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)
AVERY (CONT'D)
What do you think I’m talking about?

COMPUTER
The first time you had sex.

AVERY
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.

AVERY
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.

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

COMPUTER
Then why can’t you remember your first time?

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

COMPUTER
Go for it.

AVERY
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.

AVERY
Exactly.

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

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.

I’m glad I installed that Wikipedia plugin.

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

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.

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

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

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

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.

I’ve just realised—you literally pitched a tent.

In fact—Okay, this is embarrassing.

(MORE)
AVERY (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?

AVERY
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?

AVERY
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.

MA IN 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 AVERY
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.
AVERY
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!?

AVERY
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.

AVERY
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.

AVERY
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.

AVERY
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.
AVERY
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.

AVERY
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?

AVERY
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.

AVERY
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.
AVERY
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-

AVERY
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.

AVERY
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.

AVERY
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?
AVERY
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.

AVERY
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?

ALTERNATSCOPE
Processing... Processing... Processing...

COMPUTER
This is going to end badly, I know it.

AVERY
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)
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)
You do this again and again, until your 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
deply 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 swingsandroundabootspodcast.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 swingsandroundabootspodcast.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.