

The Body Shoppe 2054

My wife died on our 47th anniversary. Two years later, at 70, I still got the urges common to all males past puberty. But I would never have guessed I would depend on technology to solve my problem.

In the clubhouse locker room, my friend Hayden smiled and said, “You heard about Jim?”

“Tell me,” I said. We all knew Hayden enjoyed locker-room gossip.

“Jim went to a new store on the mall and exchanged bodies with a young man! For two days, he packed in everything he could think of.”

“How did he do that?”

“He went to a store that has an app that lets two people trade bodies. Think about it. We could be young again—for a price,” he said, grinning.

“That sounds amazing. How does it work?”

“They have a stable of healthy young people willing to exchange bodies with an older person for a day or two. The kids make a bundle for a couple of days of inconvenience. You trade bodies but keep your personality. I thought: The idea is intriguing. A romp in a younger body might be worth considering. Then when your time’s up, you both revert to your normal selves.”

I thought about this idea for several days. Sex without relationship is a normal, biological act animals do routinely. And if both parties accept the idea of casual sex, no one gets hurt. Admittedly, shelling out a large amount of money for a one-night stand doesn’t make all that much sense. But recalling the early days of my marriage, the intensity of sex with a much younger body was a strong pull. I had the money and the desire, so I decided to go for it.

I went to the mall and found the store. A banner over the entrance proclaimed: Live your Fantasy! and a sign over the door read: The Body Shoppe. The owner, a man of about 40, built like he didn’t need the service he was peddling, greeted me.

“Come in!” he almost shouted.

Life-sized posters of young, attractive couples covered the walls, and at the back were two upright transparent cylinders, about 8 feet tall. “This is where the magic takes place,” he said. “And it’s painless. Lasts for as long as you want, then you’re back to your normal self. Fully insured and approved by the FDA.”

“If you’re interested, sit here, and I’ll pull up the file of our employees,” he said.

I flipped through images of young men, all healthy and clean-looking. Finally, I stopped on one about my size, with dark hair like I once had, a friendly face, and a baritone voice. “Is the charge the same for all of them?”

“Yes, a flat rate. You interested in Donovan?” he said, indicating the man showing on my monitor.

“I am.”

“The shortest time you can buy is 24 hours. The price for a day goes down by 50% past the first day. The set-up is the big cost.”

The price amounted to an entire month of my retirement income. Despite the cost, I signed a waiver of responsibility and paid for 24 hours.

On Saturday morning, I arrived at 8:00 A.M. for my appointment. The clerk told me to “dress young,” so I wore jeans and a sports shirt. Donovan showed up; we smiled at each other and shook hands.

“I’ve done this a few times,” Donovan said. “Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do.” He laughed.

Each of us got into one of the cylinders. The clerk locked the chambers and moved to a console where he pushed some buttons. It didn’t take long, and I only felt a slight vibration, but I stepped out of the cylinder and my hands were those of a young man. Donovan got out of the other cylinder, but slowly. Yes, he had my body.

As I drove away, I reviewed my plans. I had already discarded the idea of searching for someone at a movie theater. A grocery store aisle might work, but I settled on the golf course at my club.

I waited on a bench near the first hole like a spider hoping for a fly. Four women came out of the clubhouse and moved to the first tee. Each teed her ball and drove down the fairway. They were laughing as they walked away. A couple of men followed them. Then, my luck changed.

Finally, a young woman about Donovan’s age got out of her car, unloaded her cart and clubs, and came past the bench where I sat. She was alone. Her embossed leather golf bag looked expensive.

I admired her tall, willowy stance as she teed up her ball, drew back her driver, and swung with force—and missed!

“May I help you?” I asked. “Are you a beginner?”

“That was an easy guess,” she said with a smile. Her eyes got brighter. Donovan’s body was doing its job.

“I can help if you’ll permit me.”

“Would you mind? You can see I’m pretty much a beginner.”

I moved to where she stood, and her perfume, though not strong, was like smoke from a magic lantern.

“This might be a bit forward, but I’ll have to put my arms around you to show you how to fix your swing.”

“Of course,” she said, “if you’re not allergic.” She let out a small laugh.

My arms reached around her, and I put my hands on hers, gripping the club. Her hands were soft.

“Remember, you’re not aiming for the ball, but you’re swinging your club on a path that goes through the ball, as if the ball was a hologram. The smoother your swing, the farther it goes.”

She took four practice swings before placing the ball on the tee. I backed away, and she swung hard. The ball soared down the fairway, quite far for a woman.

“Lucky shot!” she yelled.

“With that kind of luck, you could win a tournament.”

“Hardly,” she said, “That’s only one shot.”

Sounds argumentative.

I teed up and drove my ball about the same distance she had gone. There were no players behind us, so we strolled down the fairway. It turned out she had not played for a long time and felt the need to get out more, and she was a widow. “The clubs,” she said, “belonged to my late husband.”

I told her I, too, was a widower, and that I understood her feeling of loss and the difficulty of adjusting. For a second, I thought she was going to tear up, but she took a deep breath, pursed her lips, and took her second shot.

We continued to play and chat as we walked. By the time we reached the ninth hole, the weather had warmed up, and I had learned her husband had died only a short while ago. I said, "Since this is a new activity for you, perhaps you shouldn't overdo it your first time out."

"I am tired," she said, and we sat on the grass in the shade of a giant elm.

"It's past noon," I said. "How about we get a bite? There are some good restaurants in this part of town."

"That's thoughtful of you, but I couldn't impose."

"Since we are both alone, we could get better acquainted," I said.

She said, "I planned a light snack at home. How about sharing my lunch?"

Was she kidding? I said, "I'd love to," and followed her car to an affluent part of town near the golf course.

She cut the crusts off her chicken salad sandwiches and placed a pickle spear beside them. A fruit bowl finished the menu. We sat on high stools around a granite-topped kitchen island.

"What would you like to drink? I have a cold beer if you like," she asked.

"Whatever you're having is fine."

"Iced tea coming up."

After the meal, we sat in silence till she moved her hand to cover mine and looked at me.

I felt aroused, but I needed to be sure.

"Should I go?" I asked, hoping she would say no.

"Please stay," she said, an open invitation. My venture was about to pay off, and my hormones were raging. Then the worst happened. My brain kicked in, and I made the mistake of thinking.

She was a vulnerable widow, and I was a fake. She needed care and understanding, friendship, before moving to the stage I was contemplating.

I told my brain to shut up. My brain said, “You’ll be gone in a few hours. She needs a relationship, not a roll in the hay. Tomorrow, you’re gone, and what’s she left with?”

I could feel my heart crumbling like a day-old cookie. I faced an ogre of guilt. It was hard, but I forced myself to say, “I’m sorry. I must go. It’ll be better for you if I just disappear.”

She almost pleaded, “Can’t you stay—for a while?”

I had to escape before I weakened. I opened the door, jacket in hand, and turned to see a tear on her cheek. I bolted for my car. My 24 hours couldn’t be over soon enough. I desperately wanted to return to being a lonely old man unwilling to injure someone. I still had standards, and I was better off being myself in the real world and not play acting.

Sunday morning, after I got my own body back, I felt like a sad, noble failure. I had spent a lot of money and all I got for it was a small shred of self-respect.

I was suffocating in the house, so I headed for the golf course, but not to the clubhouse where my friends would expect a full report. Instead, I sat on the bench at the first tee, trying some slow breathing to get back to the real world. Finally, groups filtered out of the clubhouse and began their rounds.

After about 45 minutes, a lone woman more in my age range drove up, unloaded her clubs, and headed for the first hole. She was stately and exuded quality, a classy lady.

As she strolled past me, I noticed her embossed leather golf bag. I waited while she teed up. Her technique wasn’t bad, but she sliced the ball to the far right. Shaking my head in amusement, I thought, *Some neighbors are probably picking her golf ball out of their pool this very moment.*

I smiled as I walked over to her and said, “May I help you with your swing?”