

SCENE 1 INT LUCIA'S BEDROOM - DAY

FX: SARAH CRANKS A BABY MOBILE AND A SIMPLE MECHANICAL TUNE PLAYS. IT SLOWS TO A STOP ON "I NEED TO STOP GROWING."

(LUCIA, OUR NARRATOR, SPEAKS IN A CALM EVEN TONE THROUGHOUT THE PIECE. SHE KNOWS WHAT IS GOING ON AND LITTLE PHASES HER FROM REALITY)

When my mother turns on the baby mobile over my head, I know that it means that she does not want me to hear her crying in the next room. The plastic horses chase each other above my head in a spectrum of blues and green, the song repeating itself without end until the gears run down. But the music does not hide the sobs through the wall, and I twist my neck at odd angles to listen better.

My mother is crying because of me. But there is little I can do to stop her tears. She cries because I am getting bigger, something that all healthy children are supposed to do. But for us, every inch I grow adds so many complications.

I need to stop growing.

I now have the body of a ten year old girl. It is a body that feels to me like a ticking time bomb. I cannot sit up, or speak words, it takes so much effort to direct my head so that I can look at people in the eye. But when I do, most of them will look away.

Except for Sarah, my mother. Often I am able to make eye contact with her, when she comes in to shift me in my bed or feed me pureed veg with the yellow plastic spoon. Our eyes meet and I can feel the muscles of my face pull back my entire head. I think that means I'm smiling, although I've never seen myself in a mirror. But more often than not she smiles, reaches up, and turns the mobile above my head on so that the music starts.

MUSIC: FÜR ALINA ALEXANDER MALTER FROM 0.00 PLAYS

THROUGHOUT REACHING ITS END AROUND THE WORDS
"STRETCHING OUT OF SKIN"

I don't think she knows I can hear her when she cries in the next room.

I'm not even sure Sarah realises I know what crying is, or what it means.

I cry, of course. It's one of the few forms of communication that I have. So I use it when I need to be changed and no one notices, when it has been too long since I've been held, when I am in pain. Just as a small infant would.

But I'm not small any more. I haven't been for a while.

I know this. Even in the body of a small girl, I'm more aware than most adults of what's going on around me. I use their language in my head to explain what I am seeing, the reactions of the people around me, the things I notice as I get older.

Recently, I hurt in more places. My back, my neck, even the growing pains in my legs, that is normal. But now, it's the top of my chest that has been aching. A sort of stretching out in the skin.

I know what that means.

FX: LUCIA STRUGGLES IN HER BED, GRUNTING.

Sometimes I spend hours thrusting my weight in my bed, trying to turn over onto my stomach. I keep thinking that pressing against the mattress will stop the growing in my chest. For years it was a goal in physio, Sarah and the therapist holding a toy above my head, keeping it just out of reach in hopes I would want the stuffed animal enough to flip over.

I wanted to. Just like I want to stop growing now. I wanted to do something that would make Sarah smile, show her I can still make improvements and make life better for both of us.

But if I keep growing, I'm afraid nothing will get better, only more difficult.

MUSIC: 1:22-1:43

SCENE 2: LUCIA'S ROOM - MORNING

FX: SARAH STRUGGLES TO GET LUCIA OUT OF BED.

I knew it would happen. Even after trying to stop my growth every hour when everyone else thinks I'm just laying in bed, the worst still comes.

Nobody sees how much I'm trying to make bad things stop happening, and even with all my effort, they happen anyway.

SCENE 3: KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

FX: SARAH PUSHES THE WHEELCHAIR. IT STOPS ON "IT HADN'T HAPPENED BEFORE."

By the time Sarah had rolled me into the kitchen this morning she had become out of breath twice, first when she got me dressed, and again when she lifted me into my wheelchair. The back of my ankle was caught on the footrest causing my skin to scrape off. It hadn't happened before.

When Sarah fed me breakfast, it wasn't enough. I could have eaten a second jar at least, but I had no way of telling her.

She pulled at my shirt once while I was eating. It doesn't go over my belly anymore.

SCENE 4: DRIVEWAY - LATER

FX: SARAH OPENS THE CAR DOOR LIFTS LUCIA, AND CRASHES TO THE GROUND

Then she rolled me out to the car to go to physio like we do every Tuesday. The car door opens Sarah swings her back to lift me into the car, but instead we end up on the ground.

FX: LUCIA WAILS

The back of my left hand starts to feel like there's a liquid running out of it from where it scraped on the ground. I can't see the damage, but I start to cry.

Sarah folds the upper half of her body over me and makes the same noises she usually saves for the other room.

FX: SARAH IN THE DISTANCE TALKING TO A MAN.

She has to knock on a neighbour's door to get me in the car. I don't know the man who comes out, and I hear him say he can help, but he flinches when he sees me on the ground. Then he ducks back inside to put his shoes on before picking me up.

SCENE 5: PHYSYIO CLINIC - MIDDAY

By the time we get to the physio clinic the time for the session is already half way over, and it's a rule that they can't reschedule us. For once I stay in my chair, and the therapist looks at Sarah's back instead. They stretch her out over a ball, send her home with a pack for the freezer and some rub.

SCENE 6: HOME - AFTERNOON

We call the same neighbour from the car to ask him to help bring me inside when we get home.

MUSIC: 2:16 ISH (THE DEEP NOTE, I'M HAVING TROUBLE FIGURING OUT WHERE IT STARTS) AND TURNS INTO THE MOBILE AROUND “WE GO TO THE ZOO”

I hurt her. I hurt my mother.

I keep thinking of that as I watch the horses chase each other in circles around the mobile.

I hurt my mother.

Sarah has left the room to lay down in her own bed and all I want to do is figure out what else has changed now, or if I can do anything to stop things from getting worse. I'm already too big to lift into the car, how will we go anywhere now?

We go to the zoo, or the park, or play-class and see other mothers with their daughters enjoying the day just like us.

Is that all over?

I don't want it to change.

SCENE 7: A PUBLIC LOO

FX: A TOILET FLUSHES IN THE NEXT STALL

The places Sarah and I could go together had become more limited in recent years. The last time I grew I could no longer fit on a changing table in a public toilet. So Sarah spreads out a pad and lays me down on the tiled floor, my head next to the loo. It smells awful there and I can feel the cold floor seep through the pad and onto my back.

FX: A HAND DRYER STARTS AND FADES OUT

I tried not to cry about it, craning my head in the opposite direction of Sarah in hopes that she won't notice.

But we stopped going out for long days, so that I had to only be changed at home.

SCENE 8: LUCIA'S ROOM - 2 AM

FX: LUCIA GRUNTS AND STRUGGLES IN HER BED.

Sometimes I wake up when the house is still and Sarah is asleep, I push my arms or legs against the wall beside me, curl my toes into my feet in hopes that it will stop my growth. There's not much else I can do, but even if it doesn't make a difference I have to try and help. I push until my skin is red and raw from coming up against the wall, and after the pain stops I do it again.

I curl my toes again in the morning when Sarah puts my shoes on, so she doesn't see that my feet are growing. Sometimes I catch her looking at the lumps in my shoes but as she bends over to see where my toes are I curl my feet back up again, so she can't see how much I've grown.

I don't want her to have to buy me new shoes.

MUSIC: 4:16-4:30

SCENE 9: LUCIA'S ROOM - AFTERNOON

FX: A DOORBELL

FX: SARAH OPENS THE FRONT DOOR AND STARTS THE BUSTLE OF A JOYFUL GREETING.

We've had a guest.

FX: SARAH AND THE WOMAN WALK DOWN THE HALL.

The woman brought a roller suitcase. It was louder than her clacking heels as she pulled it across the floor. I think that means she was meant to stay here for days, but the woman only stayed for an hour.

My mother and she acted like they were friends at the door. The tones of joy hit my ears as my mother removed the woman's coat and hung it up. I've never heard my mother greet anyone like that, not even when family visits. It was a chattering, like the birds in April, after they've been quiet all winter.

The woman wasn't in our flat five minutes before Sarah led her to my room. From the way my mother was acting I could tell the woman was important, and I instantly wanted to be her friend too.

I tried to hold my head straight and curl my toes, just so I could look better, more like the child everyone expects when they hear about me.

But the woman takes a sharp breath in as soon as she sets eyes on me.

(THE WOMAN SPEAKS WITH A MONYED SOUTH AFRICAN ACCENT)

"Sarah, she's not wee anymore! The way you described her... I thought she'd be... you can't take care of her by yourself much longer!"

FX: SARAH CRANKS THE MOBILE AND IT STARTS TO PLAY BUT SLOWS AT END OF SCENE.

Sarah starts the horses above my head spinning as she talks about how we get on alright, her and me. Then I feel her pull my arms forward until I sit upright, scoot me to the side of the bed and pull the wheelchair closer to put me in it. We can just about shuffle over to the chair now, without her lifting me too much.

"Sarah, is this what you wanted for your life? When we were at school you beat me in marks by miles..."

Our eyes meet for a flicker. She knows enough to stop talking then. You have to give the woman credit for that.

Of course she looks away. I try to show her I know where to look to make a connection but knowing something is there to connect with seems to bother the woman even more.

SCENE 10: KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER
FX: SARAH GOES TO THE FRIDGE AND OPENS A JAR

In the kitchen the woman offers to put the kettle on. But I can tell it's a ploy because she keeps herself flat against the kitchen counter. She looks away quickly as Sarah opens a jar of sweet potato puree.

"She's going to have the body of a women soon Sarah. Aren't you afraid that men... that people will... you know... take advantage... just because they can get away with it?"

I've thought of what the woman is saying before, but I had hoped my mother would have never thought of it. Even if it was going to happen someday, I wanted to bare that on my own.

Why did the woman have to say that out loud?

Sarah says nothing, but puts the jar of food on my tray, inhaling as she stands.

By the time Sarah takes a step forward towards the woman, if she is panicked there is no sign of it.

She asks the woman to leave our home.

FX: THE WOMAN WALKS TO THE DOOR, GATHERS HER THINGS, AND LEAVES.

She does not help the woman with her bags, or show her to the door. Instead she keeps her hand on my shoulder as if staying by my side was exactly the support I needed.

As if I could hear and understand what was going on around me.

As if everything that happened to me mattered.

Because I am her daughter, it is true.

MUSIC: 6:29 - 6:59

SCENE 11: LUCIA'S ROOM - 6 AM

FX: SARAH CRANKS THE MOBILE AND IT PLAYS

FX: SARAH STRUGGLES TO FLIP OVER LUCIA

Most mornings Sarah lays down next to me, after flipping me over so I don't get sores. It's getting to be more and more of an effort and by the time Sarah lays down, she is winded.

FX: SARAH LAYS DOWN NEXT TO LUCIA, TRYING TO CATCH HER BREATH.

We lay like that for at least another hour, some morning she cries, other mornings she is still. Sarah never says anything to me during that hour. I guess she's thinking of what the day will bring.

As her child, maybe it is right that I never know what she worries about.

Sometimes during these mornings I try to reach my stiff hand out to her, it's meant to be a simple sign that I am here, listening, aware. Even if everyone else wants to believe otherwise, I am not just a simple body that needs to be carted around, there is something inside very aware and baring witness to every effort she makes.

FX: THE MOBILE SLOWS TO A STOP

FX: SARAH'S BREATHING CONTINUES.

I see what my mother does for me, and even though I have little control over anything in this world, I watch Sarah try to control who comes into my room, what happens around my bed, what I problems I bump into in this world.

As much as she does it for me, I do the same for her, even if my actions have little effect.

To love someone is to consider them, what they need or want even if you cannot change the world to be as they would need.

And so, when I reach out my hand in the mornings and make a noise it is because I want my mother to know, I see that she loves me.

I know I am loved, and I want nothing more than to give that same love back in her direction.

I keep reaching whenever I can. Especially in these mornings when we lay together.

Usually my fingers just bounce on the side of her ribcage, unable to land on anything to gain stability. My outstretched arm shakes from the muscle tension of trying.

I cannot reach, making my efforts seem like a haphazard accident or a meaningless movement.

But today, when we laid together as we always do, I reached her.

My hand settled on the side of her rib cage and we were still.

FX: SARAH SIGHS AND SHE STARTS TO BREATHE RHYTHMICALLY

Her breath slowed.

The crying stopped.

And we stayed like that until the sun came through the window.

Tomorrow I hope I will grow a bit more. Then I might be able to reach a bit further.

MUSIC: 6:51-7:18