

The Body

A Ten-Minute Play

CHARACTERS

HENRY McCAULEY, *a rather meek accountant type in his 30's.*

STEVE CALVARUSO, *extremely nice guy, in his late 30's or early 40's.*

SETTING

The living room of HENRY'S house. A couch or chair, a small coffee table, maybe a Stars Wars poster on the wall, at least one small plastic creature figure on the coffee table along with a small framed photograph.

An ordinary living room, couch, chairs, a Star Wars poster on the wall, a couple of action figures on the coffee table. HENRY, an accountant type in a cardigan, enters with a TV dinner on a tray and sits on the couch. HE puts a napkin under HIS chin, starts to take the first bite. There is a knock on the door. HENRY glances at the door, sighs, gets up and opens it. STEVE, the absolutely nicest guy in the world, stands smiling in the doorway.

STEVE

Hey, hello. I'm Steve. I live across the parking lot.

HENRY

Oh. Sure. I've seen you around. I'm Henry.

STEVE (*shaking HENRY'S hand*)

You're the one who told me my cat had been run over. You were kind that day. I appreciated that. And here I am asking a favor and I can see I am disturbing your supper.

HENRY (*glancing down at the napkin, taking it off*)

Oh . . . well . . . not much of a supper.

STEVE

I smell something. That chicken? (*Glancing over at the coffee table*) Wow. I didn't think they made those TV dinners any more. One piece of chicken, peas and carrots, mashed potatoes.

HENRY

Easy to tell I'm a bachelor, huh?

STEVE

And a collector of *Star Wars* figures.

HENRY

An investment, yeah.

STEVE

I was wondering, Henry, if you could help me out. I'll come back after you finish your meal.

HENRY

No problem. You need to borrow something?

STEVE

A manner of speaking, yes. I'm moving out and need to borrow a couple of things.

HENRY

Oh. Okay. Sure. I guess that would be okay. (*A short laugh.*) I guess I should ask what they are first.

STEVE

I was noticing your large trash can. I had a peek on my way over. Mostly empty for tomorrow's pickup.

HENRY

Okay, sure. You can put some garbage in it. I won't have much tonight, maybe one small bag with the TV dinner tray thingy.

STEVE

Okay, good. And I need to borrow some muscle.

HENRY

Yeah, we all seem to collect a lot of junk, don't we? We're talking about a couch to the edge of the street or what?

STEVE

A body.

HENRY (*a statement*)

A body.

STEVE

Yeah.

HENRY

A body.

STEVE

Heavy one.

HENRY

What kind of body?

STEVE

Dead one.

(*Silence. Finally HENRY starts to smile and nod knowingly to STEVE.*)

HENRY

I get it. You're with that Channel 9 show . . . *Prank it Forward*. Where's the camera? (*Approaching STEVE, bending over slightly and peering at the buttons on HIS shirt.*) Hell-low-oh. You see me? Which one of you just *looks* like a button?

STEVE

So you'll help me?

HENRY (*in sing-song to STEVE'S shirt buttons*)

No-no-oh-no. I don't think I want to help you put some heavy dead body in my trash.

STEVE

Please stand up straight. Good. There you go. Seriously, I need your help.

HENRY

But this is a joke, right? Nobody just walks next door and says, Hey, help me throw a body in your trash.

STEVE

Sure they do. I just did. Now. Go ahead, please. Finish your supper. I insist. I feel bad about that.

HENRY (*slowly*)

You feel bad about interrupting my supper. My old fashioned TV dinner.

STEVE

Absolutely. Please. Sit. Enjoy.

(HENRY *slowly makes HIS way to the couch, sits, looks down at the TV dinner, then back up at STEVE.*)

HENRY (*finally, HIS voice shaking*)

What . . . unh . . . (*Pointing to the wall with HIS fork, indicating STEVE'S apartment across the way.*) What . . . unh . . . Who's . . . unh . . . ?

STEVE

Friend of mine.

HENRY

Oh, Jesus . . .

STEVE

Actually a former business partner.

HENRY

Oh, my goodness gracious Jesus in blessed heaven above help me.

STEVE

What's wrong?

HENRY

Are you going to hurt me?

STEVE

Why would I do that?

HENRY

Because you've told me you've been a naughty boy.

STEVE

Naughty? You sound like my mother.

HENRY

Oh, I hope you like your mother.

STEVE

Relax, will you? Enjoy your supper.

HENRY (*looking down at the TV dinner*)

What a shitty last meal.

STEVE

I am not going to hurt you, Henry. Relax. I need help with the stairs. You can't expect me just to throw Junior-Boy out of my window. Remains should be treated with a little respect. (*Thinking about that for a moment.*) Well, up to the point where they go in the trash anyway. (*Looking around the apartment.*) A nice dump like mine. (*Seeing HENRY nod.*) All these places are. Not like when we had people on the construction payroll. We still did quality work on any project.

HENRY

In . . . unh . . . light of recent developments . . . I should've moved out after Louise divorced me. Clean slate, new place. No dead body.

STEVE (*indicating the photo on the coffee table*)

That's the two of you, hunh? And you're still mooning over her.

HENRY

That's us at the Renaissance Faire, the Sword and Saga Tournament. She fell for a guy in our office giving the Pig and Whistle concert.

STEVE

I'm not sure I know what you're talking about.

HENRY

That's okay. (*Shrugging.*) A bunch of grownups playing fantasy games. She left me and it almost killed me. And I see them every day.

STEVE

Not too late to drag up and start over, Henry.

HENRY (*after a long moment of staring at STEVE*)

I'm expecting to die in a little while. You know, leave no witnesses and all. Concrete shoes, swimming with the fishes, fingerprints burned off, tongue pulled through a slit throat and hanging down like a tie . . .

STEVE

You watch too much TV.

HENRY

Yeah. I prefer a .22 bullet in the back of the head. Supposedly bounces around in the brain . . .

STEVE

You're creeping me out. Honestly. Just relax, hunh?

HENRY

I can't. I gotta help you carry a body.

STEVE

Well, get your rubber gloves if they'll make you feel better. I *know* you use them to wash dishes. Well, when you actually use a plate.

HENRY (*glancing down at his TV dinner*)

Exactly how much does your former business partner weigh?

STEVE

Two-seventy . . . three hundred. 'Course that's dead weight.

HENRY

Oh Jesus Mary Lord in heaven above . . .

STEVE

Please don't start that again.

HENRY

I couldn't even open the cardboard box before I buried *my* cat.

STEVE

It's much harder to lose a pet than an idiot business partner.

HENRY

Meow . . .

STEVE

Junior set up this score. I'm not proud of it. Sunday School class at the Missionary Baptist Church was supposedly counting the building fund money.

HENRY

Sunday School? Geez, that's awful.

STEVE

I feel terrible. I'm probably going to hell for that.

(HENRY starts to say something, probably along the line of wouldn't murder qualify for a trip but decides against saying anything.)

It turns out instead of piles of money, thousands in cash, there's five old men playing checkers. So I leave immediately but Junior robs them anyway and gets thirteen dollars and a cell phone. So when he walks in with that haul I blasted his fat ass.

HENRY

Head shot, hunh?

STEVE

No, I shot him in his fat ass and then a head shot.

HENRY

Wow. *(After a quick moment.)* I feel like I'm in a dream directed by Scorsese.

STEVE *(looking around the apartment)*

Pardon me for saying this, Henry, but you need to wake up and start living.

(HENRY notices STEVE looking around and does the same. In a moment THEY look at EACH OTHER and acknowledge that with nods.)

HENRY

I've always been too chicken shit to live on the edge, too scared to take what I wanted. I didn't even know how to fight for Louise.

STEVE

You send her flowers?—candy?—all that stuff women love?

HENRY

I took her to a *Star Wars* convention.

STEVE

She into that? *(Watching HENRY shake HIS head.)* You really do need some help, don't you?

HENRY

Well, she liked all that Renaissance stuff.

STEVE

Tell you what, Henry. Why don't you team up with me?

HENRY

Oh Jesus Mary and Joseph . . .

STEVE

I'm in the market for a new partner.

HENRY

Hunh . . . pardon *me* for saying *this* . . . but your partners end up in the trash.

STEVE

That wouldn't happen this time. I like you.

HENRY

If . . . if I *politely* decline your offer . . . really, am I going to end up next to Junior?

STEVE

I said I wasn't going to harm you. I'm a man of my word.

HENRY

We don't have much in common.

STEVE (*after a moment*)

I didn't ask you to marry me. It was just an idea. I need a partner, you need a life. I like you, what can I say?—ever since you told me my cat had been run over, tears in your own eyes. Of 'course my track record in picking partners is not the best, you're right. If you want, help me dump Junior and I'm out of here. You just can't call the cops. (*Off-handedly.*) I would have to hunt you down if you do.

HENRY

I wouldn't do that. When they question me how Junior got in my trash can I know *nothing*. Like they always say about serial killers, he was a nice quiet murderer.

STEVE

You finished there, Henry?—with your supper? I've got to get Junior moved.

HENRY

Should I change clothes? What if they check for fibers and all that? Trace them back to me. Suddenly I'm known as the Cardigan Killer.

STEVE

I've got a couple of jumpsuits we can wear then dispose of. Just like the movies, Henry.

HENRY

What about masks?

STEVE

Masks? We're disposing of Junior, not robbing a bank.

HENRY

What about blood-borne diseases?

STEVE

Junior always made sure his *companions* were clean.

HENRY (*softly*)

That's a relief, I guess.

STEVE

So you're in? I can count on you?

HENRY

Can I have a few minutes?

STEVE

The first kill is always the toughest.

HENRY

But I didn't kill him.

STEVE

Just saying if you *had* killed Junior.

HENRY

Am I being framed for this?

STEVE

Tell you what, Henry. Take a few minutes. I trust you. To show that, I'll leave you alone, check on Junior. Be back in a few. Okay?

HENRY

Check on Junior?

(STEVE holds out HIS hand. HENRY stares at it a moment then shakes it.)

STEVE (*a friendly smile*)

Okay, that's settled. (*Heading for the door.*) Oh. Henry. I hear sirens it'll be bad news city.

(STEVE exits. HENRY sits a moment, it dawning on HIM that HIS life is forever changed. HE rises and begins pacing.)

HENRY

Oh, Jesus . . . (*Still pacing.*) . . . I was just trying to eat my supper. Suddenly I'm a hardened criminal. The only thing I ever stole was a Superman comic . . . (*HE stops pacing.*) 'Course it was at a convention and was worth \$3,000. Now I'm dumping some dead fat ass named Junior in the trash. (*Pacing again.*) Please, Lord, somebody help me. (*HE stops pacing and picks up the photograph of HIM and Louise.*) And you. I want to blame you!

(HE starts pacing again, still holding the photograph. HENRY fumbles in HIS pocket and pulls out HIS cell phone, punches one number. STEVE appears in the doorway, HIS hand going under HIS coat, evidently getting ready to pull HIS pistol, when HE sees HENRY talking into the cell phone.)

Hello? Shit. (*Waiting a moment.*) I gotta talk fast. There's something going on that I'm a part of. A life-changing serious as shit event.

(STEVE continues to watch, confused.)

It's clean slate time, Louise. (*After a quick pause.*) I've been accused of many things. Not loving you madly was never one of them. So I've become hard . . . suddenly, very suddenly. I can't blame Pig and Whistle boy. But if you hadn't pretended we were so happily married while you were sleeping with him. So, yes, love denied and lied about has pushed meek Henry over the edge. (*Yelling into the cell phone.*) Look at me, Louise! (*Hanging up, noticing STEVE in the doorway.*) Her voice mail. (*Shrugging.*) She deserves a little guilt.

STEVE

With Junior in your trash she *will* think you've gone over the edge.

HENRY

I want to change my name, Steve. What do you think of *Deuce*?

STEVE (*nodding*)

It should last the rest of your life.

HENRY (*in HIS own world*)

Deuce Harding. That sounds tough. Do I get Junior's gun?

STEVE

You sure do. And all the bullets, too.

HENRY

Louise gave me her father's German Luger. I've shot that a few times.

STEVE

You're going to be a real hit with me, Deuce.

HENRY *(smiling at the use of HIS new name)*

Deuce. That's sounds great, doesn't it? Hey, I better get my kitchen gloves.

STEVE

Good thinking. *(Rolling HIS eyes in disbelief when HENRY exits.)* What an absolute chump. *(Watching HENRY return with bright yellow kitchen gloves.)* Perfect.

HENRY *(looking around for a moment)*

Kind of mysterious this way, hunh? I'll need to stop and withdraw what money I can.

STEVE

You're thinking clearly, Henry. Everyone will wonder what happened to you. A *real* mystery. Come on, partner, let's go dump Junior and then I've got to take care of some other business.

HENRY *(looking around)*

Can I have one more minute? This is a big change.

STEVE

Okay, Henry, sure, I understand, it. Look, I'm going on. Don't linger. I can trust you?

HENRY *(nodding)*

As much as I trust you, yes. I'm right behind you.

(STEVE exits. HENRY takes one last look around, starts to leave but stops. HE exits into the other part of the apartment and appears moments later with a German Luger pistol. HE checks the pistol and then conceals it under HIS shirt in the small of HIS back.)

HENRY

Aaahh, Deuce, smart move, very smart. Just in case, Stevey-boy. Just in case.

(Again he starts to leave but goes to the coffee table and picks up a Star Wars figure, puts it in the pocket of HIS cardigan and exits.)

BLACKOUT