

SWINGS AND ROUNDABOUTS
EPISODE 4: REFRACT
by Avery Edison

TEASER

SOUND FX: A hospital waiting room BUZZES with activity.

SOUND FX: A door SHUTS.

NURSE

Take your trousers down and hop up
onto the table, love.

SOUND FX: Belt being UNCLASPED, zipper being PULLED, and
trousers being pushed down.

NURSE

In a second I'm going to start
gently palpating your testicles,
I'll just wait for your mum to
join us first.

AVERY

I asked her to stay outside.

NURSE

Usually we have a parent in the
room to make sure everything's
appropriate-

AVERY

Is this an informed consent thing?
I'm 16, I know what's going on,
I'm fine with it.

NURSE

Oh, I'm sorry, I thought you were
younger.

AVERY

Yeah, everyone does. That's kind-
of why I'm here.

NURSE

Right, yes, sorry... I'll start,
then.

AVERY

Thanks, it's a bit cold.

A beat.

SOUND FX: CLACKING of wooden balls.

AVERY

What are those?

NURSE

This is an orchidometer. It's a set of differently-sized beads that we compare your testicles to to see how much they're growing.

AVERY

That's pretty low-tech.

NURSE

Unfortunately, we can't x-ray your genitals-

AVERY

Because the penis isn't technically a bone?

NURSE

-because it would make you sterile. So a professor named Andrea Prader invented these, which is why they're sometimes called Prader's balls. They're also nicknamed the "endocrine rosary".

AVERY

For the patient praying they won't get an erection.

NURSE

If that happens I'll turn around, and give time for you calm down before we proceed.

AVERY

I don't think that'll be an issue. Again, that's why I'm here.

A beat.

AVERY

By the way, I'm, uh... I... I'm, I'm sorry that you, um, that you have to do this. You know... Touch my... Privates.

NURSE

Oh, It's nothing, this is the fifth pair of testicles I've handled today.

AVERY

I don't think you should be telling me about your personal life.

NURSE

You know, I think I need a smaller set of Prader's balls.

SOUND FX: CLACKING continues, fading out.

OPENING CREDITS

MUSIC: BLOOPY electronica.

AVERY

I'm Avery Edison, and you're listening to Swings and Roundabouts, which is a show about me using my computer's speech function as a therapist. We don't usually talk about sex stuff, but this story plays into the show's initial arc about integrity and regret, I promise.

COMPUTER

You've done a great job maintaining that theme over each episode.

AVERY

Thanks, I'm a very good writer.

COMPUTER

Although you've taken your sweet time doing it.

MUSIC: FADE out.

MAIN STORY PART ONE

SOUND FX: Crickets CHIRPING and tent sheets FLAPPING in the wind.

AVERY

My first time was in a tent in my back garden.

COMPUTER

That's smart. You're out of the house, there's nobody around to hear any noises...

AVERY

Exactly.

COMPUTER

All the embarrassing negotiations and check-ins, the "are you in me yet?"

AVERY

In who?
(MORE)

EVERY (CONT'D)

What do you think I'm talking about?

COMPUTER

The first time you had sex.

EVERY

Oh! No, I'm talking about the first time I *jerked-off*. Sex? God, no, I've- I've no idea what *that* was like. I mean, I know the basic details, like who was there and where we were, but I don't remember any of the specifics.

COMPUTER

That's peculiar.

EVERY

When you've banged around as much as I have, it all kind-of blurs together-

COMPUTER

You've had four sexual partners, and spent the majority of your adult life in long-distance relationships.

EVERY

Okay, yeah, I've had a below average amount of intercourse.

COMPUTER

Then why can't you remember your first time?

EVERY

I'll tell you, but first I need to make something clear.

COMPUTER

Go for it.

EVERY

Not every problem or issue in my life comes down to the fact that I'm a transgender woman, okay?

COMPUTER

Noted. You're a complex individual, you're more than your gender identity, you're large-you contain multitudes.

EVERY

Exactly.

(MORE)

EVERY (CONT'D)

That said, a lot of transgender people do find that they dissociate from early sexual experiences.

COMPUTER

Dissociate. D-I-S-S-O-C-I-A-T-E. The term dissociation describes a wide array of experiences from mild detachment from immediate surroundings to more severe detachment from physical and emotional experience.

EVERY

I'm glad I installed that *Wikipedia* plugin.

COMPUTER

So your trans-ness scrubbed the memory of you losing your flower-

EVERY

It's more like the memory was never formed in the first place, and by the way, I'm gonna edit your dictionary so you never call it that again.

COMPUTER

-and yet you *do* remember the first time you masturbated?

EVERY

I guess that's Millennial narcissism for you? And it was a very memorable experience! Hey, camping was involved!

COMPUTER

You're right, how could you forget such a magical evening?

EVERY

And it was a big deal in terms of my health, as well. I had just started taking steroids to stimulate puberty, and this was one of the first signs that it was working.

COMPUTER

I've just realised-you *literally* pitched a tent.

EVERY

In fact- Okay, this is embarrassing.

(MORE)

EVERY (CONT'D)

The morning after, I actually told my mum what had happened. I didn't go into detail, but I let her know that I was... Now able to get somebody pregnant.

COMPUTER

In those words?

EVERY

Pretty close, yeah.

COMPUTER

Do you think it's common for young boys to tell their mothers when they've masturbated for the first time?

EVERY

I was proud, I guess. I'd had all this delayed-puberty stuff going on, and I wanted to let her know I was making progress.

COMPUTER

You can't just keep throwing around "delayed-puberty" and not explain it.

MAIN STORY PART TWO

SOUND FX: Cassette tape CLUNK.

DOCTOR (MURMURED)

Doctor's notes for patient Hayes, Kyle. First meeting October 14th, 2001.

SOUND FX: The mechanical STOP-START of the cassette.

SOUND FX: Cassette FAST-FORWARDING.

SOUND FX: Papers SHUFFLING.

DOCTOR

You were referred to our clinic by your GP after a meeting with your school counsellor, correct?

YOUNG EVERY

I've been getting bullied, and one of my teachers said it might help if I talked about it with someone.

DOCTOR

That's good advice.

YOUNG AVERY

I would have preferred if instead of shuttling me to therapy they'd... They'd just stopped my classmates from beating me up.

DOCTOR

Unfortunately, boys will be boys...

YOUNG AVERY

Which is why I was sent here, I think? The counsellor and I were talking about why I get picked-on, and I said that maybe it was because the other kids can tell that I don't feel like a boy.

DOCTOR

Your GP wanted to look into adolescent delay.

YOUNG AVERY

He said that that's why... That's why I feel like this.

SOUND FX: Pencil WRITING on paper.

DOCTOR

It's worth investigating. First, we're going to take an x-ray of your forearm, just to see where your current growth is at, and where we think you should be headed, then we're going to draw some blood, and measure your...

SOUND FX: The mechanical STOPPING of the cassette.

MAIN STORY PART THREE

AVERY

It's always worrying when your child has something wrong with them, but I think it was especially hard for my mum, because she'd had a son who died before I was born.

COMPUTER

Whoa, really?

AVERY

You didn't know that? I figured you'd already listened to my stand-up set about it.

COMPUTER

Ah, yes, you used to do comedy.

AVERY
I still do. *This* is comedy.

 COMPUTER
Only sometimes.

STAND-UP CLIP

 AVERY
Um, I'd like to start with, um, an impression. It's, it's of my brother-John.

A beat.

 AVERY
I should clarify: John died.

 CROWD
[laughter]

 AVERY
You know, every family has jokes about terrible things that have happened to them, it's how we deal with life, and tragedy. My family has some jokes about John's death. I'd like to read some of them to you.

Knock-knock, who's there? Not John.

 CROWD
[laughter]

 AVERY
Because he died, didn't he?

 CROWD
[laughter]

 AVERY
Why did the chicken cross the road? Probably to go to John's funeral.

 CROWD
[laughter]

 AVERY
A horse walks into a bar. That barman says, "Why the long face?" The horse says, "I've just come from a funeral."

 CROWD
[laughter]

AVERY
For a child.

 CROWD
[laughter]

MAIN STORY PART FOUR

 AVERY
So I wanted to reassure my mum
that I was gonna stick around.

 COMPUTER
And the fact that you were making
semen was the best you could come
up with.

 AVERY
We'd always been frank about the
body and how it works. There are a
lot of things I can criticise my
mum for-

 COMPUTER
You have mother issues? That's
very original.

 AVERY
-but I think one of the things she
did *right* was always answer me
honestly. She never fobbed me off
by saying, "I'll tell you when
you're older." I learned about sex
when I was young, I learned about
drugs-

 COMPUTER
How about rock and roll?

 AVERY
-so I knew what would happen when
my body started changing, and what
the significant steps would be-the
ones worth reporting to my mum so
she could know I was on track.

 COMPUTER
You're making a big deal out of
being aware that growing older
means you can bust a nut.

 AVERY
Fine, I agree: it was very strange
of me to let her know I'd jerked
off. You know, I'm more than happy
to accept that have a problem with
boundaries.

MAIN STORY PART FIVE

SOUND FX: KNOCKING at front door.

AVERY

Wait here one second, I think that's a delivery for me.

COMPUTER

Where would I go?

SOUND FX: Avery RUNNING down the stairs, OPENING the front door.

POSTAL CARRIER

Package for Avery Edison?

AVERY

Hi, yep.

POSTAL CARRIER

Sign here.

AVERY

Sure.

SOUND FX: PEN scratching.

POSTAL CARRIER

What's in here, anyway? It's heavy, but it also feels like it's floating in my hand.

AVERY

Oh, yeah, it's, uh... It's a... A buoyancy aid. It's bleeding-edge snorkelling equipment.

POSTAL CARRIER

Alright, well, say hello to the fish for me.

SOUND FX: Door CLOSING, Avery CLIMBING back up the stairs.

COMPUTER

You don't even *swim*.

AVERY

I couldn't say what it actually is because what it is is... It's complicated. It might not even be real. I mean, it's *real*, it's *here*, but... It might not actually *work*.

COMPUTER

Actual details would be good at this point.

SOUND FX: Avery OPENING the box.

EVERY

Talking with you over these past few weeks about all these mistakes I've made... It's brought up a lot of regret, and I've been wondering... I've been wondering what I could have done differently, how I could have fixed things.

COMPUTER

What's in the box, Avery?

BRAD PITT

What's in the box!?

EVERY

It's called an Alternascope. It- It uses, uh, quantum hindsight visualisers to refract-

COMPUTER

I know what it does. Those are illegal, Avery, and for good reason.

EVERY

Right, right, but... I'm not going to get in any trouble, okay? I'm just gonna turn it on for a few minutes, take a peek at some variations of my life, and then turn it off, put it away in the back of my closet, and never touch it or even think about it again.

COMPUTER

I can't condone this.

EVERY

You don't have to, you just... You have to watch and let people know if anything goes wrong and something bad happens to me, okay? Now be quiet, I have to figure out how to turn this thing on.

SOUND FX: Fumbling with switches causes some CLICKING, followed by a low HUM.

EVERY

Ooh, weird, it's um... It's putting out, like, a bunch of heat, but I feel freezing.

COMPUTER

You're supposed to wear a thermal lab-coat when you operate-

AVERY

Like I said, it's, it's just a few minutes, I'll be fine.

ALTERNASCOPE

Booting. Spinning up dimensional drives. Accessing multi-multiversal pathways. Connection established. Please describe the life-event you wish to view.

COMPUTER

Pick something small, please. People always ask these things about big decisions and the scenarios are so wildly different from their real lives that it gives them nervous breakdowns. There's a reason Alternascopes are banned.

AVERY

I promise I'm being careful. I already know what I'm looking for.

SOUND FX: CLUNK as the device begins to HUM at a higher pitch.

COMPUTER

Hurry.

AVERY

I remember this one lunch period in year seven, before I left middle school for Poole Grammar... I'd dumped my girlfriend, and told my regular friends that I didn't want to hang out with them any more either, so I didn't have anyone to talk to.

COMPUTER

That seems like a logical result of alienating everybody you know.

AVERY

I thought I should have a clean break before I went to my new school. It was totally unnecessary, but I have a tendency towards doing that sort of melodramatic stuff, even now.

COMPUTER

Right at this moment, in fact.

EVERY

I was all alone during break and lunch times, so I tried to make new friends with the guys who used that time to play football. I'd spent seven years avoiding that side of the playground, but beggars can't be choosers.

COMPUTER

By football you mean soccer.

EVERY

I never had the instincts for it. One time, the ball got kicked over the fence, and then someone went to punt it back over and it arc'ed up into the air and came down right on my head. I remember standing there, gazing up at it as it fell towards me, and not moving an inch to get out of the way or even lean forward and, like, attempt a header.

COMPUTER

And the other guys still let you play?

EVERY

They must've found it funny, or... Not cute, but adorably intriguing? I'd known these kids since... Since I was five, and, y'know, I'd long established myself as, like, a weirdo. And I think they were curious about me? As long as I didn't get in the way too much, I think they found it entertaining.

ALTERNASCOPE

Awaiting input.

EVERY

Right, yeah, the event, okay, uh... So, one lunchtime I was talking with a bunch of these guys. They were a little bit stunned by the sex-education talk we'd just gotten in biology class. At twelve and thirteen years-old, it was time for us to officially learn about puberty, and our changing bodies.

COMPUTER

Or your *theoretically* changing bodies.

EVERY

I was still a few years away from addressing that and taking steroids.

COMPUTER

That's not the decision you're focusing on, is it? Because that's a big one. As a transgender woman, to have your body give you a freebie like not turning you into a grown man, and then throw it away with medical intervention-

EVERY

It's probably my biggest regret, yeah. Not speaking up and saying, *"Actually, I don't feel like I'm meant to be a dude, so maybe we should just run with this."*

COMPUTER

That's way too big a decision to look back on with the Alternascope. If you pick that thread you'll end up with a devastating existential nightmare.

EVERY

I know, I know. I- I swear I'm just focusing on this lunchtime. We were chatting about this biology class, and I decided to try and make myself seem more grown-up. I said that none of what we'd seen or heard had really surprised me, because I was already having wet dreams.

COMPUTER

That would be an embarrassing thing to talk about even if it were true.

EVERY

And the group could tell that it wasn't. I was a bad liar, for a start, I was the shortest kid in our class, and, y'know, all these guys had seen me changing before P.E. There were a few sceptical looks between the guys, maybe some stifled laughter, and then they made their excuses and left to go get lunch.

COMPUTER

You couldn't go with them?

EVERY

They told me I should stay and save the spot in the playground. So I stood there, um, for the rest of the hour.

COMPUTER

Ouch.

EVERY

Exactly. So, uh... Machine? I- I want to know what I could've done differently then. Could I have said something better? Could I have made some friends in that moment? What could I have done so I didn't end the lunch period by myself?

ALTERNASCOPE

Processing... Processing...
Processing...

COMPUTER

This is going to end badly, I know it.

EVERY

I'll end you badly if you don't shut up.

ALTERNASCOPE

Scenario one: silence. After the presentation, when everybody is discussing the material, you say nothing. No jokes, no opinions, and no lies.

You blend into the background, and nobody notices when you follow them to the lunchroom. After a few days of shadowing them, you become a fixture, a permanent member of the group, and come to see them as friends, which makes your departure from the school slightly more painful.

Once you get to Poole Grammar, you try the same strategy, silence, but it only makes you seem a weaker target for the bullies. The fact that you hoped to be friends with them makes their attacks even more demoralising. After two years of their attention, you tell your teachers and your mother that you can't take it any more. You leave and return to state schooling.

(MORE)

ALTERNASCOPE (CONT'D)

Your old friends don't remember you.

Your future is the same as it is here.

AVERY

Things would've turned out the same if I spoke up or not? I guess that makes me feel better.

COMPUTER

Good. Now shut the machine off before it gives you something that makes you feel worse.

AVERY

Quiet, I'm still curious!

ALTERNASCOPE

Scenario two: deference. Immediately after your lie about the wet dream, you admit that it didn't happen and make fun of yourself, laughing at the how ridiculous your story was, and how bizarre it was that you thought you needed to falsify your adolescence to fit in. Everybody has fun gently teasing you, and you're invited to join their lunch table.

You lean into self-deprecation, and entertain your new friends by mocking yourself. Your departure from the school is painful, but you enter Poole Grammar more confident in your ability to function as part of a social group.

You still draw the attention of bullies, but manage to deflect most of their verbal attacks by joining in and heightening and out-doing their criticisms, defusing their attempts to hurt your feelings.

Your comedic instincts are honed as you enjoy making your friends laugh. You spend your spare time watching sitcoms, sketch shows, and stand-up, and begin writing your own material. You take the train to the nearest open mic and do five minutes.

(MORE)

ALTERNASCOPE (CONT'D)

You do this again and again, until you are regularly performing stand-up comedy at only sixteen years old.

You are still incredibly small, and display none of the secondary sexual characteristics associated with male puberty. It takes longer for you to seek medical attention, but when a few too many hecklers mention your height, you visit your GP. You are seventeen years old when you finally learn that your body has yet to begin puberty.

You tell the doctor that this is okay. The introspection and self-awareness required by your stand-up comedy persona means that you've already begun to recognise and deal with your Gender Identity Disorder. You ask for treatment to be delayed until your eighteenth birthday, so that you can be allowed to take estrogen instead of testosterone. Your voice never deepens, your facial hair never grows, and you gain only a few inches of height.

After taking a year off after graduating from high school, you enter university as a young woman. More comfortable with yourself, you don't drop out. You complete a three-year degree in film, taking time on weekends and holidays to travel the country and continue taking part in the stand-up circuit.

You move to London, with your education and experience earning you a place at the BBC. Your future is brighter than it is here.

AVERY

Wow. Okay. That- That sounds... I had no idea things could've gone so well. I mean, I've always regretted taking the steroids but I didn't realise I messed things up that badly.

COMPUTER

I told you this was a bad idea. You don't need to be any angrier at yourself for things you can't change. Now *please*, turn this damn thing off, I can hear it overheating.

AVERY

Just, uh, just one more! I have to know that I did *something* right.

ALTERNASCOPE

Scenario three: insistence. Sensing the disbelief in the crowd, you double-down and swear that not only did you have a wet dream, you're growing body hair, and have started shaving. It's patently obvious that you're lying, and the group laughs at you before leaving you alone in the corner of the playground.

As the school year continues, so do their taunts. You become more withdrawn, and more accustomed to bullying. When you arrive at Poole Grammar School and attract tormentors, you simply take it, not speaking up. You never see a school counsellor, you never talk with your GP about your delayed puberty, and you never take steroids to start it.

As you get closer to graduating Grammar School, you are still the small, childlike, friendless boy you were when you entered. You are depressed, about your suffering at school and about your gender identity, but don't speak up. Your grades are unremarkable. You don't apply to any universities.

You're working at the supermarket in your home town when puberty finally begins. You are twenty-two years old. Years of adult labor in a pre-adolescent body have taken their toll, and your bones are weak. They twist and warp as you grow, making it difficult and painful to move. Your voice cracks, but doesn't recover, staying neither high nor low. Your eyes are always downcast. You are deeply unhappy.

(MORE)

ALTERNASCOPE (CONT'D)
Your future is darker than it is
here.

AVERY
Oh my god.

COMPUTER
Yep, that one's a real drag.

AVERY
It... It was worth continuing to
listen, right? Because yeah, my
life could be a little better,
but-

COMPUTER
A lot better.

AVERY
-God, it could have been so much
worse.

COMPUTER
Most people arrive at that
conclusion without resorting to
dangerous technology, but I'm glad
you've clued-in. Now, can you turn
that machine off?

AVERY
Absolutely. I... Yeah, I don't
need to hear any more. Who knows
how depressing the next scenario
could be.?

SOUND FX: CLICKING of a few buttons.

AVERY
What's happening? Why won't it
turn off?

SOUND FX: The HUMMING speeds up.

ALTERNASCOPE
Core integrity diminished.
Initiating probability-collapse.

COMPUTER
Uh-oh.

AVERY
It's getting warmer, it's spinning
faster. What do I do?

COMPUTER
Pull the plug!

AVERY
There isn't one!

SOUND FX: Metallic BANGING.

AVERY
Okay, you- You were right, I
shouldn't have used the machine.
But I'm ready for this to be over
now.

SOUND FX: The HUMMING gets even louder.

COMPUTER
You need to get out of here.

AVERY
I'm sorry-

SOUND FX: The HUMMING crescendoes, followed by several
EXPLOSIONS. Then, the sound of RUSHING AIR, and a POP.

Beat.

COMPUTER
Hello? Are you there?

KYLE
Of course. Are you ready to start
recording?

COMPUTER
Avery, is that you? You sound
different.

CLOSING CREDITS

MUSIC: BLOOPY electronica.

AVERY
Next time on 'Swings and
Roundabouts'.

KYLE
Hi, I'm Kyle Hayes, and you're
listening to Swinging From The
Roundabouts.

COMPUTER
Wait, what?

AVERY
Swings and Roundabouts was brought
to you by me, Avery Edison. Music
was, once again, provided by Liam
Cooke.

(MORE)

AVERY (CONT'D)

Links to his work can be found in this episode's show notes at swingsandroundaboutspodcast.com/four, that's F-O-U-R spelled out. To find out when new episodes of the show are available, you can follow me at twitter.com/aedison, A-E-D-I-S-O-N, or find subscription links at swingsandroundaboutspodcast.com, or search for Swings and Roundabouts in iTunes, or the podcast app or service of your choice. Thanks for listening.

I love you.

MUSIC: CRESCENDOING electronica.