

TIL DEATH DO US PART

Written by

J.E. Clarke

FADE IN ON:

EXT. BLACK VOID

The world's an incoherent blur. Sirens wail. Desperate breathing and screams pierce the night.

Sounds which give way to a heart monitor. BEEP BEEP. Fuzzy memories come into view...

INT. CAR - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Beyond the windshield, a dark road twists and turns.

In the passenger seat, passenger LAURIE flirts with driver CRAIG. Both 30-something, marriage rings on both fingers... an echo of 20's wildness in Laurie's eyes.

LAURIE

Enough with the clock and dagger.
Craig, be straight with me - what's
the plan?

CRAIG

For our anniversary? No amount of
grilling's gonna work. Just be
patient. Wait and see.

LAURIE

I'm not asking for spoilers, a hint
will do. For instance, is it best I
look elegant?

She cinches hair up in a bun, bats her eyes.

LAURIE

Or should I be more... fancy free?

Hair tumbles to her shoulders. Equally sexy, with a different
vibe. Craig flashes time-proven charm at his wife:

CRAIG

Honey, whichever you prefer. Both
look great to me!

A car ZIPS in front; too close for comfort. A near miss!
Craig wrenches the wheel to the right.

CRAIG

Fucking lunatic. What's *his* deal!?

LAURIE

Dunno. Maybe he missed his
anniversary, and is racing home?

She squints out a side window.

On the horizon, a white building looms. Red tail-lights glow
around it. The parking lot looks jammed even this far out.

LAURIE

Oh. It's that event at Montecore
Hospital. You know, that thing on
the news?

CRAIG

That "thing"?

LAURIE

You remember: that mad scientist
body transfer thing-a-ma-bob they
won't stop talking about?

CRAIG

Oh. The press meeting for the new
breakthrough!

Laurie giggles at a sudden thought, slaps Craig's arm.
Causing another close call as a car roars by.

LAURIE

Do *not* tell me you booked tickets
to Frankenstein's monster? I'd give
you points for creativity, but come
on! Lemme guess: you want me to
trade my body in for something
newer? Jerk! More flexible, with
less wrinkles...

CRAIG

Honey, don't be silly. You know I
love you for your mind!

LAURIE

Well, it *would* still be me inside.
Just with different hardware. Be
honest, is that what you'd like?

Craig mulls the question over: is there any way to answer
that without getting burned?

CRAIG

Who cares? It'll never happen.

LAURIE

Why not?

CRAIG

Our insurance won't pay for that!

LAURIE

Excellent deflection, Sir. I've trained you well.

CRAIG

And now for yet more graceful pivoting. We can pay for a romantic dinner, followed by dance. That's better than Frankenstein any night.

LAURIE

I knew it! We're going to Mara's, aren't we? That's my all-time favorite spot!

Craig frowns; a sign he's miscalculated here.

CRAIG

Baby, Mara's might not be open.

He glances down at his phone. Googles "*Mara's reservations*".

A third car zips by. One distracted Craig can't dodge.

LAURIE'S POV - MONTAGE

Time slows to blurry snapshots. The heart monitor from before marks the time:

- Headlights flare. Tires screech. The world tilts sideways.

- Blood slicked Craig tears at Laurie's seatbelt. Red and blue strobe lights bathe his face as he cries.

CRAIG

Honey, for God's sake, don't leave me now!

- Lying on a gurney, the hospital ceiling rushes by. An anesthesia mask descends. One ragged gasp then: black out.

INT. MONTECORE HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - LATER

A bruised and bleeding Craig stares at DR. LAMBERT (50s). Despite his wrinkled scrubs, the surgeon looks distinguished nonetheless. Concerned by Craig's appearance, too.

DOCTOR LAMBERT
Mr. Johnstone, I hear you refused
to be admitted. Has staff even
checked you out?

CRAIG
I'm standing. So who cares?

DOCTOR LAMBERT
You could still have broken ribs,
internal injuries. Adrenaline can
mask a lot. I always recommend
erring on the side of caution -

CRAIG
Only after I see my wife!

A strange blend of emotions flash on Lambert's face.
Satisfaction mixed with... fear? He gently takes Craig's arm.

DOCTOR LAMBERT
This way, please.

They wind through cramped corridors. Nurses gawk after them,
open mouthed.

DOCTOR LAMBERT
Your wife's fine. Fundamentally.

CRAIG
What the hell does that mean?

DOCTOR LAMBERT
She's alive. And that's a miracle.
The crash severed her spinal cord.
The damage to her heart; beyond
repair.

CRAIG
Beyond repair doesn't sound "fine"!

Craig stumbles. Lambert catches him before he falls.

DOCTOR LAMBERT
Mr. Johnston, promise me you'll go
to X-ray when we're done here?
(beat)
About Mrs. Johnstone's condition:
consider it the perfect storm. If
the crash hadn't happened so close
to our facility, and even a day
earlier... Well, there's no way
she'd have survived. That she was
even a match defies all odds.

CRAIG
A match for what?

DOCTOR LAMBERT
Our new body-transfer process.
Honestly, a human test subject was
still decades out. We're still in
the animal testing phase. But this
was a matter of life and death. And
as far as your wife is concerned,
there was nothing left to lose.

They turn a corner. REPORTERS mob the nurse's desk. Burly
ORDERLIES shove them back.

Craig recoils at the chaos.

CRAIG
What the hell have you done?

DOCTOR LAMBERT
The great news is she - um,
"Laurie"'s alive. There's just one
thing we need to talk about. After
you get physically examined, I've
booked time with a counselor, too.

They push past the press to a room.

INT. MONTECORE HOSPITAL - ROOM - NIGHT

Monitor beeps fill the air. In a bed, a body rests. A MAN
(20s). Craig takes one look, whirls around.

CRAIG
What kind of joke is this?

DOCTOR LAMBERT
Beggars can't be choosers. I know
it's a shock, but I swear: that
person there... is your wife.

LATER

Craig stands over the bed, shell-shocked.

ER's worked him over: his right arm now cradled in a sling. A
Frankenstein-style stitch adorns one cheek.

Dr. Lambert closes the curtains to shut out reporters.
Resting against a wall, he gives Craig space.

DOCTOR LAMBERT

The donor's name was Terry. A physics student from Rutgers. It's a tragedy, really.

CRAIG

Tell me something I *don't* know.

DOCTOR LAMBERT

A tragedy for *Terry*, I mean. He came in with an embolism, right before they brought you here. He was brain dead. Irreparable. If a nurse hadn't noted how perfectly Laurie's profile was a match...

CRAIG

You expect me to thank you? You put my wife in a man's body, for Christ sake!!

DOCTOR LAMBERT

Mr. Johnston, you did sign the heroic efforts waiver. All things told, we saved her life.

CRAIG

Whoopee. The "operation was a success, but oops, the patient's had a sex change"?!? Since it was so easy, do it again. With the *right* body, this time. Dammit!

DOCTOR LAMBERT

The chance of finding another match - female OR male - are five billion to one. Even if it wasn't, look at the options rationally, Mr. Johnstone. Should Mr. Terry here have died in vain? Should we discard his sacrifice, and needlessly use a second body that could theoretically save a *different* life? Even if regulations allowed us to experiment -

In the bed, Laurie (now Terry) groans.

TERRY

Craig?!?

Terry's eyes drift to Craig's battered face and sling.

TERRY

OMG. What happened? Are you OK?

Craig strangles on his answer.

Terry stops - stares at a mirror across the room. He soaks in the distorted reflection of Craig... then himself.

Feels his own face. Then chest. Screams.

LATER

Dr. Lambert stands sentry at the door.

Craig sits at Terry's side. Though inches apart, they avoid touching. Both of them look stunned.

The hum of reporters in the hallway seems so far away.

TERRY

This is just a dream, right?

CRAIG

I wish. But if it's not: maybe we should sue?

TERRY

The people who saved my life?

CRAIG

By doing this?!?

A nervous Lambert inches towards the exit.

DOCTOR LAMBERT

You two deserve privacy. If you need anything, I'll be outside.

He slips out. The open door leaks a roar of questions from reporters. Closing it muffles the sound once more.

Craig and Terry exchange awkward looks.

CRAIG

I... I don't know what to say. Let alone, think.

TERRY

Neither do I. This is bizarro world.

CRAIG

To say the least.

TERRY

Even more than just... well, you know. This body feels all wrong.

CRAIG

Looks wrong, too.

TERRY

No. I mean from the inside. Except for a headache, I feel great! Younger. More energized.

CRAIG

Well, they *did* give you the body of a college student. Which means -

Laurie's previous words in the car mirror his.

CRAIG

Newer. More flexible. Less wrinkles.

TERRY

This isn't what I had in mind!

CRAIG

Please tell me we're going to wake up from this nightmare?

TERRY

This is no dream. No way I'm *that* weird.

CRAIG

Honey, we've been married ten years. Trust me, sometimes you are.

The two share a dark laugh.

TERRY

Some surprise. This is not how I expected our big day to play out.

TERRY

I completely understand if you can't do this and - uh - want a divorce?

Tears well up in Terry's eyes. Craig freezes. He hadn't thought through the situation this far.

CRAIG

We promised to stay together through sickness and health.

TERRY

Yes, but damn - this wasn't in the fine print of our marriage vows!

Terry looks down his sheet-covered new body.

TERRY

How could you still find me attractive? I don't even know how this... equipment works!

CRAIG

Sure you do. Just from a different vantage point.

TERRY

Is this my anniversary gift? You giving me "beginner's tips"?

CRAIG

You gotta admit, it'd be a massive marriage sea change. Experimenting to keep the magic alive!

TERRY

Craig, you never said you were bi.

CRAIG

I'm not. But for you, I'll try?

Terry forces a weak smile. Craig reaches for his hand. Chickens out last second, pulls back.

CRAIG

But no promises.

Terry grazes Craig's cheek. Who shudders, but doesn't recoil.

TERRY

Let's start slow, feel things out.

CRAIG

"Feel things out"? Bad choice of words!

TERRY

Well, at least your humor hasn't changed. When they let me out, how's about a second, uh "first date"? Dinner at Mara's, for instance?

CRAIG

Your all-time favorite? You bet!

INT. MONTECORE HOSPITAL - HALLWAY

Just outside, Dr. Lambert bravely faces a mob of press corps.

DOCTOR LAMBERT

I know the process seems like science fiction. But imagine what this will mean for every human on earth! The ability to escape bodies riddled from disease. And as the cost becomes more affordable, we can probably clone replacement bodies for us all.

REPORTER

Upgrading to new models, like a car!

DOCTOR LAMBERT

A crude way to put it, but yes.

REPORTER

What about this whole - uh - switching genders thing a ma bob?

DOCTOR LAMBERT

That wasn't the goal we had in mind. But given the specifics of Patient Zero, you're right. This could bring the options for sexual reassignment to whole new realms.

INT. MONTECORE HOSPITAL - ROOM

Craig reaches again for Terry's hand. This time, he holds on.

Hands clasp. Fingers intertwine. A smile plays across Terry's unfamiliar lips.

TERRY

You *did* say you love me "for my mind". The next few months will test that theory. Big time.

CRAIG

OK, but let me lay it on the line. No matter where this relationship go, I will not cheat on my wife.

TERRY

Ha-ha. Real funny, Mister. I don't know whether to laugh or cry.

INT. MONTECORE HOSPITAL - HALLWAY

Reporters surge forward, burying Lambert with questions.

INT. MONTECORE HOSPITAL - ROOM

Inside the room, neither Craig nor Terry care. For them, it's a very different, *new* and private world...

FINAL FADEOUT: