

PLEASE STAND BY

Written by
Finn Whitehead

BLACK SCREEN.

TITLE CARD: PLEASE STAND BY

A child's voice, TELLY, is heard. Along with a young woman, INTERVIEWER.

INTERVIEWER (V.O)
Alright. How are you?

TV (V.O)
Good.

INTERVIEWER (V.O)
Good. We're gonna talk about school, okay?

INT. INTERVIEW ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Telly, 8, is placed directly in front of the camera. They have an old TV box for a head with two antennas sticking directly up. Two pixelated eyes focus on the person behind the camera.

Silence passes before Telly answers.

TELLY (V.O)
Okay.

INT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - DAY

Telly sits at their desk, kicking their feet and drawing. The TEACHER begins to hand back papers, inaudibly addressing the class.

INTERVIEWER (V.O)
Do you like school?

TELLY (V.O)
No.

INTERVIEWER (V.O)
Why not?

The teacher arrives at Telly's desk, handing back a quiz with a 'D-' in the corner. They blink at the score.

TELLY (V.O)
I'm not very good at it.

INTERVIEWER (V.O)
Why do you say that?

Telly turns to see their non-TV-headed classmates, happily sharing their grades. A's and B's are framed proudly on their quizzes.

TELLY (V.O.)
Cause that's what everyone tells me.

Telly tilts their head to the side as the sound of static faintly buzzes. They flip over their quiz, hiding their grade.

TELLY (V.O)
Even my doctor.

INTERVIEWER (V.O)
Your doctor tells you that you're not good at school?

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Telly sits on the bed of a doctor's office with their parents standing at their side. Their TV screen is painted in black and white static. Telly peels away at the thin layer of paper that covers the examination table as a doctor is inaudibly speaking to the parents.

TELLY (V.O)
Yeah. She says that I struggle to pay attention or meet deadlines cause my brain runs around too much.

The doctor hands Telly a pill bottle as the static continues.

Telly takes out a pill and swallows it.

TELLY (V.O) (CONT'D)
But, she gave me pills to fix it.

INTERVIEWER (V.O)
Do they help?

The static stops as Telly's pixelated eyes return, but not before the TV screen abruptly shut off.

TELLY (V.O)
I guess so.

INT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY

Telly sits at their desk, completely still. Their TV screen is dark and reflective.

INTERVIEWER (V.O)

Do they make you better at school?

The teacher hands Telly a sheet of paper. An 'A' followed by a 'Good Work!' is written in the corner, tied together with a sloppy smily face.

Telly looks up from the paper. An antenna on the TV bends down. Faint static is heard.

TELLY (V.O.)

Yeah.

INT. KITCHEN - EVENING

Telly sits at the kitchen table. Their big pixelated eyes have returned. They dip a paint brush into a water cup as their mom prepares food in the back.

INTERVIEWER (V.O)

What's home like?

TELLY (V.O)

I like being at home more than school.

INTERVIEWER (V.O)

Oh yeah?

TELLY (V.O)

Yeah. I don't need the pills there. I can focus on my own.

INTERVIEWER (V.O)

What kind of stuff do you focus on?

TELLY (V.O)

Stuff I like.

The scene suddenly shifts as Telly's painting are replaced with homework. A grumpy looking TUTOR appears, pointing from paper to paper. The tutor speaks inaudibly.

TELLY (V.O) (CONT'D)

But, I still had to get a tutor for school stuff.

The static on their screen comes back, louder than before. Telly begins to sink into the kitchen seat, deeply slouching. Their antennas bend down with them. The tutor taps the table with a pen angrily, prompting Telly to sit back up.

TELLY (V.O) (CONT'D)
I don't like her. She's rude.

INTERVIEWER (V.O)
Oh, I'm sorry.

INT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - DAY

A STUDENT takes his diorama off of a stool that's placed in the front of the classroom. He sits down at his desk. The class inaudibly claps as Telly moves to the front of the class, holding their own diorama.

INTERVIEWER (V.O)
Do you have accommodations?

TELLY
What?

INTERVIEWER (V.O.)
Do you have, uhm... Do you have a 504?

Despite their bent antennas and blank screen, Telly places their project down on the stool and begins to read off of note cards.

TELLY (V.O)
Oh, yes.

INTERVIEWER (V.O)
What's a 504 mean to you?

TELLY (V.O)
It's like, a thing that makes me an exception to some rules. It's supposed to help me in school. Like, having me sit closer to the teacher or giving me more time to work on things.

Telly's screen switches to static abruptly as they drop their cards. They topple, attempting to catch the stool. However, their diorama falls to the floor, breaking.

THEIR (V.O)
I don't like to use it though.

Telly fixes their antennas, stopping the static. Their screen goes dark again as they pick up their broken diorama.

INTERVIEWER (V.O)
Why's that?

TELLY (V.O)
I don't know.
(Beat)
I just don't need it.

INT. TELLY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Telly sits on the floor of their dark bedroom, facing their full length mirror, their screen full of static. It buzzes faintly.

Telly raises their hands to both sides of the TV, attempting to take it off.

INTERVIEWER (V.O)
I don't really like using mine
either.

TELLY (V.O)
You have a 504?

INTERVIEWER (V.O)
Kind of. I have something like it.

Telly rises to their feet, continuing to pull at the TV head.

TELLY (V.O)
Do you have something wrong with
you, too?

The static grows louder as Telly stumbles backwards, bumping into their desk.

Pens and books fall to the floor. However, that doesn't stop Telly's aggressive attempt at removing the TV.

INTERVIEWER (V.O)
I don't think 'wrong' is the right
word.

Telly pulls at their antennas. Error messages flash on the TV screen.

TELLY (V.O)
It's terrible.

Telly moves their hands to the underside of the TV, pushing forward. They slam into the mirror, breaking it.

Shards of glass fall to the floor, leaving behind a shattered reflection.

INTERVIEWER (V.O)

It can be.

The TV screen cycles through error messages before falling on the RGB Color Test. The neon colors illuminate the room as the static buzz turns to a steady, high pitched frequency.

Telly stops their movements, letting their arms drop to their side in defeat.

INTERVIEWER (V.O) (CONT'D)

But, it doesn't have to be.

They look at themselves in the shattered mirror, their RGB reflection abstracted by the cracks.

TELLY (V.O)

How?

Telly tilts their head.

INTERVIEWER (V.O)

That's up to you.

INT. ART CLASSROOM - DAY

A large painting of Telly's colorful and abstracted reflection hangs on the wall.

TELLY (V.O)

When will I grow out of it?

Telly stands next to the painting, their pixelated eyes beaming as they inaudibly present their work to the class.

More students and teachers join the small crowd.

INTERVIEWER (V.O)

You won't. But you'll grow into it.

Faint static is heard, intensifying before being switched off.

CUT TO BLACK.