ORGANIC

A 20-minute sci-fi drama

By Jenna Jane

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Summary

In a future where everyone is enhancing their bodies with the latest tech, 81-year-old Donna Goldman is an anomaly – she's 100 percent organic. But now, there's a problem: She's dying. And a bionic body part is the only cure. Will non-binary cyborg Dr. Flores persuade her to abandon her sense of self to survive? This 20-minute sci-fi drama for two actors explores the relationship between the body and the self.

Cast of characters

A note from the playwright on gender references, below: These are only suggestions. Gender is just a performative social construct, anyway. Do whatever feels right to you.

DONNA GOLDMAN: Female, 70s-90s. All natural in a world of cyborgs. Sentimental, reflective, stubborn. Would rather suffer than be someone she's not.

DR. FLORES: Non-binary, 25-39. A cyborg, like everyone else in this society. A physician. They are actually in their 80s, but appear much younger. Practical, logical, progressive. A touch vain. Focused on the future. They exude a quiet sexual confidence with subtle swagger.

Costumes

DONNA GOLDMAN: A comfortable shirt and sweatpants. Padded calves, ankles, and feet covered in compression socks.

DR. FLORES: A white coat with a chic, professional, androgynous outfit underneath. How much they appear like a cyborg is up to the costumer's discretion. They can look like a normal human or the costumer can use metallic silver makeup to highlight certain body parts, like half their face or fingers.

Setting

A futuristic doctor's office. Clean, sterile. At minimum, an exam table and a rolling stool.

Content warning: Brief mentions of suicide and infertility.

We hear a clock ticking. Lights up on a doctor's office, 200 years in the future. DONNA, an 81-year-old woman, is sitting on an exam table in a doctor's office. Her sweatpants are rolled up to just below her knees, revealing extremely swollen calves, ankles, and feet covered in compression socks. She is visibly nervous. The clock ticking sound stops the moment DR. FLORES walks in, looking down at their tablet. They are androgynous, flawless, and chicly dressed under their white coat.

DR. FLORES

Alright, Mrs. Goldman, your blood work shows…

(DR. FLORES looks up at DONNA, gasps and nearly drops the tablet. They simply look at each other for a moment.)

I'm so sorry, I don't mean to—

DONNA

Stare?

DR. FLORES

I'm sorry. The nurse warned me, but it's just –

DONNA

I'm used to it.

DR. FLORES

It's just I've never seen someone who's… well, I just didn't know there were people like you out there anymore. At least, not in an economically developed country. People who are—

DONNA

100 percent organic?

(DR. FLORES nods.)

DONNA (CONT'D)

Am I really the only person you've ever met without upgrades?

(DONNA searches DR. FLORES' face for something. DR. FLORES nods again.)

DONNA (CONT'D)

Well, to be fair, I've never met anyone else who's unenhanced, either.

DR. FLORES

I really must apologize for my reaction, Mrs. Goldman. This is terribly unprofessional.

DONNA

Happens all the time. Can we just talk about my blood work, please?

DR. FLORES

Yes. Of course. Let's start over. My name is Dr. Flores.

(DR. FLORES extends a fist. DONNA extends her hand to shake, then tentatively curls it into a ball and fist bumps DR. FLORES.)

DONNA

Donna Goldman.

DR. FLORES

It's nice to meet you, Mrs. Goldman. Your blood work shows you're in late-stage kidney failure, which explains the swelling in your ankles. But it's a simple fix. No big deal. We can swap out your kidney for a LIFE CORP bionic kidney this afternoon.

DONNA

What are my other options?

DR. FLORES

(A beat, confused.)

LIFE CORP is the only manufacturer of bionic organs. They bought up the patents to all the --

DONNA

I don’t want a bionic kidney. So, what are my other options?

DR. FLORES

Are you kidding?

DONNA

Do I look like I’m kidding?

DR. FLORES

Natural death rates are at historic lows, Mrs. Goldman. You'd have to wait for an accident, a homicide, a suicide. You could be on the organic transplant waitlist for 30 years or more. But good luck finding a doctor who's trained or willing to do the surgery.

(A beat.)

You don't have 30 years. With that kidney, you've got one year, if you're lucky.

(Looking at their tablet.)

Your chart says you're 81. Kidney failure is not unusual in someone your age, especially someone who hasn't had any other internal enhancements. Eighty-one years old and fully organic. Don't your joints hurt? Your back?

DONNA

What about medication?

DR. FLORES

Why would anyone want to coddle a bad kidney with meds when they can get a bionic one? Even if you need firmware updates every now and then. You can download them all through LIFE CORP's app. It's free for the first year...

(DR. FLORES pushes up their sleeve, runs their fingertips along their inner forearm and taps around, as if they're pulling up an app to show DONNA.)

DR. FLORES (CONT'D)

...Well, it's free as long as you don't mind ads in your dreams.

(Stops.)

Right. You don't have a tactile interface, do you? That’s almost as unheard of as being fully organic.

(Pushing their sleeve back down.)

Mrs. Goldman, help me understand your hesitation here. Please.

DONNA

I guess I just feel like, if I start swapping out all my real parts for artificial ones, at some point I stop being me.

(A pause, then DR. FLORES bursts out laughing hysterically.)

DONNA (CONT’D)

OK, now THAT is unprofessional.

DR. FLORES

(Laughing throughout.)

I’m so sorry, it’s just so… backward! It’s just a kidney!

DONNA

It’s just a kidney for now! But, next, it’s silicon discs in your spine, night vision eyes, Swiss army knife fingers –

DR. FLORES

And what’s wrong with any of that?

DONNA

3-D printed vocal cords, artificial skin grafting –

DR. FLORES

Well, technically, my skin was 60 percent organically farmed.

DONNA

My point is, a bionic kidney is a gateway organ. Who knows what I’m willing to compromise on next?

DR. FLORES

Is it really a compromise to improve your quality of life?

DONNA

But how far can you go before you stop being you?

DR. FLORES

Listen, aside from 85 percent of my brain, I’m fully enhanced. And I’ve never felt more like myself.

DONNA

What do you mean?

DR. FLORES

My whole body is bespoke. It's designer. It's custom. And that means what's on the outside now reflects what's going on in here.

(Taps their temple.)

I was assigned female at birth. But it didn't feel like it fit right. So, after 50 years or so, I got masculine enhancements. It was new. It was different. It was exciting. But it didn't exactly fit right either. There were things I loved about masculinity and things I missed about femininity.

(Euphorically admiring their own body.)

So, after another 10 years, I got my body tailored to the specs in my brain. Now, I look and feel exactly like the person I am in my mind. A perfect fit. And it's euphoric.

DONNA

I never thought of it like that. I'm happy for you.

DR. FLORES

You're… happy for me?

DONNA

I'm happy you feel like yourself. Everyone deserves to feel authentic.

DR. FLORES

Not to mention, with my titanium-lined bones and silicon joints, my body is strong enough for anything. Climb a mountain? Sure. Rearrange the living room furniture one-handed? No problem. The fat redistribution valve in my navel means I can adjust my physique to whatever body type is fashionable this season. And with my solar panel fingernails, I never have to sleep. What part of that sounds bad to you?

DONNA

I think I would miss sleep. You don't miss dreaming?

DR. FLORES

Colossal waste of time. Sleep is for lazy people.

DONNA

Rest is important!

DR. FLORES

Why?

DONNA

(Flustered.)

It just is!

DR. FLORES

When your body has nothing to heal, nothing to restore, why lose productivity? Maximizing your time is what matters, Mrs. Goldman.

DONNA

It’s Ms.

DR. FLORES

I’m sorry?

DONNA

You keep calling me Mrs. Goldman. It’s Ms.

DR. FLORES

My apologies, I could have sworn your chart said –

DONNA

It’s fine.

DR. FLORES

It’s just a kidney, Ms. Goldman. You’ll still be you.

DONNA

Will I?

DR. FLORES

Well, I suppose it depends on how you look at it. What makes you, you? Is it your spleen? Your esophagus?

DONNA

My mind, I suppose. My consciousness.

DR. FLORES

So, is the body simply a protective housing for the brain, then? Or is the brain’s primary function to keep the body alive?

DONNA

What do you mean?

DR. FLORES

Let’s say someone removed your brain from your 100 percent organic body and swapped it out with someone else’s brain. Are you still you?

DONNA

Definitely not.

DR. FLORES

But you’d still have all the same parts, except one.

DONNA

But my mind wouldn’t be captain of the ship anymore.

DR. FLORES

Ah, but if someone transplanted your brain into an entirely different body, are you still you?

DONNA

I don’t know. I don’t think so.

DR. FLORES

But you’d be… what was it you said? Captain of the ship.

DONNA

But it’s not my ship anymore!

DR. FLORES

Wouldn’t it become your ship if your mind was behind the wheel? What makes you comfortable with an organic kidney transplant? It’s a piece of someone else. Why doesn’t that threaten your sense of self?

DONNA

Because it's HUMAN, not a machine! Don't you think there comes a point where we aren't even human anymore? With all the tinkering and inauthenticity, at what point do we become a different species entirely?

DR. FLORES

Maybe being human is overrated. Why limit yourself? Why not transcend? Post-human? Beyond-human? Super-human? LIFE CORP is so close to putting the first bionic womb on the market. Imagine! Infertility could be a thing of the past.

DONNA

But have you thought about the implications of that? Will the… creations of that bionic womb be fully human? Will they have the same rights? What if the manufacturer claims parental rights?

DR. FLORES

You’re overthinking it.

DONNA

Maybe you’re underthinking it.

DR. FLORES

It just so happens I’m building an app that would help you with overthinking.

(DR. FLORES holds up their forearm and excitedly indicates their tactile interface.)

DR. FLORES (CONT’D)

It can regulate your emotions. People would never have to feel sadness or social anxiety again! Doesn’t that sound… peaceful to you?

DONNA

No, Carmen, you can’t just numb your emotions to get through life.

(DR. FLORES looks at DONNA, confused.)

DR. FLORES

How do you know my first name?

DONNA

Oh, I... must have seen it on the front door.