

Art in the Mind

By

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2024

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Cast of Characters

<u>NARRATOR:</u>	Tall-ish, wearing all grey
<u>BODY:</u>	Shorter, wearing all beige
<u>BLIGHTED FIGURE 1:</u>	Wears draping black clothes (sort of like a veil)
<u>ASSAILANT:</u>	Wearing all red
<u>BLIGHTED FIGURE 2:</u>	See Blighted Figure 1
<u>Other Blighted Figures:</u>	About 5 or 6 people, also wear draping black clothing

Scene 1

Lights up. The walls are covered in sheets of white paper and canvases. And there are cans of paint propped up against them. There are also toys scattered around the stage maybe (and an empty crate). Narrator stands upstage wearing all grey. Downstage, Body is playing with a toy train on the floor wearing all beige. The Narrator speaks.

NARRATOR

The date is February 7th 2020. I have a great job working at a library, playing with and caring for children after the scheduled story-times. I'm also taking a full semester at college with classes on queer theater and the study of religious fundamentalism that I am really excited to be in. By all accounts, things are going great. For the first time in years, I finally feel like something close to a functional, accomplished adult who knows what they want to do with their life.

Suddenly, Assailant enters, wearing all red. They take long strides towards Body who is still playing on the floor, oblivious to their arrival. Assailant stares at them, slowly circling them like an animal sizing up their prey. Narrator turns to acknowledge the scene, watching Assailant as it completes its circle, then stops. Then, Assailant points a finger gun at the head of Body.

NARRATOR

This is also the day where all of that ends, because it's the day that I am shot.

Assailant shoots their finger gun. The body freezes, their face is clearly strained in discomfort. Slowly, they stand and let go of the toy train. They cross their arms in front of themselves. They slowly start to pace in circles around the stage, but Assailant is always one step behind them.

NARRATOR

It's not a literal bullet that hits me, but instead a thought. Something hideous and vile, something involving a child, one of the children I work with, being put in a position only a wretched human being could ever conceive of. The repulsion and fear tears

through me like skin being peeled back in layers, until there is nothing but sinew and blood. I have no idea what to do, so instead of saying any thing about it, I quietly finish my shift. I go through the motions of pretending to be okay. Eat dinner, go home, sleep.

Body goes to the crate and starts walking around, picking up toys. But Assailant always follows, watching them and curiously tilting its head every now and then. After picking up all the toys it stands still, but Assailant continues to circle them.

NARRATOR

When I do tell someone I trust about it, they reassure me, saying that it's probably an overactive mind. A single, fleeting thought that won't bother me come tomorrow. I want to believe that they are right, I've had intrusive thoughts before and they've dissipated with time, why should this be any different?

Body dumps all the collected toys back onto the floor. Assailant kicks a few of the toys around with their foot. Body starts trying to pick up all the toys all over again, but this time, as Assailant follows them, they take multiple opportunities to place their foot on Body's back, as if appearing to start standing on them. Each time they do this, they also pull out and shoot the finger gun again and again.

NARRATOR

But somehow it doesn't go away. The thought and its discomfort not only stick around, they actively worsen as time goes on. Playing with or talking to children at all becomes horrifying, - let alone just being around them, because what if these horrible thoughts are actually desires? What if you have secretly been hurting or abusing children this entire time without even realizing? What if the reason you enjoy your job at all is just because it helps you revel in your otherwise secrete and sick desires towards them? It turns my stomach and soon enough-

One more time Body tries to pick up the remaining toys, but Assailant puts a foot on their back and shoots them again. This time, Body crumples, dropping the crate as it covers its face and weeps in despair.

NARRATOR

It's just too much. I have to quit working there soon after, but doing that doesn't make the thoughts go away. Nothing gets better, so the opposite follows. I try going to classes, to focus on something that isn't the horror in my head, but I struggle to get through even a single class. The words of my teachers are flimsy distractions. Lectures about gender and the craft of writing and fundamentalist religion all blur together, none of them really meaning anything at all when the only thing my mind jumps back to are the horrors of what it might be like to abuse a child. It becomes hard to even sit through one period without feeling as though I'm some malicious person hiding amongst these decent, moral people. The thoughts are omnipresent, there is nothing to enjoy or find comfort in while they continue to grow louder and louder in my head. It doesn't take too much longer for me to shut down completely, to drop everyone and everything.

Assailant, still with a foot on the Body's back, continues to fire shots in the Body. During this, Body looks over the mess of toys on the floor and takes a doll from the mess, holding it close. Blackout.

Scene 2

Lights up. Body, still carrying around the doll, paces the length of the stage. Assailant appears, ushering several blighted figures onto stage all dressed in drape-y black clothes/scarfs . They follow Assailant, but also sort of dance around and do their own little tasks as well. Some kick the toys off the stage or throw them at each other, others follow Assailant doggedly and study their next move, there's a variation of direction here.

NARRATOR

Just a month after I've left everything the Corona pandemic sweeps the world. Both my parents have to work entirely from home and my grandmother comes to live with us temporarily. We wear masks constantly, we barely touch each other, it is punishingly quiet. Or at least, it is everywhere save from my own head. Most of the time I spend my days pacing around the house, or sitting completely still in little corners, trying to distract myself. I feel anxious and empty if I stand alone too long without holding something,

and the thoughts tell me that that is a sign of something perverse.

Blighted Figure 1 yanks at the doll in Body's arms. It pulls it away and runs off and dances with it a little. When Body tries to follow, one of the Blighted Figures 2 steps in, blocking the way in front of them continuously. For a moment Assailant leaves the stage and there is a sequence between the Body and the Blighted Figures, passing the doll around and taunting Body. Narrator, watching as this goes on, makes a small effort to reach out and touch Body's shoulder as a means to comfort them, but they are too far apart from one another for there to be any contact. After a second Narrator pulls back.

NARRATOR

The thoughts are constant, never-ending accusations and questions screamed in an infinite loop. What if you are secretly a monster? Have this vile image of an act! Have another! Do they arouse you? Maybe secretly? Do you want to cause this abuse to children? How about your pets? Do you know how you want to abuse them? How can you live with yourself? How can you possibly go on living if this is true?

Assailant returns to the stage with a hammer and several tall, long nails. It grabs Body by the hair closest to the head and Body squirms trying to free itself, but to no avail. Assailant then reels back and strikes Body's head with the hammer. The Blighted Figures all laugh, kind've a tittering sound. Body falls onto one of it's knees, the other leg still trying to stand. No use, Assailant strikes again, Body is on its knees. Assailant strikes continuously, till Body is on its hands and knees.

NARRATOR

The thoughts pound against the inside of my head. They're unending and volatile and totally inescapable. They never stop plaguing me, insisting I must be something abhorrent. It breaks me down to the point that something as mindless as scrolling through posts online becomes an effort, a struggle, a tireless dirge of concentration. But it's not the only thing that makes life damned near unbearable.

Blighted Figures in black take off their flowing

scarves/outfit pieces and drape them over the kneeling Body as though they are dressing a table.

NARRATOR

The depressive fog is so heavy and thick that it pushes like a physical weight against me. It clouds everything, all sensations, all experiences in a heavy coat of despair.

Body reaches out a hand in front of its face, but Blighted Figure 1 also gets down and places its hand onto the Body's face. It doesn't properly cover the Body's eyes, as the Body can still sort of see through the slats between their fingers, but this doesn't really matter. Assailant continues to hold Body by its hair, still hammering down frequently.

NARRATOR

There are points where I try to remember what my body looks like, times I hold out my hands in front of me to be sure that they are still there, but the whole gesture feels fake. Nothing feels solid or standard or real. There's only the thoughts, swirling and slamming around, insisting they know me better than I know myself. Everything I thought I knew is wrong. 'You are a danger if you are real deal or even if you aren't. You'll hurt children and animals and any one vulnerable. There is nothing inside you but the lust to abuse, the lust to rape. In all your years this is secretly what you have wanted all along. You are stuck like this, stuck with your mind, and no one will ever understand it as a hell besides you. You are worse than doomed, worse than damned, you are incurably destroyed. People like you are better off sediment at the bottom of a river. No one wants to share the world with someone like you.'

The Blighted Figures dance in a circle around Body as it finally huddles up, bringing their knees to their chest and burying its head within them. Assailant continues to hammer down on Body repeatedly. The Blighted Figures laugh. This goes on for a bit, there are looping whispers in the background noise along with the sound of a hammer hitting metal over and over again and yet more tittering laughter. This moment lasts for a little longer without dialog over it.

NARRATOR

It is only by the second week of March, 2020, that I decide that if this hell never ends and the thoughts are all true, the most humane thing for me would be to die.

Blackout.

Scene 3

Lighting for the stage goes down. Assailant and the Blighted Figures make their way off the stage and discard the objects they were using, leaving just Body and Narrator.

NARRATOR

My parents tell me that being committed right now is a terrible idea. Hospitals are overflowing, people are dying en mass, if they even have to space to admit me, the only things I'll see are their eyes. They know how badly I'm hurting and want desperately to help, but the timing for this breakdown could not have been worse if I tried. Still, we search together for a psychiatrist who can prescribe me anything that will make this monster inside me cease. Eventually there is someone who is willing to take patients and they put me on Luvox. I hope that this is a sign that my nightmare might be over. I'm wrong.

At this point, the Body gets up. It is swaying on its feet as it moves. It keeps the black scarfs that it has been shrouded in on. For a moment Body looks to acknowledge the audience, but then it turns around again looking for the previously discarded doll. When they find it they pick it up by one leg.

BODY

25 milligrams to 50 milligrams to 100 milligrams to 125 milligrams to 150 milligrams and they're all the same.

The Body lifts the doll above itself, still only held by one leg.

NARRATOR

The dosages are a useless blur of nothing. I still in silence for hours.

BODY

They move through me uselessly, do nothing to ward

off the symptoms, nothing to alleviate the pain.

Body goes to the canvases backstage while still holding onto the doll. Body begins to paint with one of the brushes the shapes of monsters, whether they appear stereotypical or not can depend on the actor's interpretation. The paint should be some variation of black or gray. The monsters are painted to be much larger than Body, towering over them and painted in broad strokes.

NARRATOR

I keep thinking that maybe adding more will help this time around.

BODY

I gain weight and bloat with water constantly. My skin expands to make room for the fat, thick ribbing lines along my stomach and thighs.

NARRATOR

My head still throbs with thoughts, with ceaseless waking hours of discomfort.

Body stops painting and sets the brush aside, and while still holding the doll by the foot, takes one of the unopened paint cans and removes the lid. Body sticks their whole hand inside the paint can, then pulls it out after a few minutes.

BODY

I feel myself sinking into endless dread, dense and heavy. It is all encompassing, enveloping, ever present and inescapable. Everything is coated in a thick layer of it, weighted on top of muscle and bone and the very will to live itself.

Body observes their dipped hand, watching the way that the paint drips down their forearm. Suddenly Body locks eyes with Narrator and holds out their painted arm to them. Narrator steps back, Body steps forward. Narrator breaks out into a run and Body follows.

BODY

(Shouting)

What are you going to do? Ignore it? Hide? Do you think you can squint your eyes and turn away and pretend I'm not here? That I'm not being eaten alive?

How long do you think you can run away from the monster? How fast do you think you are now? Your back aches, your head throbs, and there's no escape. Why don't you face me? What are you doing to alleviate my pain? The drugs don't work, the therapy doesn't work! Tell me why I shouldn't just die already why don't you!

Narrator stops for a moment and Body is able to lay a hand on their heart. Narrator flinches as Body drags their handprint down Narrator's body, making full eye contact with them.

BODY

Pathetic.

(pauses)

You know what?

Body turns their attention back to the doll and takes it to the open paint can. Body holds the doll by the foot over the paint can and sways it back and forth. Body turns again to Narrator who is trying to look stoic, but quietly mouths the word 'don't'. Body dunks the doll in the paint can thoroughly. When pulled out the doll should have very little (if any) surface area not covered by paint. As the doll drips onto the floor, Body regards it with some kind of disgust. Narrator looks away sadly and puts a hand onto their heart. After a small pause, the body should wrap the doll in the discarded fabric that it has been draped in and swaddle it.

NARRATOR

The days start to blend into one another, and for a long time I am stuck like this. For several years all I feel is despair, all I am is fearful. During the pandemic it is hard to get any therapy, so I suffer on my own, constantly trying to find the words to explain what I feel, writing nonstop about the dread and the terror of potentially hurting an innocent animal or child, even if only in my own mind.

Body should pick up the discarded hammer and nails and walk to the back of the stage where the canvases are, still holding the doll. Narrator turns their attention back onto Body.

NARRATOR

With all this, constantly, day after day after day

after ceaseless day, the state I'm left in is -

This line is cut off by the body nailing the doll upside-down onto the canvas. It's body wrapped in the cloths while its one exposed leg continues to drip paint. Both Narrator and Body watch as the paint from the doll drips out over the canvas in long streaks.

BODY

(to Narrator)

So? Can you acknowledge it? Can you even entertain the idea?

Narrator takes slow and cautious steps towards the doll, holding their hand to their heart again. Narrator tries to reach out to the doll, but at the very last second, decides they cannot and pulls away. Body sighs.

BODY

You aren't going to be able to help me like this you know.

At this point Body walks off stage. Narrator stares after them, still holding their heart. After a second they turn back to the audience.

NARRATOR

But now, I want to talk about art for a moment.

Blackout.

Scene 4

Lights up. Narrator goes backstage and takes the brush and paint can that the Body coated the doll in.

NARRATOR

In order to talk about the way art would eventually save me, I have to explain how I came to understand it in full.

During this monologue Narrator slowly uses the discarded brush to paint lines around the dripping doll, but carefully avoids ever actually touching it. Think squiggles around the cocoon.

NARRATOR

Back in my early semesters of college, way before this illness consumed me, I took two classes that taught me greatly. These were the History of Modern Art and Art and Philosophy. The two of them complemented and spoke to one another through shared insight. From the both of them, there are two particular lessons that I remembered distinctly.

At this point Narrator stops painting around the doll and tries to reach out to it again, but cannot. Narrator sighs, then moves to another canvas and paints the image of a pipe. They can also draw smoke coming out of it if they like.

NARRATOR

The first thing, from Modern Art History, was about this painting, The Treachery of Images by Rene Magritte, and the way it talked about subject and perception.

They touch the image of the pipe with one hand and their heart with the other.

NARRATOR

Ultimately, while this image *appears* to be a pipe, because it is a painting and not an actual physical object, the Pipe in the Treachery of Images is not actually a pipe, but the representation of one. And the representation of something being portrayed in art must be held to a different moral standard than it's real counterpart. If I destroy this image, have a damaged an object? Or have I simply changed the image you already had in your head?

Narrator then paints something violent. This can be anything within the confines of the individual actor's comfort level, but it has to be some kind of violent act involving a clear "victim" subject.

NARRATOR

The second thing I learned about, this time in Art and Philosophy, was something relating to Aristotle's ideas on how people interoperate mimetic objects in a moral sense, and can, in this case, loosely be dubbed "The Paradox of Tragedy".

Narrator looks towards the paint cans and hesitates for a moment. They look to their brush, but decide to gently set it aside.

Narrator then approaches the paint can, and very tentatively dips one finger into the open can.

They bring it out and flex it gently in the light, examining with caution before turning back to the violent image.

NARRATOR

This is the representation of -describes the violent act they've painted-. If you saw this happen, with real people (or animals) in front of you on the street, such a thing would likely traumatize you. That is one dimension of existence that has no separation between you and the act of violence.

With their finger Narrator draws one square around the violent act image.

NARRATOR

Take that and abstract it out by another dimension, say instead of seeing this happen in front of you, you happened to see a video of this occurring, again with real subjects. This would create one degree of separation between you and the act, and while the damage of this act would still be tangible and real, in your mind that degree of separation fundamentally transforms the way you perceive this moment.

Narrator draws a larger square around the first square and the violent act image.

NARRATOR

Abstract this act again, this time by taking any real damage out of it and making it a scene with two actors, and you've got two dimensions of separation. The first being the separation from the act as a whole, and the second being the separation from tangible reality. Our last abstraction can come from drawing two figures doing-(describe the act portrayed on the back canvases).

Narrator stares at their finger again. Again they flex it, but this time they reach out to the doll and touch it with this one painted tinted finger. They pull away very quickly and examines their finger, looking for damage, but find none. Very carefully, Narrator reaches out their hand to the doll and starts trying to wipe away some of the paint. It doesn't work and their hand comes back more dirty. For a moment they look panicked, but after a moment they

again they tentatively dip their finger into the paint can and draw a final square around both previous squares and the violent image.

NARRATOR

Here there are three separations, one between the act, one between the tangible reality, and one between the subjects represented. Nothing of it is real, it has been abstracted out between so many dimensions that it's important to understand that the context that this image is treated with has to be vastly morally different from the tangible act itself.

Suddenly some of the Blighted Figures reappear on stage. They circle around the Narrator.

NARRATOR

But what's the point of all this? Why even bring it up? Why even explain any of this in the first place?

The Blighted Figures start chanting lowly the word 'predator' and Assailant emerges again, but this time, the Blighted Figures circle them, still chanting. Assailant walks to the middle of the stage and stares at the Narrator while the Blighted Figures continue to chant 'predator'.

NARRATOR

Something that fed my fears constantly was the fact that I liked art with characters who were minors and animals being intimate, sometimes even sexually, with adult characters. There were so many shows, books, movies, and games that I knew and loved that touched upon the subject so very openly. Sometimes as a way to talk about sexual abuse directly, sometimes in provocative ways to eroticize a very blatant taboo, but always always with drawn, fictional characters.

The chanting gets a little more vague here, still the word predator is present but inter-dispersed are other things like rapist and sadist.

NARRATOR

The rational, reasonable part of my brain that understood fiction as fiction, a place for taboo to be explored would not work, would not turn on, and so I was subject to not only to the hell in my head, but the hell that has brewed online as well.

Narrator leaves stage. Blackout.

Scene 5

Lights up. Narrator is not onstage, but instead has their voice projected over some kind of speaker. Blighted Figure 1 stands apart from the larger group and directs themself to the Assailant.

NARRATOR

(O.S.)

These arguments started springing up long before I was diagnosed. People who were in fandom or fan run spaces online would hear alarming talking points and rush in to explain why this rhetoric was not only wrong, but dangerous to use.

BLIGHTED FIGURE 1

It doesn't matter what's fictional or not, sexualizing a child in any way, fictional or not, makes you a pedophile.

ASSAILANT

That doesn't make sense, fictional characters aren't real people!

Blighted Figure 2 steps out.

BLIGHTED FIGURE 2

Don't you know that fiction affects reality? If you like anything sexualizing minors in any way in fiction you will eventually sexualize real kids too!

ASSAILANT

That's ridiculous, you wouldn't hold that same standard for any other kind of media! You wouldn't say 'you'll become a serial killer if you watch too much horror'!

BLIGHTED FIGURE 1

Horror and sex are different things! It's okay with violence but not sexual violence!

NARRATOR

(O.S.)

Not so long ago, conversations like this were not even conceptual. Fandom was a place where everyone had equal ground, where the taboo thrived, where sexuality was explored at its most deviant.

BLIGHTED FIGURE 2

Only someone who wants to commit sexual violence in real life would ever seek it out in stories.

BLIGHTED FIGURE 1

You're a dangerous person! You should be in therapy or prison! Don't interact with fan spaces!

ASSAILANT

I am an artist. Whether you like it or not art is allowed to be transgressive. That's freedom of expression!

BLIGHTED FIGURE 1

You're freedom shouldn't come at the cost of the safety of minors, who might internalize your disgusting work and think that it's normal for adults to sexualize real children.

ASSAILANT

Who's doing that?

BLIGHTED FIGURE 2

It's been proven!

ASSAILANT

By who? Where?

NARRATOR

(O.S.)

So many of these arguments are fueled by repulsion, by an instinct towards disgust and nothing further. Any specifics about what harm is being done is obscured, or altogether avoided. Or sometimes-

BLIGHTED FIGURE 2

I was groomed using stories of minors and adults in relationships! What more evidence do you need?

ASSAILANT

What a predator uses isn't the point! They can use anything to groom someone! The thing used is totally arbitrary. Why are you blaming art for the actions of a predatory person?

Blighted Figures all gather round Assailant, there's more 'predator' chanting. Assailant looks at each of them briefly, surmising their basic appearance.

NARRATOR

(O.S.)

This rhetoric is everywhere on the internet right now, but it conveniently became more utilized and widespread at the start of 2020. As a result, it fed deeply into my OCD at the time. I would internalize all these ideas about how I must've been secretly attracted to animals and children for even reading any or watching any stories like the ones that were most consistently attacked online. It took so much time and therapy to unlearn this toxic, painful mindset. It took going back to the lessons I had learned in Art History and Philosophy to even *believe* that my therapists weren't lying to me when they said it was okay to like these stories or have fantasies about them.

ASSAILANT

You know, there was a time where all of this would feed me, make me grow and thrive and under the weight of repression, but I can't lie. I'm tired of this, tired of feeding off the same fear that I can so easily dissect. Hearing the same arguments over and over ad nauseum with no deviation. You're all exhausting.

BLIGHTED FIGURE 1

Being like this makes you sick you know! There's something deeply wrong with you!

ASSAILANT

No shit, that's what the play is about. But it doesn't matter, my point is that you're boring. And if you're going to forever haunt us with this, then why shouldn't I be able to examine it? Why shouldn't I be able to understand my tormentors? The ceaseless questioning doesn't go away, but the questions change, and the questions have answers. Maybe not determinate ones, but answers all the same. So here's my answer to the question you haven't asked. 'Why can't you just kill me?', because I'm not just some ephemeral whim. I exist at the root of all things, like a knot that can never be unraveled. You can't kill that, and you won't, and when your rhetoric wears thin and falls away years from now I will still be here. Until then, best do yourself a favor and change your heart, or die like this. See if I care.

The Blighted Figures all turn to one another, exchanging what would be nervous looks. They try chanting 'predator' again, but it's much more

subdued now. Assailant walks out of the circle of Blighted Figures and for once, they don't follow them diligently. Slowly, one by one the Blighted Figures start leaving the stage and Assailant is left by themselves. Assailant goes back to the canvases and paint and dunks their entire arm up to their forearm into the paint. Narrator comes back on stage into the foreground, but this time both of their hands are covered in black paint.

NARRATOR

I feel for the people like me who are still trapped in this mindset, and I imagine many of the people perpetuating this toxic line of thought are probably suffering too. It doesn't make it okay for them to do of course, but it makes their struggle a little more understandable. And this is only one of the hurdles that something like OCD can throw at you, I still haven't told you about the hardest step.

Blackout.

Scene 6

Lights up. Assailant spreads a paint covered hand across the canvases in a wide, horizontal stroke, think rainbow arch. Dips their hand in paint again and starts painting abstracted shapes with their hand underneath said arch. These shapes should be decided on by the actor and should reflect their inner personal abstractions of the feelings being discussed. The Narrator watches as Assailant paints and speaks lowly, facing away from the audience.

ASSAILANT

It can't be dealt with, not ever. It's insufferable.

NARRATOR

The biggest, most frightening, most insurmountable thing I ever had to address with my OCD was the raw, naked truth of paraphilia. It's a little bit difficult to explain, but the condensed version of this subject is that paraphilias are abnormal sexual desires. They can be mundane like your average kinks, but more often than not they are associated with three major fixations: pedophilia, zoophilia, and necrophilia.

Assailant can choose to make rough caricatures

of these subjects if they choose to, but it's not strictly necessary.

NARRATOR

These are sexual desires that are pretty objectively taboo, and I don't think I have to explain why in such great detail. There's some interesting historical precedent behind all of them, like how in the Victorian era it was an open secret that many people were somewhat drawn to fantasies of necrosis, but I don't want to diverge too far here.

Assailant stops painting and takes a moment to imitate a person dying. They cross their arms across their chest and seem to fall back, but just before they fall Body comes back on stage and catches them, like a trust fall. Body is now covered in paint all over their clothes and hands and face. Assailant gets up, looks the Body over, and then circles them. Body is clearly uncomfortable with this, but remains still. After a tense moment between them Assailant goes back to their painting again. Body tentatively goes to the opposite end of the canvases and begins painting the shape of their own face onto the canvas with a brush.

NARRATOR

I was so afraid of the possibility that I could have two of those three major attractions, but I was especially scared of being a pedophile. Not just because I loved working with children, but because the idea of being a pedophile was one that I thought would be impossible to live with.

BODY

It would've been impossible to endure. The physical strain was already too much.

ASSAILANT

If I found tomorrow that it was definitely true I would wake up, call my mother and ask if she could bring me home a meal and when she got home I would tell her that if I couldn't be fixed that I wanted to end my life in five years.

Assailant should paint a rough picture of what that looks like here. Body should paint an expression of how this feels.

NARRATOR

I was so sure that being a pedophile would make me an automatic abuser, that I was doomed to hurt children if my fears turned out to be true. That every person that had this horrible attraction was some kind of monster who had been cursed to be this way somehow. As if they had been born evil, born inferior.

ASSAILANT AND BODY

(in unison)

I should end my own life for the safety of others. I should end my own life if my worst fears are true. It's my right to end my own life and I'd rather do that than ever hurt anyone.

The two of them look at each other, staring for a moment. Assailant then drags their painted hand across the length of the canvases to where Body is. Body faces Assailant head on.

BODY

Death is sort of like sleeping isn't it? Would it really be such a bad thing to fade away forever? Especially if it meant I never got to hurt anyone. If I was engulfed by the weight of oblivion, would I stop suffering? Is that the price I would have to pay to finally be left alone?

Assailant knocks the paintbrush out of Body's hands. Assailant takes a step closer to Body, who is visually very tense.

ASSAILANT

Shut up. You're not a martyr. Stop pitying yourself. There's no such thing as a saint rapist.

Assailant makes a another finger gun to shoot at Body again, but this time Body grabs the gun with both hands. Assailant is caught off guard and does not fire. Both of them are still like this for just a second. Then, while still holding Assailant's hand, Body leads the two of them over to some empty paint cans in the front of the stage.

BODY

This.

ASSAILANT

It's not really about you or me is it?

BODY

No, it's this.

ASSAILANT

Just this.

BODY

Yep.

A pause.

ASSAILANT

I still hate you.

BODY

I know. It's going to be like that for a while I think.

ASSAILANT

Fine, then let's do this.

At this point both Assailant and Body each take one or more of the smaller buckets of paint, opens them up, and just tosses the contents onto the canvas behind them. This paint should be a variety of loud colors and look uncomfortably bright and garish. Body then dumps an entire can's worth of paint onto themselves, again, something bright colored. Assailant laughs at the site and spins around in a circle with their paint can, getting paint all over the stage. By the time Narrator reappears at the back of the stage following Assailant and Body everything is a mess. At first neither Body nor Assailant notices them, but hesitantly Narrator touches Assailant's shoulder. Assailant turns their attention to Narrator and touches their face with their paint coated hand, Narrator flinches but does not turn away. Instead, they cover the original mark on their chest with their hands, as if to cradle their heart. Assailant pulls away and points to the front of the stage.

ASSAILANT

Finish.

Narrator nods and returns to their usual spot. Assailant and Body watch.

NARRATOR

I went through several therapists over the course of

3 years, but just about all of them reiterated a similar point to me, sometimes through radical acceptance, sometimes through some form of research, but it came down to this: even if my worst fears turned out to be true and I somehow did have these paraphilias that I was so afraid that I secretly had, I was still capable of living a normal life and being a good person. A person who understood that abusing children or animals was unequivocally wrong. I had to learn a lot about the people who *do* really have these attractions and who are still sane, healthy people. They know abuse is wrong and they would never do it. They still go out and live their lives. They have friends and families that they love. They have hopes and dreams like everyone else. They are not rape hungry monsters driven by lust and depravity. And learning that even if my worst fears were in fact true, I could still live a life where I never harmed anyone was the hardest thing I had to learn about.

ASSAILANT

Alright, I'm getting tired of this.

Blackout.

Scene 7

Lights up, Body and Narrator look to the Assailant. The stage is a mess, there's paint everywhere and everyone looks exhausted.

NARRATOR

Sorry?

ASSAILANT

There's only so much we can pass on by loosely gesticulating on what the past 3 years have been like. If they can't understand what it was like after all that you've said than they're hopeless.

NARRATOR

Nothing's hopeless. I thought I did a good job of describing that much.

BODY

You eventually got that across I think.

ASSAILANT

That's my point though, it's about time to get onto the 'where are they now' segment of things. Have it all tied up in a nice little bow.

NARRATOR

I think we both know it's not really that simple, but I'll entertain you. 3 years have gone by since that initial assault on my mind, I'm coming up on my fourth one as we speak and my mind happens to be a lot clearer now thanks to...well partially drugs.

BODY

Took some time to find a good drug cocktail mix.

NARRATOR

Such is usually the case for drugs I think, we only went through, what, 5 or 6 different medications until something actually worked?

BODY

I stopped counting after Prozac failed. Besides, the important part is that Anafranil and a hormonal shot of Depoprovera every three months does wonders.

ASSAILANT

For you, you mean. It does wonders *for you*.

BODY

Yes. Yes it does. You're still here of course , but the dread, the fear, the constant questioning of myself, it all sort of falls away with the drugs. I know for sure that I am not attracted to children or animals on these medications and I know it with certainty. The one thing that doesn't leave is the obsession.

ASSAILANT

So what am I then? Irrelevant now? Just a malingering symptom in the worst of times?

NARRATOR

If that's what you're taking from this then I definitely haven't done my job correctly. You're the thing that changed me irreversibly. I can't go back to being the person I used to be before you because I can't look at the world or myself without looking through your lens, for better or worse.

ASSAILANT

Hmm.

BODY

Does that answer not satisfy you?

ASSAILANT

Probably not, but I'd have to think on it more.

NARRATOR

How very in character for you.

BODY

There's something that I'm still curious about though. Do you remember when you were still in high school and you had to do that assignment where you wrote about your life to your younger self?

ASSAILANT

This just seems like a stupid digression.

BODY

Quiet, it isn't. I want to ask, if your were going to talk to your younger self again, about this time, about us, what would you say?

NARRATOR

Well, if I wanted to be difficult I might just say that that's what the play is for. But in all honesty, I'd preface all this by saying that a time will come where you are up in the air. You are not going to have solid answers about where you land, if you'll ever be able to touch the floor again, and it will be frightening. But all things considered, despite the unsureness, despite the fear and the obsession and the questioning, you will survive being up in the air. And when you land, wherever and whenever that is, you will probably know enough to find your feet.

The three of them look towards the doll.

ASSAILANT

You think it's the right time?

NARRATOR

I don't think there's ever going to be a 'right time'. I think it's just we either do it or we don't.

ASSAILANT

Fair enough.

BODY

I don't want to.

ASSAILANT

Well tough. Good thing it's not all up to you.

BODY

Just shut up and do it.

At this Assailant gets the hammer and uses the back end of the hammer to pry out the nail. Assailant hands the cloth wrapped doll to Narrator, who carefully unwraps it. The doll is of course still smeared with paint and depressing to look at.

NARRATOR

I still want to clean it, but I think that would be missing the mark.

ASSAILANT

I hate looking at it.

BODY

What are you going on about? It's your fault it's even like this in the first place.

ASSAILANT

That doesn't require me to like it.

NARRATOR

I'll grant you that it's not the most conventional, but really none of this is, least of all you.

ASSAILANT

Sure, but who will want us like this? Who will listen to us? Who will love us without running away once they know us?

BODY

Someone is out there, nobody is born to be entirely alone.

NARRATOR

We'll just have to live long enough to find that out for sure won't we?

ASSAILANT

Which I'm assuming is more than 5 years.

BODY

Obviously.

NARRATOR

A reasonable assumption I think.

ASSAILANT

But is everything really going to be okay in the end?
Are we going to be okay?

NARRATOR

We'll see.

*The three of them turn to face the audience and
hold the doll out in front of themselves.*

The End