

Out of Body

A Play by Jonathan Emerson Kohler

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A surgical operating room. Above it, upstage, are bleachers as you might see at a baseball game, with a short rail on the downstage edge. These are accessed by a large white door, up center. SUE is seated in the front row of the bleachers. She is dressed in a stunning red dress. At some distance from her is DAVID, who wears surgical scrubs and has a pair of opera glasses with which he watches the action in the operating room below.

In the operating room, a body lies on a gurney. There is the sound of a heart-rate monitor, which will play lightly in the background throughout. Two SURGEONS come in and perform the delicate ballet of gowning themselves with the assistance of a SCRUB NURSE, prepping and draping the patient, and beginning to operate. The surgery continues throughout as the action takes place above. The scrub nurse obscures the action from the audience, so the body can be a mannequin, allowing the insertion of instruments and the piping of blood. This is important.

JOE enters through the white door. He is a large, foul-mouthed man who has lived hard and now is paying the price for it. He is overweight and wearing a beer t-shirt.

JOE

What the fuck is this?

DAVID

Shhhh. They're opening.

JOE

What the fuck. Where the hell am I?

SUE

You're down there.

(points at the body on the table)

JOE

(coming down the bleachers and peering over the rail)

Shit. What am I, dead?

DAVID

Shhhh.

(to the surgeons below)

Come on, come on, get that bovie in there. Christ, kid, you never learn!

SUE

You're not dead. Sit down.

JOE

So I'm dreaming?

(really sees SUE for the first time)

Hot shit! It worked.

SUE

What worked?

JOE

They said I might dream. When I got the anesthesia and all that shit. So I prepared. And here you are.

SUE

You prepared?

JOE

I wanted to be sure that I had, you know, happy dreams. So I got me a pile of, you know, "gentleman's magazines", and when they came to shoot me up with all that shit I thought about it real hard, as it were, and here you are, and here I am (pause). Let's get it on!

(starts to take off his pants)

SUE

Oh, that's charming. Keep your pants on there, Casanova. You're not dreaming.

JOE

Well, I sure as fuck ain't awake, now am I? Cause that's me down there...

(looks over the rail, sees himself being split from stem to stern, pauses in fascination that turns quickly to horror)

Oh shit. Oh shit. Look at that.

DAVID

Yes, well, we're trying.

SUE

Don't mind David. He's a purist.

(JOE is starting to feel a little bit sick)

SUE (Continued)

Here, you should sit down.

JOE

They got me all opened up. You can see my fucking guts. I'm gonna be sick.

DAVID

Those aren't your guts. That's just the subcutaneous fat.

Jesus!

JOE

You'll see the beauty, in time.

DAVID

I don't know about that. But you'll get used to it.

SUE

What's going on?

JOE

You're experiencing an extracorporeal event.

DAVID

A what?

JOE

An out of body experience.

SUE

Like all that lights and tunnel shit?

JOE

Dream on.

DAVID

David's a cynic. But it's like that. Your mind is outside of your body. Obviously.

SUE

(looking at David)

What are you, some kind of doctor?

JOE

Some kind. A cardiothoracic surgeon, actually.

DAVID

In his day.

SUE

And you guys are like some kind of figments of my imagination. Or like some part of my psyche and my relationship with my parents, and you're going to tell me all these things I already know about my life, but I'm afraid to say, and then I'll wake up and be at peace and shit?

JOE

No.

SUE

God forbid! I assure you that your mind would never be able to create me. Sue, perhaps.

DAVID

SUE

We're real.

JOE

Then what the fuck are you doing here?

SUE

Passing the time.

DAVID

Trying to.

SUE

It's more fun here than watching myself. I go around to all the rooms, see what's going on. Keeps my mind off of things.

JOE

Damn! How long have you been here?

SUE

A long time. Almost six months.

JOE

Shit! What kind of operation are you getting?

SUE

The operation's over. It's just that I've been having a little trouble waking up.

DAVID

Sue's a vegetable.

SUE

David's a charmer.

DAVID

She suffered a massive intraoperative cerebral embolism and her dumb-ass husband refuses to let them turn the machine off and donate her organs. It's a damn shame...her heart's in excellent condition, and her liver looked great.

SUE

Shut up, will you, Dr. Death.

JOE

(to DAVID)

What's your story, doc?

SUE

David's been a bad, bad boy.

JOE

What's that mean?

DAVID

Sue, you don't need to tell this guy everything about us.
He's going to be gone in a couple hours.

(looks down at the surgery)

Four, tops.

SUE

David's in purgatory. It makes him testy.

JOE

No way! Saving lives wasn't enough to get you into through
the pearly gates, eh doc? I always knew doctors were all a
bunch of dirty bastards underneath it all, looking at people
naked all the time, you know they like it.

DAVID

Fucking NASCAR dads.

(goes back to watching the surgery)

SUE

He was late to his tee time. Isn't that right, David?

DAVID

That's how she likes to tell it. Anyone could have done it.
Roger Morgenstern left three lap sponges and a malleable
retractor in a patient three days before he kicked it, and I
don't see him around here.

SUE

But you meant it.

DAVID

You try doing this day in and day out. You get tired, you
get burned out...

SUE

(glib)

You write "I'd rather be golfing." On your patients abdomen.
With a scalpel.

JOE

That was you?! No way! I saw that on the news! But
you're...

DAVID

Dead? Yes. The only really dead person here. The side
airbags of the Lexus aren't all they'd have you believe,
unfortunately. Now I'm stuck here for eternity, it seems, to
watch over my peers and learn my lesson. It's not so bad,
though. If only for those times when they get a lawyer in
here and go light on the gas.

(smiles)

(JOE suddenly clutches at his chest and gasps in pain. In the background, the heart rate monitor sounds become irregular)

JOE

Ah! My chest!

SUE

(going to JOE)

Joe? Breathe, honey. Just breathe. This happens sometimes.

(SUE and DAVID share a look. To DAVID:)

What's going on?

DAVID

(watching the operating room intently. The surgeons have stopped operating, and are looking at one another.)

Ectopic beats. They're holding. Just breathe easy, friend. It'll settle down.

JOE

(gasping for breath)

My heart. It's not good. They told me this operation could be risky. Oh my god, I can't breathe. Goddamn.

DAVID

Sometimes this happens. You don't feel the incisions, but beyond that you can still feel your body. Probably just a little bit of angina. Don't worry, though. These guys are good. I trained them myself. A few extra pounds of bacon in your coronaries won't be a problem for them.

JOE

But the pain...my god, I can't fucking breathe.

SUE

You're doing fine.

DAVID

There. They're giving you some nitroglycerin. That should help.

(He moves to JOE, and watches him with clinical interest, while taking his pulse)

DAVID (Continued)

Are you feeling any better?

JOE

A little. Thanks. God, I'm thirsty.

SUE

Just rest easy. There's no eating or drinking in the spirit world, unfortunately.

DAVID

It's the greatest drawback of this place. This would a lot more fun with an open bar.

JOE

(looking over the balcony, still winded but feeling better)

God. Look at that. They've split me wide open. Is that my heart there?

SUE

No dear. That's the left lobe of your liver.

DAVID

I've taught her well.

JOE

God, what's all that stuff writhing around in there? That can't be right!

DAVID

Those are your intestines. That's perfectly normal. They look good. See, look, now they're pushing them over to find the aneurysm.

JOE

That big balloon thing?

DAVID

Exactly. They'll clamp above and below it, then open it up and put in the graft.

(to the surgeons)

There you go. Gentle, boys. Just like in the real hospitals.

(Pause. then to JOE and SUE)

Joke.

(watching closely. The senior surgeons is distracted, talking to the scrub nurse)

There you go. All together now. No, Bob, wait for your attending. Higher. Get around it right up at the renals. Higher! Higher! Wait! Jesus Gary, watch what your kid is doing there.

(The junior surgeon looks to his boss, who is still distracted. Then he shrugs and clamps down tight. Blood spurts high into the air. The other surgeon turns back quickly, and there is a flurry of motion.)

(Still, the blood spurts up. JOE
moans and collapses.)

SUE

Oh my god.

DAVID

Damn resident just clamped straight into the aneurysm wall
while the Gary wasn't looking. They've lost proximal
control. Jesus, what a mess.

(looking at JOE, then at SUE)

He's not going to do well.

(The sound of the heart rate
monitor increases, and becomes more
irregular. The surgeons get
control of the bleeding.)

DAVID (Continued)

They've got control of the bleeding now. Let's see if he
comes around.

(The heart rate becomes more
irregular. SUE strokes JOE'
forehead.)

Yeah, I was afraid that might happen. Sucks to be him. Of
course, he gets out.

SUE

You saw his wife and kids in the waiting room?

DAVID

Yeah.

(pause)

He could still pull it out. They're giving him a lot of
fluids.

(JOE moans and stirs. His speech
is a little bit slurred. He
doesn't move his body, which Sue is
supporting)

JOE

What happened? I can't move my legs.

SUE

There was a little accident. You lost some blood.

DAVID

He's had a stroke, probably.

(to JOE, loudly)

You've had a stroke, probably.

JOE

I can still fucking hear.

DAVID

Oh. I'm sorry. If you get the chance, be sure to sue the bastards.

SUE

They've stopped the bleeding. They're trying to get you fixed up.

(JOE clutches at his chest and groans. The surgeons are using large instruments to open the body's chest.)

JOE

I want to see.

DAVID

You don't want to watch this. They're cracking your chest.

JOE

It's my life. This is an important part of it. Help me fucking see. Please.

(SUE and DAVID help JOE to look over the rail at the table below.)

JOE (Continued)

Is that my heart?

DAVID

Yes.

JOE

It's beautiful.

(The heart monitor gives a single long tone -- JOE's heart has stopped. The surgeons put paddles into the chest and shock the heart. JOE's body shakes.)

It's beautiful. Tell my wife.

DAVID

Sorry, friend. I'm dead.

JOE

(to SUE)

Tell her?

SUE

Honey, I'll try. I promise I'll try.

JOE
It's beautiful.

(Another shock)
What happens now?

SUE
You'll fade away. After that, we don't really know.

JOE
Stay with me.

SUE
I'll stay.

JOE
It's beautiful.

DAVID
Yes, it is.

(JOE goes limp. There is another shock. This time JOE does not react. They shock again. Nothing. The heart monitor continues it's steady monotone. DAVID and SUE watch him for a while.)

DAVID (Continued)
Well.

(pause)
There's a craniotomy starting in room seven. Want to join me?

SUE
I'll be along. When it's done here.

(DAVID exits through the center door. SUE sits stroking JOE's hair as the body below is covered in a white drape. The cast below exits, leaving the body in bright white light. Then all fades to black.)