.

BODY LANGUAGE

"PILOT"

Written by

Helen Marsh

ACT I

FADE IN:

INT. DAKIN RESIDENCE – THEODORA’S BEDROOM – EVENING

THEODORA DAKIN (17), a coddled child working tirelessly to embody the female stereotype.

Theodora lifts the lid of a wax heater and uses a popsicle stick to collect the hot goop and smear it over her peach-fuzz upper lip. She sets a timer and a soft TICKING accompanies the rhythm of her:

- Applying mascara
- Rubbing A535 on her lower back
- Taping strapless push-up cups onto her breasts

The timer DINGS and Theodora rips the wax from her upperlip with such calculated force that her eyes barely have time to water.

Headlights move across her bedroom wall and Theodora dances to the window.

TITLE CARD: 2020

EXT. DAKIN RESIDENCE – EVENING

A silver Celica meanders up the twisty driveway.

The Dakin mansion stands shrouded in trees that spit angry, green, needles. The house is old and timeless, an artifact of a bygone era.

The Celica stops and gives a couple impatient HONKS.

INT. CELICA – EVENING

BEN SLATER (18), the poster boy for white privilege and small-town nepotism, is behind the wheel in a crisp white shirt and bowtie.

Chewing tobacco SMACKS between his gums, which he quickly spits into a red-solo-cup as Theodora bursts from her home in a dress that glitters like stardust. Her Cinderella beauty is anything but effortless.

The darkened silhouettes of Theodora's parents are briefly seen in the threshold – seeing her off with an emotionless wave – before they're re-concealed behind the closing paneled doors.

Slater fiddles with his hair, John Travolta-style, as Theodora slides into the passenger's seat.

THEODORA

Hey Slater.

She's a radiant orb of sunshine and perfection. He's still fixing his strays in the rear-view mirror.

SLATER

Hey, sorry I didn't come to the door. Your driveway's a mud hole after all this rain.

THEODORA

Your grave. You know what my Mom says about chivalry.

Theodora pulls two masks out of her clutch.

THEODORA (CONT'D)

I thought we could match.

His eyes flit over her for the first time. As she attempts to put on the mask he ensnares her wrist.

SLATER

Screw that germ-infested gymnasium.

He puts the car in gear and starts peeling out. Mud spewing in his wake.

THEODORA

Slater, it's prom!

SLATER

This'll be better. You'll see.

He takes her hand and kisses it.

SLATER (CONT'D)

Just trust me-- You smell great, by the way.

INT. MINSTER'S DINER – NIGHT

A family-run diner and a favorite local for most of its patrons. Simplistic, cheap, greasy and good.

The waitresses wear tight black dresses and ill-fitting masks, a box TV anchored to the wall runs through a President Donald Trump highlight reel.

Slater and Theodora are nestled in a booth.

THEODORA

The championship is on Saturday, so if my back's not healed by tomorrow I'll have to book a chiro or something.

Slater's attention darts between her and the television.

SLATER

I hate that.

THEODORA

What?

SLATER

The thought of some perv running his hands over you.

THEODORA

I think I'd know the difference between an adjustment and assault.

Slater slides a menu across the table.

SLATER

Let's eat. Get anything you like. It's on me.

As Theodora's face disappears behind the menu, Slater slides out of the booth and onto one

knee. He pulls a ring box from his back pocket and signals for a waiter, JOSHUA (19), to start filming.

THEODORA

I don't know what I can eat that won't give me a ridiculous food baby.

She drops the menu and GASPS, the ring in Slater's fingers extended towards her. A small cut diamond.

SLATER

Theodora Dakin, I don't know much, but I do know what it looks like to have a perfect woman and never want to let her go. I know this isn't the prom night you were expecting. But I don't want this to be the end of high school, I want it to be the beginning of you and me. Will you marry me?

As the word "yes" starts to form on Theodora's lips, the diner entrance door chimes and JED DAKIN (17), a sensitive soul with intelligent eyes – one blue, one brown – races in brandishing a gun.

Although Jed's hands are shaky it's obvious they're aiming for Slater, who grabs a terrified WAITRESS. A succession of SHOTS fire accompanied by the SHRIEKS of Theodora's panic. Joshua scrambles under a table and continues to film.

Blood spreads like fire across the waitress's chest and Slater flees from beneath her, hurrying for the bathroom as OFFICER RAMSAY (30s), a gentle, optimistic widower, barrels out from his booth. Jed is about to shoot Slater in the back when Officer Ramsay tackles them to the ground.

The revolver slides across the floor, sounding a light metallic CLICK as it hits against Theodora's silver heels. She briefly meets Jed's gaze before running to Slater's aid.

ROLL TITLE SEQUENCE.

INT. PENITENTIARY – HOLDING CELL – DAY

TITLE CARD: 2030

JED DAKIN (27) looking scruffy yet wiser, is led into the holding cell. Jed's uncuffed and

seated across from OFFICER RAMSAY (40s). Neither meets the other's gaze or speaks a word until the guards have departed.

Then, under the table, their hands brush and linger.

RAMSAY

I'll be your probationary officer. I made sure of it.

Jed nods, thankful.

RAMSAY (CONT'D)

No one came to pick you up. Can I give you a ride somewhere? A hotel?

JED

I'll taxi.

RAMSAY

I'll need to know where you're staying so I can check in.

JED

Check in? Like for the hotel?

The question is serious but Jed quickly realizes the blunder. They both blush.

JED (CONT'D)

Sorry, I mean, I'm not going to stay in a hotel. I'll go home.

RAMSAY

Your sister and her husband live there now.

Ramsay leans in closer.

RAMSAY (CONT'D)

Why stick around, Jed? When you're probation is up just... get outta here.

JED

You know I can't do that.

Their eye-contact breaks and Ramsay takes Jed's chin, forcing their gaze to realign.

RAMSAY

You can't get justice for anyone but yourself.
Remember that.

EXT. DAKIN RESIDENCE – NIGHT

Ten years passed and not a stone is out of place.

INT. LIVING ROOM – NIGHT

THEODORA DAKIN (27), elegant but frail, her body listing slightly to the left, wheels herself to the base of the grand staircase and stares up. The rhythmic creak of a rocking chair draws her attention to a dark corner of the livingroom where her mother, CYNTHIA DAKIN (70s), drools feebly.

THEODORA

Go to bed, Mom.

A dry, thin-lipped smile is the only response.

Theodora slides out of her wheelchair and places her hands on the first step, heaving her body onto it. The sharp CLIP of approaching shoes makes her move quicker.

She manages three steps before—

SLATER (28), bespoke suit guarding his demeanor, emerges from the hallway, his eyes brooding.

SLATER

What are you doing?

He scoops her up. It's neither glamorous nor loving. She presses her cheek to his chest as he packs her up the staircase.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM – NIGHT

A shelf of track and field trophies collects dust behind the bed. Slater sets Theodora on top of the duvet.

THEODORA

I think I'll play the harp this evening.

SLATER

That sounds nice. But first the test?

He opens his palm, waiting to receive.

THEODORA

I haven't done it yet.

SLATER

Of course not.

He scoops her back up, this time with her bony fists raining blows against his back.

THEODORA

There's no point. I told you I'll know when it happens.

SLATER

I know you think you can tell that, but you can't.

THEODORA

I don't even have to pee.

Her fingers lock against the door frame as he carries her into the ensuite.

SLATER

I don't understand why you have to make this so difficult.

THEODORA

That look of disappointment isn't exactly the highlight of my day.

SLATER

What look?

CUT TO:

INT. ENSUITE – NIGHT

Theodora passes the negative pregnancy test to Slater.

THEODORA

That look.

She sits exposed on the toilet while he uses a sharpie to write the date on the test. He then files it into a cabinet of tests, a reminder of her barrenness.

SLATER

We just gotta keep trying.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM – NIGHT

Theodora's head is turned so she can stare into the bedroom's abyss as Slater thrusts against her. She suddenly turns to face him, pulling his head down for a kiss.

THEODORA

I love you.

He finishes, collapsing on top of her.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM – NIGHT

Theodora sits in an armchair, PLAYING a small handheld harp. The frame is wood, the cords gut. As she strokes the strings, she watches Slater's chest rise and fall in slumber.

A cord brakes, lashing her hand, and making her recoil in pain. She bites her lip to stop from squealing.

As she pulls the snapped string from the tuning pin, a new sound catches her attention. The prominent and unmistakable SHRIEK of the front door.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY – NIGHT

Theodora crawls to the staircase banister that overlooks the living room. Her strong arms drag her paralyzed lower body.

She catches a shadow moving across the living room wall and scrambles towards the staircase.

INT. LIVING ROOM – NIGHT

Coming down the steep hardwood steps is laborious. Theodora clutches the banister with one hand and the harp string in the other like a silver whip.

A light comes on in the kitchen and she holds her breath. The WHISTLE of the kettle and the CLATTER of cup and saucer.

INT. KITCHEN – NIGHT

Theodora snakes into the kitchen like a viper. In one fell swoop she wraps the harp string around the intruder's bare ankle and yanks them to the ground.

The sound of their teeth SNAPPING together as their chin hits the kitchen tile is no deterrent to Theodora as she pulls herself on top of the GROANING body and starts winding the harp string around their neck.

JED

(choking)

Hey, sis. Didn't think you were awake.

Her hands fall to her side. Her heart in her stomach.

THEODORA

Jed?

THEODORA

What are you, an assassin?

Jed pushes her off and comes to sitting. Jed's mismatched eyes twinkle with mischievous love. They take each other in.

THEODORA

What are you doing here? Did you...?

JED

Escape? No. I'm on parole. I see you still hide the spare key in the bird bath. That was a nice surprise.

THEODORA

And your parole officer is okay with you breaking into the house of the man you tried to kill?

JED

Theodora, you don't believe that? Haven't you read the tabloids? It was a drug induced craze. I hadn't meant to hurt anyone.

THEODORA

You killed a waitress. Jenny Goldberg.

Jed winces, their chest tightening.

THEODORA (CONT'D)

Why didn't you tell me you were getting out?

JED

Tell you? I haven't heard from you. No one picks up the phone around here, let alone makes visits to the local penitentiary.

Jed gets up and offers a hand to Theodora. She stares at it, annoyed.

THEODORA

I can't.

JED

You won't even touch me? You know we can't switch unless we're both willing.

THEODORA

You don't get it.

JED

NO YOU DON'T GET IT. I have no

where else to go. This is still technically Mom's house,
isn't it?

Jed takes her arm and starts to lift her up, surprised to find a dead weight and a complete
lack of footing.

JED (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

THEODORA

Just put me down.

Jed does, and she lands with a gut-wrenching flop.

THEODORA (CONT'D)

My wheelchair's in the living room.

INT. LIVING ROOM – NIGHT

Theodora is now in her chair nursing a cup of tea while Jed lights a fire in the brick chimney.

JED

I bet Slater loves having you all... helpless.

THEODORA

What's that supposed to mean?

JED

Nothing. Sorry. I guess I'm just bitter that no one told
me.

THEODORA

Consider yourself lucky. No one had to tell me.

JED

When did it happen?

THEODORA

During your trial. You had enough on your plate.

JED

Was it the championships?

Theodora SIGHS and sets her tea aside.

THEODORA

You had no right to tell me not to run. How was I supposed to know you screwed my spine?

Jed frowns.

THEODORA (CONT'D)

That is what happened, isn't it?

Before Jed can answer, they both tune into a new sound. The floorboards CREAKING above them.

SLATER (O.S.)

Theodora?

Slater's slippers PAD along the upstairs hallway. Theodora jerks her head towards the kitchen.

THEODORA

Hide.

Jed doesn't move from their perch at the fireplace, they pass a smoldering orange poker from one hand to the other.

THEODORA (CONT'D)

(hissing)

Please, Jed.

Jed refuses to move. Theodora waits with bated breath as Slater sleepily makes his way down the staircase.

SLATER

My flower, what are you—

He comes to the back of Theodora's chair and lets out a pitchy GASP.

JED

Quite the greetings I've been receiving.

SLATER

I'm calling the police. Get out of my house.

JED

Actually, this is my Mom's house. She is still alive, isn't she?

SLATER

What is he doing here? Is he armed?

THEODORA

No. He's on parole. I didn't know he was coming.

JED

Pronouns.

THEODORA

I didn't know *they* were coming.

SLATER

Tell him to leave, Theodora, before I escort him out myself.

INT. JED'S BEDROOM – NIGHT

Slater leads Jed to their old bedroom. Fluffs the pillow for them.

SLATER

You can't stay long. This is our home now. Not yours.

Jed picks up a rolodex of Pokémon cards.

JED

All my stuff is still here. Kinda looks like home to me.

SLATER

Don't do this to your sister. She's been through enough

with you.

JED

And you haven't?

Slater moves to the threshold of the door, his face sunken with fear.

SLATER

I don't know what set you off and I don't bother
wasting my time trying to guess. But I saw the devil in
you, Jed. And I don't believe for a second that he's
gone.

Slater softly closes the door and Jed SIGHS into the bed sheets.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM – NIGHT

Slater enters his bedroom, locks the door and hastily pushes the vanity in front of it before
turning to Theodora in a cowardly rage.

SLATER

What is he doing here? Why didn't you tell him to
leave?

THEODORA

They're my brother.

SLATER

Shared blood line didn't seem to have much
significance to you during this past decade of
excommunication.

Theodora reaches out for Slater, taking his hand and guiding him into bed.

THEODORA

This could be good for all of us. It might give Jed a
chance to open up a bit. Become himself again.

SLATER

Open up?

THEODORA

You know what I mean.

SLATER

Yeah, I actually think I do. But this isn't CSI
Lloydminster. You're a...

THEODORA

A what?

SLATER

A wife. My wife.

Theodora presses her lips together – hard – before giving a firm nod.

THEODORA

And as your wife I'm asking you to trust me. Just like
I'm trusting you on this.

She moves his hand to her flat stomach and leans in for a kiss.

INT. JED'S BEDROOM – DAY

The morning light streams in. Jed lies still in the confines of the bed, their eyes open and calculating.

The front door SLAMS and Jed peers out their window to see Slater leaving the house, briefcase and cigarette like extensions of his limbs.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY – DAY

Jed, squeezed into a button-up from their high school days, peers over the banister. The coast is clear.

Jed slinks towards the master bedroom and KNOCKS softly.

JED

Theo, you in there?

The silence is their welcoming.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM – DAY

Jed steps into the master bedroom, choosing the floorboards carefully. Jed eagerly gets to work.

QUICK SHOTS:

- Flipping through Theodora's journal. Her obsession with Jed's trial is painstakingly documented.
- Opening the pregnancy test cabinet. The sticks tap together like infertility windchimes.
- Peering into her jewelry box. Pearls shine. A ballerina spins.
- Pulling a small metal safe out from under the bed.

Jed rests the safe on top of the bed and enters a four-digit code. The safe beeps but remains locked.

Jed tries another sequence, unaware of the bedroom door slowly opening and a small figure stepping in. The safe BEEPS in denial.

A papery hand reaches over Jed's shoulder, startling them.

JED

Jesus Christ, Mom.

Cynthia shuffles in front of the safe and types in the code. The vault swings open. Jed reaches inside, removing a handgun from the safe.

JED (CONT'D)

Thanks.

Jed tucks the Glock 19 into the back of their trousers and re-secures the safe beneath Theodora's bed.

CYNTHIA

I hope your aim has improved.

END OF ACT I

ACT II

EXT. BUNCHBERRY BLOCK – DAY

Weathered yet hospitable townhouses spruced up with flower boxes.
Theodora lets herself in--

INT. BUNCHBERRY BLOCK – ROSE’S TOWNHOUSE – LIVING ROOM – DAY

Wheeling into Rose’s open concept living room. Red string like arteries connect photographs to statements.

ROSE RAMSAY (30s), a rookie cop eager to make detective, is flipping through a folder, her back to Theodora as she moves around the room, neurotic like a collie.

ROSE

Good. You’re here. Body of an eighteen-year-old Michael Grey found naked and unconscious on the Alberta-Saskatchewan border. He can’t remember anything but it looked like a message.

Theodora picks up a discarded mess of yarn and begins winding it up.

THEODORA

Who are you after?

ROSE

His boss at the brewery, Aaron Briggs. His DNA was all over the scene. Not enough evidence to arrest him, but he’s in for questioning. I just need to find something. A motive or... ties to gangs.

THEODORA

Is Michael that kid trying to bring Lloydminster completely into Alberta?

ROSE

That sounds right.

THEODORA

Briggs brewery gets its hops from Saskatchewan.
If Michael was successful, they'd have to start paying
tax when they brought it over the border.

ROSE

Why not kill him?

THEODORA

Maybe they figured they had.

ROSE

This is why I invite you over, my dear.

Rose's words are casual, platonic, yet Theodora looks away, nonplussed.

THEODORA

Jed's back. Like at the house, back.

Rose slumps into a chair and Theodora tosses her the coiled ball of yarn.

ROSE

I know. My Dad said.

A dam breaks and tears quite suddenly start to well in Theodora's eyes. Her voice becomes a
CROAK.

THEODORA

I just don't know what to do.

Rose glides towards Theodora, scooping up her hands and stroking back her hair.

ROSE

What is it? Are you scared of them?

THEODORA

No, if anything I'm relieved to have them back. I
feel like I might finally get closure on everything. On
what happened. But...

She blinks away her tears and releases Rose's hands, struggling to stay dignified.

THEODORA (CONT'D)

But Slater and I are already in a difficult place. Jed's presence is like a tornado in a mine field.

ROSE

You married Slater very young.

THEODORA

But I married him.

ROSE

I think you should put your family first for once.

Theodora puckers her lips as she chews this over.

THEODORA

Are you still coming tonight?

ROSE

Of course.

INT. DAKIN RESIDENCE - KITCHEN – DAY

Theodora supervises kitchen STAFF as they prepare mini quiches and tarts. Raw meat is cranked through a handgrinder for meat pies.

Theodora dips a wooden spoon into a simmering butter and brown sugar mixture on the stove.

THEODORA

This is looking really great, Maggie.

Jed appears in the doorway, their nose twitching delightfully.

JED

Are we celebrating my freedom?

THEODORA

It's my and Slater's wedding anniversary.

She wheels herself out of the crowded kitchen.

THEODORA (CONT'D)

If you plan on attending, make yourself respectable.

Jed follows her out and--

INT. LIVING ROOM – CONTINUOUS

-- grabs onto the back of Theodora's wheelchair and spins her around, crouching to her level.

JED

A decade of marriage is certainly something worth celebrating.

THEODORA

Let go of my chair.

Jed swiftly releases her chair and envelopes her hand.

JED

Wouldn't you like to walk again?

THEODORA

Don't do this to me.

JED

Don't you want to run? Like you used to.

THEODORA

Of course I do.

JED

Well what's holding you back? I'm open to it.

THEODORA

We've each been forced into a prison, Jed. Because of you. Except I'll never be released from mine.

Eventually you'll want your body back. And when that happens, I'll be escorted back into this jail cell.

Theodora tugs her hand free and wheels away, bumping into an armchair, to her chagrin.

EXT. DAKIN RESIDENCE – EVENING

The driveway is packed with an assortment of cars.

INT. HALLWAY – NIGHT

Theodora carries a tray of chocolate dipped strawberries on her lap. She's wheeling towards the packed dining room when—

LUXX (27), young and graceless, emerges from the basement.

THEODORA

Luxx, I haven't seen you in months. I wasn't sure if you were even coming.

Luxx leans down and gives Theodora a kiss on the cheek.

LUXX

I'm sorry, I've been doing a lot of travelling. I just got back to Lloydminster a few days ago.

THEODORA

Well, I'm glad you made it.

Theodora peers past her.

THEODORA (CONT'D)

What were you doing in the basement?

LUXX

Sorry, I just got a bit turned around. Where's the bathroom?

Theodora points down the hall.

INT. DINING ROOM – NIGHT

A large crystal chandelier and ornate paintings. Appetizers and presents crowd the dining room table. JOSHUA (29), drunk and cheerful, chats gaily with Slater and his boss, MR. WHITMAN (50s).

Rose and Theodora CLINK champagne glasses while setting a new record onto the gramophone.

THEODORA

Anything more on the Briggs case?

ROSE

Not yet. I'm still waiting for my chance to interrogate.

Luxx watches the hustle of catering staff as Jed enters, coming to a stop next to her.

JED

So, an ex-convict and the preacher's daughter walk into a dining room...

LUXX

Is that still how you think of me? The preacher's daughter?

JED

I honestly don't know what I think of anyone anymore.

LUXX

But you still want him gone, right?

Luxx eyes Slater, who is brown-nosing up to his boss with a bottle of wine. Jed doesn't reply and Luxx smiles coyly.

LUXX (CONT'D)

I wouldn't blame you.

JED

What'd he do to you?

LUXX

What'd he do to you?

JED

It wasn't me he did something to.

They both watch Theodora for a moment, the curvature of her spine leaning her left like a tree waiting to be felled.

LUXX

Well, it's no wonder God isn't granting them any children. He doesn't want the devil reproducing.

JED

That may be so, but what I did last time was child's play.

LUXX

You have a new strategy?

JED

Evolution, baby.

Jed B-lines for Slater and Mr. Whitman. Joshua nearly recoils in fright.

JED (CONT'D)

Albert Whitman, right? Boy do I love what you've done for the advertising world.

Mr. Whitman is obviously flattered.

WHITMAN

I don't think we've met.

He takes a step back, bumping his whiskey glass off the table and into Theodora's lap. Theodora GROANS and wheels towards the table for a napkin.

ROSE

Let me get it.

Rose is about to mop her dress clean but Theodora stops her.

THEODORA

I've got it, thanks.

She starts to wipe herself dry, her face twisting in disgust as she gazes over the presents towards the meat pies. She looks back to Rose.

THEODORA (CONT'D)

Do you smell raw meat?

INT. DINING ROOM – NIGHT

The guests are gone and only Jed remains in the room. He's holding Albert Whitman's sleek business card – Whitman's Magazine and Advertising.

The HUSHED WHISPERING of voices draws him out of the dining room.

INT. LIVING ROOM – NIGHT

In the dim light Jed watches as Slater gathers Theodora out of the wheel chair and carries her up the stairs like a rag doll.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM – NIGHT

The whites of Theodora's insomniac eyes as she lays restlessly in bed next to Slater.

She turns on her phone flashlight, casting it around the room. She illuminates the discarded harp on the armchair, still missing a string.

She reaches into her bedside table, pulling out a stack of journals. She selects the same one Jed had flipped through earlier.

INSERT JOURNAL:

June 23 / 2020

Today was supposed to be remembered as the day Benjamin Slater joined the Dakin family. Instead it's the day Jed left it.

She flips to the previous page.

June 22 / 2020

Jed and I have started switching more often and for longer periods of time. I'm no longer feeling at home in my own skin...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THEODORA'S BEDROOM – FLASHBACK

Laying in a sea of liquorish and Swedish berries is Jed's body. But it's not Jed. Instead the dull grey eyes of Theodora* (17) peer through as she gorges herself on sweets.

Jed* (17) enters, their mismatched eyes peering out of Theodora's face like a well-formed mask. Jed fiddles with pearl earrings.

Theodora* BURPS and watches as Jed* quickly starts changing out of their skin-tight jeggings and crop-top and into a large knit sweater.

Jed* reaches for a gummy but Theodora* swats their hand away.

THEODORA*

I told you, you can't eat junk in my body. Sugar makes me break out.

JED*

Thanks for watching my complexion.

Jed grabs a towel off the floor.

THEODORA*

Is something wrong?

JED*

Menstrual cramps. I need a bath.

Theodora extends her hand like Liberty's torch.

THEODORA*

Switch back with me. I'll bathe and you can watch the game with Dad.

Jed* hesitates, casually raking their fingers through the long auburn hair.

JED*

We can't switch back.

THEODORA*

This is not the night to get fucky with me, Jed.
Tomorrow's prom. I need to shave my legs and do a
full mani pedi tonight.

JED*

I can do it for you.

THEODORA*

Just give me my body back!

Theodora* comes to stand on the bed, her eyes frantic within the large and domineering form.

JED*

Only if you promise not to run on Saturday.

Theodora's* jaw slowly drops.

THEODORA*

It's the championships.

JED*

It doesn't matter.

Theodora* searches Jed's* eyes, the pain beneath them is obvious.

THEODORA*

What happened to you?

JED*

Just promise me.

THEODORA*

Fine, I promise.

She* extends her hand once again and this time Jed* takes it. Their eyes start brimming with tears so thick and watery that their irises distort into a whirlpool of saltwater.

When they blink away the tears, Theodora is back in her body and so is Jed.

Theodora's legs shake and she slowly comes to kneeling, her hand massaging her lower spine as she looks up to Jed in complete distress.

THEODORA

What happened?

Jed is already walking out the door, head bowed.

JED

Running can only make it worse.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM – NIGHT

Theodora flips a few pages ahead in her journal. June 28th.

EXT. TRACK – FLASHBACK

The bleachers are a ghost town save for the few parental spectators equipped with masks and hand sanitizer.

Theodora (17) lines up on the track next to a row of other WOMEN. Their body types are nearly identical. Long, lean, sinewy. Their eyes starved.

Theodora has trouble straightening out, a pinched-nerve pitching her left.

A GUN-SHOT sets their feet in motion and within the first few strides of fury, Theodora stumbles against the woman next to her. The woman shoves her back, pulling ahead.

Theodora pushes her legs against the pain, rocketing forward until the tiniest POP of a spinal disc sends her careening into the track. Bewildered runners trip over Theodora, continuing to run despite her SCREAMS.

THEODORA. LEGS. DON'T. MOVE.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM – NIGHT

Theodora shines her phone flashlight over a series of old news articles that have been pasted into the journal with headlines like “*Lloydminster’s Star Runner Paralyzed for Life*” and “*Convict and Cripple - The Truth Behind The Lloydminster Twins*”.

Theodora grabs another journal, opens it to a fresh page and writes: “*What happened to my body on June 22nd 2020?*”

The CREAKING of floorboards draws her out of her own head. She flashes the light at the closed bedroom door.

Another sound, like the SHUFFLING of papers.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY – NIGHT

Theodora crawls out of the bedroom and into the hall. She can see the light through the crack beneath the door in Slater’s office.

The door is ajar. She lightly nudges it open.

INT. OFFICE – NIGHT

Jed flips through Slater’s daily schedule, committing his routine to memory.

There’s a folder of advertisement pitch ideas that Jed tucks beneath their arm.

Jed notices the door is slightly cracked, and moves around the desk to shut it, briefly peering into the hallway. It’s vacant. Jed returns to the desk, sliding into Slater’s ergonomic office chair and running their fingers over the keyboard.

Behind the armchair, Theodora is balled up, struggling not to breathe as she watches Jed shuffle through her husband’s work documents.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM – NIGHT

Slater feels across the empty sheets for Theodora. He clicks the lamp on.

INT. OFFICE – NIGHT

Jed's ears prick at Slater's awakening. Jed quickly flicks off the light and hurries back to their own bedroom.

Theodora releases her breath and inches out of the hiding place.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY – NIGHT

Theodora is halfway back to her own bedroom when Slater nearly steps on her.

SLATER

Were you in my office?

THEODORA

I wasn't on the computer.

SLATER

That's not what I asked.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM – NIGHT

Theodora lays with her head in Slater's lap. He plays with her hair, curling it around his finger.

SLATER

You said your dream was to be a mother. Remember that?

THEODORA

Who am I supposed to mother? You?

Slater is silent. He releases her hair to trace patterns on her arms.

THEODORA (CONT'D)

No matter how badly I want a baby,
I can't live for this fruitless
dream forever. I feel so empty.

He EXHALES resentfully.

SLATER

I have tried so hard to fill up your life, Theodora. I was eighteen years old, remember that? I had friends that told me I shouldn't marry you. That my life would be over if I tied myself to a woman who couldn't even get out of bed...

THEODORA

I get out of bed just fine.

SLATER

I've worked so hard to make things easy for you.

Theodora clutches at Slater.

THEODORA

I appreciate that, I really do. But I don't need easy anymore. If I could just apply to the academy.

SLATER

God, you're not Ironside.

THEODORA

I'm not getting pregnant, Slater.

SLATER

Don't say that.

He leans down and kisses her, tugging at her pajama shirt and slowly pulling it over her head.

THEODORA

Slater... Please.

SLATER

Let's keep trying. For me.

She resigns to his touch. Focusing on his face, clear, tan, carved angelically. He's undeniably beautiful. And he wants her. So why is this so difficult?

EXT. DAKIN RESIDENCE – DAY

Slater exits the house, lighting a cigarette and sucking enthusiastically. The yellows of his fingertips massage the paper as he exhales in sweet ecstasy.

INT. JED'S BEDROOM – DAY

Jed watches Slater tuck his briefcase into the passenger's seat before backing out.

Jed dials the number on Albert Whitman's business card and starts flipping through the yellow folder confiscated from Slater's office.

INTERCUT BETWEEN:

INT. SLATER'S BMW – DRIVING – DAY

Slater WHISTLES along to the radio, his smoldering cigarette bobbing between two fingers.

INT. WHITMAN'S OFFICE – DAY

A sleek marketing office. A decanter of scotch beside a RINGING telephone.

Mr. Whitman's wrinkled hand bejewelled in silver bands, picks up the phone.

WHITMAN

Albert Whitman's office.

JED

Hi Albert. It's Jed Dakin here. We met at my sister's anniversary party.

WHITMAN

Jed! I was wondering when I'd hear from you.

JED

I just needed some time to get my thoughts together.
This a good time?

WHITMAN

Perfect. We'll be having a pitch meeting later this morning. You're first out the gate.

JED

Okay, so... For Gillett razors...

Jed pulls a document out of the yellow folder.

JED (CONT'D)

I was thinking we'd have two cowboys talking in a bar. One's telling this story about being chased out of town, dodging bullets as they fire past him.

Slater parks his car and pops open his briefcase. He skims through the files for his folder, first casually and then with an air of panic.

JED (CONT'D)

He asks his buddy, "Have you ever been that close". The other cowboy takes the guy's hand and rubs it across his cheek. The campaign is called "The closest shave."

WHITMAN

Jed Dakin, you are a visionary.

Whitman notices Slater standing outside his office, like a distraught school boy.

WHITMAN(CONT'D)

Come in Wednesday morning.

JED

I'll be there.

END INTERCUT.

INT. JED'S BEDROOM – DAY

Jed hangs up the phone, smirking triumphantly.

Jed hops out of bed and pulls the mattress up - empty. Their stomach knots.

INT. LIVING ROOM – DAY

Theodora is perched in her wheelchair, a book open in her hands, although her eyes are focused on Jed as they hurry down the stairs.

THEODORA

Everything alright?

JED

Where's Mom? I need to talk to her.

THEODORA

Are you looking for something? I might be able to help.

Jed turns to Theodora for the first time. The Glock 19 is sitting on her lap. She drops the book and wheels towards Jed.

THEODORA (CONT'D)

FYI, my phone alerts me every time the safe is opened.

JED

It's not what you think, Theo. I need it for protection. There are other guys from the penitentiary that are gonna be released soon--

THEODORA

Bodies are funny, Jed. I could never lie while in your body. Apparently, you can't either.

JED

I'll leave the gun. Just forget I ever took it.

THEODORA

What about the gun you took from Mom and Dad? Am I supposed to forget about that one too?

JED

It was a decade ago. We can't play this blame game forever.

Theodora turns the gun over in her lap.

JED (CONT'D)

Why do you even keep that thing?

THEODORA

You have no one to blame but yourself and yet you still got your freedom.

She slides her hand over the barrel.

THEODORA (CONT'D)

There's only one way for me to get mine.

Jed kneels in front of her, covering her hands with theirs, searching her eyes.

JED

You're talking like we don't have the most amazing ability in the world.

THEODORA

The gun wasn't the only thing I found under your mattress, Jed.

Theodora retrieves a small, delicate set of pearl earrings from her pocket.

THEODORA (CONT'D)

Why'd you take these?

JED

I dunno. Nostalgia, I guess. It was always easier being you. I mean, being in your body.

THEODORA

You don't have to be in my body to be who you are.

They always looked better on you anyway.

Theodora pulls Jed down and fixes the pearls in their ears.

JED

Sometimes I forget you're not Mom.

THEODORA

Not about this.

Theodora lowers her head, suddenly wracked with guilt.

JED (CONT'D)

What's wrong?

THEODORA

Jed I... I called your parole officer about the gun.
He's on his way.

END OF ACT II

ACT III

INT. JED'S BEDROOM – DAY

Jed fixes the collar on their shirt, gels the tips of their hair, adds a spritz of sandalwood cologne. Lastly, Jed adjusts the pearl earrings in their lobes.

While checking themselves out in the mirror, Jed notices a shirtless Han Solo poster reflected behind them.

In a sudden frenzy, Jed quickly starts burying the remnants of their childhood. Justin Bieber merchandise, Lego death star, slippers with bunny ears, and hand sketched Star Wars fan art. All forced into the closet.

Officer Ramsay KNOCKS casually on the open door.

RAMSAY

Spring cleaning?

Jed swings their closet door shut.

JED

I've heard purging is good for the soul.

Officer Ramsay smiles, taking in the bedroom. Jed takes a seat on the bed and pats the space next to them.

JED (CONT'D)

You've come to talk?

RAMSAY

Maybe your bedroom isn't the best venue. Given the circumstances.

INT. DINING ROOM – DAY

Jed leads Ramsay into the dining room. They circle each other and the table, a dance of uncertainty. Unsure how close is too close.

Ramsay notices the wrapped presents laying out on the table.

RAMSAY

Somebody's birthday?

JED

Wedding anniversary, actually.

Ramsay crinkles his nose and touches a red mark on the table cloth.

RAMSAY

Something smell off to you?

JED

Off?

RAMSAY

Raw.

JED

There was a lot of catering staff in here. Who knows how well they cleaned up. We could go to the living room?

RAMSAY

No this is fine. I'll be brief.

In unison they reach for the same chair. Jed retreats first, finding their own.

RAMSAY (CONT'D)

Your sister called me in about a gun. I was perfectly clear when I said firearms are in direct breach of your parole.

INT. LIVING ROOM – DAY

Theodora gently wheels up to the closed dining room door. Resting her hand on the crystal handle, she brings her ear to the wood.

JED (O.S.)

If you're going to arrest me, let's just get it over with.

INT. DINING ROOM – DAY

Ramsay reaches out and takes Jed's hand, squeezing it intimately.

RAMSAY

I didn't report it. But I need you to be honest with me. What's going on?

JED

I told you I have to finish what I started.

RAMSAY

If you're telling me that you're a risk to Slater's life, I have to bring you back in.

JED

I'm telling you that Slater's not the one that needs protecting.

RAMSAY

Well, who is?

JED

Theodora.

There's a SHARP intake of breath and they both glance towards the closed door before dropping their voices.

RAMSAY

If you just tell me what happened. The entire story.
The courts might actually be in your favor.

Jed gets up from their seat and opens the dining room door. Theodora is on the opposite side of the living room, her back to them as she gazes into the embers of the fireplace.

Jed closes the door again.

JED

It's not my story to tell.

INT. ENTRANCE – DAY

Theodora draws back the curtain and watches as Jed walks Officer Ramsay back towards his cruiser. They hug, with melancholy longing, before Ramsay gets in his car and drives away.

An alarm goes off in Theodora's phone.

INT. BATHROOM – DAY

Theodora opens a new pregnancy kit and pulls out the stick.

She takes hold of a railing and heaves herself from the wheelchair to the toilet. Then there's the struggle of getting her pants down. It's enough to break a sweat.

She pees on the stick and sets it in the sink while she bunches her pants up and makes the journey back into her chair. The smallest of actions are epic ordeals and it's obviously wearing on her.

She presses her hands together and gives a soft prayer before looking at the pregnancy stick. Her slack shoulders are clear enough results.

There's a light TAP on the bathroom door.

THEODORA

Occupied.

JED (O.S.)

You okay?

THEODORA

I'm fine. Go away.

JED (O.S.)

You sound like Mom when she was trying to off herself. Don't give me PTSD.

A smile tugs at Theodora and she opens the bathroom door to where Jed loiters.

THEODORA

Let's do it.

INT. LIVING ROOM – DAY

Jed kneels in front of Theodora. They're both giddy with excitement.

THEODORA

It's been ten years of this body.

JED

I know.

THEODORA

None of our other tricks work anymore. What if this one doesn't either?

JED

What if it does and you don't give me my body back?

THEODORA

It'd serve you right.

JED

Listen, Theo, you're the most important person in the world to me. If you want to walk, if you want to be a runner again, you can keep the body. That's all it is to me.

THEODORA

And you'd stay happily married to Slater?

JED

Unlikely.

Jed extends their hand and Theodora rubs the sweat from her palms before accepting it. They lock eyes and their corneas become saturated with liquid that builds until it captures their irises and pupils. A whirlpool of fluid drips down their cheeks in fat tears.

The moment's over and they blink the tears away. Jed's mismatched eyes are now in Theodora's body.

Theodora* collapses within Jed's form.

JED*

Are you okay?

Jed* reaches for her, but is constrained by the wheelchair.

THEODORA*

I'm fine, I just... haven't used legs in a long time. It's...
like learning to walk again.

Theodora* slowly comes to standing, her legs trembling but she's grinning.

THEODORA* (CONT'D)

I'm standing.

JED*

In quite the handsome form, I must say.

THEODORA*

Oh, shut up.

Theodora* twirls and stumbles, relishing in the movement before remembering the body she's bestowed upon her sibling.

THEODORA* (CONT'D)

Are you gonna be okay?

Jed shifts, testing out the wheelchair.

JED*

Are you always this uncomfortable?

THEODORA*

You forget what comfort is after a while.

Theodora prances to the window, looking anxiously outside.

THEODORA* (CONT'D)

Could I...?

JED*

Of course, you're free. Go for a test drive.

THEODORA*

Thanks.

Theodora* has already grabbed a pair of sneakers and is heading out the door.

EXT. DAKIN RESIDENCE – DAY

Theodora* exits the house, fumbling to control the legs that were once so familiar to her. She continues to twist to the left, as she had in her previous body. She fights to straighten her posture and focus on the movement of the feet. She jogs in place for a moment, unable to control the permanent smile radiating off her.

When she finally gets the hang of the legs, she tears off, disappearing down a trail that weaves through the surrounding pine forest.

EXT. FOREST TRAIL – DAY

Theodora* runs, first with control and discipline, and then with deranged freedom. She runs with the complete release that sends blood rushing into the ears and cheeks, her throat raspy with each inhalation.

She LAUGHS as she runs - the body peppered with an endorphin high.

She lets out a HOOT of joy, turns sharply down an adjoining path and crashes straight into Joshua. They're both thrown to the ground upon impact.

Joshua leaps up in terror.

JOSHUA

Jed!

Theodora* clutches her shoulder as she rights herself.

THEODORA*

Jesus Christ. Sorry about that.

JOSHUA

What were you doing? You okay?

THEODORA*

Just jogging. And yeah, fine.

Joshua dusts off his pants.

JOSHUA

I better keep going.

THEODORA*

Are you sure you're okay? You look scared to death.

Joshua shakes his head but keeps his distance.

JOSHUA

Just weary I guess. Sorry about leaving early from your sister's dinner party thing. It's just been so long since I'd seen you. The whole situation wiggled me out, man.

THEODORA*

It's fine.

JOSHUA

You're not mad, are you?

Theodora* shrugs.

THEODORA*

Why would I be mad?

Joshua gazes around the darkened forest, the canopy of trees above them.

JOSHUA

You know I'm not really that close with Slater anymore. I mean... It's not like it was. Not after what went down.

Theodora* looks Joshua over. Does he know something?

THEODORA*

Do you remember? I mean... what went down?

JOSHUA

Of course, it's engrained in my brain. And for him to have told you about it is just sick. It's like I'm stuck in a guilt feedback loop. I wonder if I'm to blame. If I could have stopped it.

THEODORA*

Jed, I mean-- I had a gun, you would have just got yourself shot.

Joshua takes Theodora* by the shoulders.

JOSHUA

Not stopped the shooting, man. Stopped Slater. If he hadn't gotten so drunk, he never would have done that. We know what booze does to the guy.

Theodora* steps back and Joshua releases her.

THEODORA*

Say it.

JOSHUA

What?

THEODORA*

Say what he did. I wanna hear it.

JOSHUA

That's sick, man. You couldn't pay me a million dollars to articulate that shit.

(beat)

I gotta go.

Joshua does a few quick stretches.

JOSHUA (CONT'D)

See you.

THEODORA*

Bye, Joshua.

Joshua quickly jogs away, with Theodora's eyes drilling into his back.

She studies the scrapes and cuts she's now left on Jed's body before turning back towards home.

INT. KITCHEN – DAY

Toast POPS and Jed* pulls the entire toaster off the counter in order to retrieve the meal. Jed* notices the plates in a cupboard above them, stretches to reach what is clearly out of range.

Giving up, Jed* fashions a paper towel into a plate and starts buttering their toast.

SLATER (O.S.)

My flower, I'm home.

Jed's* teeth are set on edge as Slater enters the kitchen, abandoning his briefcase on the island counter to massage the back of Jed's* neck.

SLATER (CONT'D)

What are you doing? Use a plate.

Slater opens a drawer at wheelchair height, showcasing an array of silverware and dishes. Jed snubs it.

JED*

I'm good like this, thanks.

Jed* cringes with every touch of Slater's hands.

SLATER

You wouldn't believe my day. First, I misplaced my pitch documents and then Whitman tells me he's hiring your brother. It's sick what he's doing.

JED*

Providing someone in need with a job?

SLATER

Not what Whitman's doing, what Jed's doing. He's obviously stalking me.

JED*

They're.

(beat)

What reason would *they* have to stalk you?

SLATER

Why would he need a reason? He's a psychopath. Never mind... I don't want to talk about him. I don't want to fight.

Slater circles the wheelchair to stand in front of Jed*. He extends his palm.

SLATER

Test?

JED*

What?

SLATER

The test, let me see it

Jed* doesn't respond. Doesn't know how to. Slater's eyes bore into them.

SLATER (CONT'D)

What's wrong with your eyes?

Jed* swallows hard.

JED*

It's a twin thing. Used to happen all the time,
remember?

SLATER

Just being around him, hey? It can't be healthy. Do
you feel sick?

Jed* slinks away from Slater's touch.

JED*

A little.

The SHRIEK of the front door and Theodora* hurries into the kitchen. She sees Slater
leaning over Jed* and her heart skips a beat.

SLATER

Please, Jed, we need a moment.

THEODORA*

I think you have a flat tire. You might wanna take a
look.

Slater GROANS and heads out of the kitchen. Theodora* rushes to Jed*.

THEODORA* (CONT'D)

We better switch back.

JED*

Please.

INT. LIVING ROOM – NIGHT

Theodora hands Slater the negative pregnancy test. He pockets it before picking her up and
carrying her up the staircase.

MIRROR WITH:

INT. LIVING ROOM – FLASHBACK

ARRO DAKIN (40s), a man who loves his money like he loves his children, carries THEODORA (7) up the staircase. She's asleep in his arms.

They're midway up the stairs when Theodora's eyes POP open and she wrenches herself from Arro's arms, SCREAMING in pain.

She falls down the staircase, the moment she hits the floor she starts rolling frantically.

THEODORA

I'm on fire! I'm on fire!

Arro races down the stairs to his daughter's side, shaking Theodora as she rolls and SCREAMS.

ARRO

Theodora!

Just then the front door opens and CYNTHIA (40s) rushes into the living room with a scorched JED (7) in her arms. He's limp and MOANING in pain.

CYNTHIA

Start the car, Jed caught himself on fire. We need to get him to the hospital.

ARRO

Jesus Christ.

Cynthia nudges Theodora with her foot.

CYNTHIA

What happened to her?

ARRO

She said she was on fire. But I don't understand. She was fine a moment ago.

CYNTHIA

It's a twin thing, just get the car.

Cynthia grabs Theodora by the wrist and helps her to stand while Arro grabs the car keys and heads out.

INT. JED'S BEDROOM – FLASHBACK

Jed (7) has lined up a series of Lego stormtroopers, preparing them for an unseen enemy.

JED

Ready! Aim!

Jed's bedroom door opens and Arro looks in.

ARRO

Stop playing. It's time we go over the books, and what you're going to say to the auditor.

JED

I just need to kill Theodora.

Arro frowns, glancing around the empty room.

JED (CONT'D)

Fire!

Jed makes a series of shooting noises.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY – CONTINUOUS

Arro walks down the hall and carefully opens Theodora's bedroom door, just enough to peek inside.

Jed's shooting noises can no longer be heard and yet--

INT. THEODORA'S BEDROOM – CONTINUOUS

Theodora clutches her chest and twitches as if she's aware of every shot.

She falls to the floor and sticks her tongue out dramatically.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY – CONTINUOUS

Cynthia walks past Arro with a hamper full of laundry.

CYNTHIA

It's a twin thing. They'll either grow out of it or become some sort of scientific phenomenon.

Arro shuts Theodora's door.

ARRO

I'd prefer we keep quiet about this.

INT. LIVING ROOM – FLASHBACK

Jed (7) is devouring a comic book by the fireplace.

Jed peeks out from behind the comic as Theodora (7) marches down the stairs, her arms crossed, her eyes glaring. She's clad in a frilly dress, a pink bow in her hair. Cynthia stands at the top of the steps, equally grim.

CYNTHIA

Theodora Grace Dakin, if you so much as get a single grass stain on that dress--

THEODORA

I DON'T WANT TO GO!

CYNTHIA

It's high tea, not jail, try to be a little thankful that we were invited to this at all.

THEODORA

I HATE YOU.

Theodora races to the window, where water pelts the earth into a delicious mud puddle.

Arro enters the living room, an old feline MEOWING inside a kennel.

ARRO

Say your goodbyes, kids.

Jed doesn't move from the fireplace but Theodora rushes to the cage.

THEODORA

Are you gonna kill him?

ARRO

Felix's teeth are rotten. He's unable to eat. It's
a mercy killing.

(glancing at Jed)

C'mon now, Jed. I'm going to show you how to do
this.

Jed doesn't move, paralyzed with fear.

THEODORA

Can't you show me?

ARRO

It's not something for a girl's eyes.

He sets the cage down.

ARRO (CONT'D)

Say your goodbyes, I'm going to dig a burial hole. Jed,
bring him outside in ten minutes. Don't be a coward.

Arro exits and Theodora notices Jed's pale complexion.

Jed slowly comes to standing before stumbling over to a large, antique vase and
releasing the contents of their stomach.

THEODORA

Are you sick? Want me to get Mom?

JED

No.

Jed wipes their mouth with the back of their hand, tears pricking their eyes.

JED (CONT'D)

I really don't want to do this.

THEODORA

Kill Felix? But it's a mercy killing.

JED

They'll be blood. Maybe a lot of it.

THEODORA

You could open him up and see why his teeth went bad.

JED

I'd rather have tea with the Mayor's wife.

Jed sinks back to their knees and Theodora glances out the window.

THEODORA

Dad's almost done with the hole.

Jed starts SOBBING.

JED

I can't do it. I can't kill him.

Theodora rushes to Jed, gathering their hands in hers.

THEODORA

It'll be okay. Felix will go up to little kitty heaven and maybe we can plant an orange tree on top of his grave. Orange like his fur.

This only makes Jed cry harder and to her surprise, Theodora's eyes start clouding with tears too. Thick and wet, covering the entirety of her eyes.

THEODORA (CONT'D)

I can't see. I'm going blind!

Theodora releases Jed's hands in order to wipe the tears from her eyes.

Jed* stares at Theodora* who stares right back. Their eyes are in new bodies,
and so are their souls.

They slowly look down at themselves, unable to grasp the true significance of this moment.

JED*

Your eyes.

THEODORA*

It's a twin thing, okay?

Theodora* grabs the caged cat and races outside. Experiencing a new freedom for the first time.

JED*

But Dad said it's not for a girl's eyes!

Jed looks down, caught between humiliation and admiration. They finger the choker of pearls around their neck. A smile slowly forms on their lips.

END OF ACT III

ACT IV

EXT. BORDER – DAY

Route 17 along the Alberta – Saskatchewan border is surrounded by grain and canola fields.

Lloydminster can be seen in the distance as a beacon of civility within the desolate countryside.

The canola stalks part and Joshua stumbles out, completely naked, dehydrated and lost.

Relief washes over him as he crawls through the ditch and onto Route 17.

Cupping his nether regions he tries to stop a semi as it barrels past. The driver slows at first, realizes Joshua is naked, and continues past, BLARING his horn.

Desperate yet resolute, Joshua starts his march towards Lloydminster.

INT. LIVING ROOM – DAY

Theodora wears a sleek green dress. Her hair is done up in a tight bun. She checks and rechecks her makeup in a compact.

Jed descends the staircase.

JED

I remember when you hated that stuff. Mom said that no one would ever marry you if you didn't brush your hair and put on your face. That night you stuck silly putty in your hair to spite her.

THEODORA

She had to cut it all off. I remember you crying as she vacuumed my hair up.

JED

I loved your hair.

THEODORA

Well, so do I now. I guess people change.

Theodora puts her compact away, wincing in pain as her left side spasms. Jed looks away.

JED

Why don't you have a stair lift?

THEODORA

We do, it's in the basement... Slater just never got around to installing it.

JED

You could have hired someone.

Theodora doesn't respond and Jed raises a brow.

JED (CONT'D)

Why didn't you hire someone, Theo?

THEODORA

My name's Theodora, not Theo. Okay? Can we not talk about this right now? Slater's gonna be here soon. We have a bit of an anniversary tradition.

Jed raises their hands innocently and stalks away.

JED

Okay, sorry.

Suddenly wrought with guilt, Theodora hurries after them.

EXT. DAKIN RESIDENCE – DAY

It's evening. The sun is slowly setting on the beautiful relic of a home.

Theodora catches up to Jed on the veranda.

THEODORA

After that first time we vowed we'd always protect each other.

Jed doesn't respond. They lean against the banister and watch as the day comes to a close.

THEODORA (CONT'D)

I shouldn't have called your parole officer. But I have Slater to protect now too.

JED

Why would you want to protect a guy that's holding you hostage?

THEODORA

Don't be ridiculous, everything he does for me is out of love.

JED

You and Slater are just like Mom and Dad. Dad controls the books and goes to work, Mom stays home and makes sure she's dolled up for his arrival.

THEODORA

But they loved each other. They were happy.

JED

Mom never looked that happy to me.

INT. POLICE STATION – INTERROGATION ROOM – NIGHT

Rose, looking severe in a police uniform and harsh lighting, sits across from AARON BRIGGS (50s), brewery owner and manager.

ROSE

So why is it that the last thing Michael remembers is being out for drinks with you?

AARON

Look, I already told the other cops everything I know. We went out for drinks every night. It's just what we did. Why would I strip him naked? It doesn't make any sense.

ROSE

No, it doesn't.

AARON

I went home at around ten, when he started hitting on this girl at the bar.

ROSE

Did you get her name?

AARON

No and I'd never seen her there before. She looked out of place.

ROSE

Do you have a wife, Aaron? Anyone who can corroborate your alibi?

AARON

I'm divorced. I live alone.

The door to the interrogation room swings open and OFFICER CODY HARRIS (30s), attractive and work-oriented, comes in.

HARRIS

He's free to go.

AARON

Thank god.

ROSE

What do you mean? I'm not done questioning him.

HARRIS

Doesn't matter, another guy turned up. Same situation, dumped in the same spot. Couldn't have been him.

ROSE

Shit.

Aaron gets up and heads for the door.

HARRIS

The naked guy says he knows you.

ROSE

Who is it?

HARRIS

Joshua Peads.

INT. SLATER'S BMW – DRIVING – NIGHT

Slater drives, Theodora sits passenger. Her wheelchair and the presents from the anniversary dinner bounce around in the back.

She shuts off the RADIO.

THEODORA

I'm scared something's wrong. That it's more than just stress or my paralysis.

SLATER

You think it's me? I've got checked. I showed you the fertility results.

THEODORA

Well maybe it's me. Some women just don't catch... you know?

Slater takes her hand and squeezes it lovingly.

SLATER

Don't give up yet. Go to a gyno, get an ultrasound or something.

THEODORA

I've had ultra sounds.

SLATER

Listen, my flower, I'll go to the high mountains of Portugal and enact a fertility ritual if that's what it takes. We're having a baby.

He parks the car. They're outside Minster's diner.

INT. DAKIN RESIDENCE - BASEMENT – NIGHT

Jed descends the concrete steps through a narrow passage into the unfinished basement.

Goosebumps prickle on their arms, the air here is musky and damp, the lighting dim and shadowy.

There are some beanbag chairs, worn couch cushions and a mini fridge crowded in a corner next to a long-abandoned flat screen TV.

There's a small, faded blood stain on one couch cushion. Jed's heart POUNDS while passing by the intimate setup.

Jed finds the boxed stairlift next to the boiler. They quickly collect it and hurry back upstairs.

INT. MINSTER'S DINER – NIGHT

Theodora and Slater sit across from each other in the booths, their wrapped anniversary presents now heaped on the table.

They raise mugs of steaming hot chocolate.

SLATER

To another ten years of love and adoration.

THEODORA

Cheers.

They CLINK mugs and sip.

SLATER

You first.

Theodora takes the largest box, reading the card briefly.

THEODORA

It's from Rose.

She tears back the wrapping paper to reveal a box of new wheelchair tires.

SLATER

What'dya need those for?

THEODORA

They're all terrain. I've been talking about wanting to get back into the bush.

SLATER

This isn't about the police academy again? Is she pushing that on you?

THEODORA

It's just for the trails out back. Don't ruin this. Open something!

Slater grabs a small box and gives it a gentle shake.

SLATER

I think I know what this one is.

He slides open a box of Cuban cigars.

THEODORA

Can always count on Joshua.

SLATER

We'll share one on the ride home.

INT. DAKIN RESIDENCE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Jed finishes installing the chairlift and helps Cynthia into the seat.

JED

Feeling brave?

CYNTHIA

Just ready to die.

JED

Touché.

He hits the start button and the mechanism slowly starts taking Cynthia up the stairs.
Jed smiles.

INT. MINSTER'S DINER - NIGHT

Most of the gifts are unwrapped. Slater reads the label of a silver package. Something is leaking out from within, staining the bottom of the box a sticky brown.

SLATER

This one is apparently just for you.

Theodora takes the box and quickly pulls the wrapping away. She lifts the lid, a pungent odor hitting her.

She slowly sets the lid back onto the box. She CLEARS her suddenly dry throat.

THEODORA

Slater, call the police.

SLATER

What's wrong? What is it?

Slater takes the box, opens the lid and reaches inside. He slowly lifts the severed hand of a newborn baby from within.

ROLL CREDITS.

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