

## Mom Says It's My Turn in the Body

From the inside of your head you ask, "Can I play now?"

"I just started playing," your sister says in your voice. She is deconstructing your Lego starship and sticking the pieces back together at odd angles. You try to keep a mental tab on the bricks so you can fix it when you have control of your body again, but she's tossing pieces all over the carpet. The Legos halo around your crisscrossed legs like shrapnel.

Mom says she can play with any of your toys, and you can't complain because she's your sister, and you were so sad when she was dead, so now you should be happy.

Before Milly came back, Mom spent all day laying on the couch, looking at her phone. She wouldn't talk, and most nights, you'd have to microwave EasyMac for dinner. Mom didn't eat very much.

One night your stomach was growling, so you snuck out of your room and saw Mom in the dark at the dining table. She was reading something on her laptop and holding Milly's stuffed rabbit. You were scared she would see you awake, so you went back to your room.

The next day you came home from school and all the lights were off. Mom was arranging Milly's clothes and toys on the table. She said she knew a way to bring Milly back, but she needed your help. She needed your body.

"Why can't she have her own body?" you asked, but you already knew the answer.

You were crouched under your desk in the fifth-grade hallway while Milly was across the school in the third-grade hallway taking a math test. You were hugging your knees and shivering the whole time because you could hear it. One of those firecracker bursts was Milly. You asked to see her body even though Mom said no at first and then she said fine. She was shredded up so much from the bullets that her head was barely hanging on. Her skin looked like fabric.

"You always share with your sister," said Mom. "It's the same." Mom had you lay on the table with Milly's stuff and hold her rabbit.

Mom sat by your head and held your ears. She whispered something in a deep, alien voice. You craned back and saw her eyes roll paper white. Her jaw stretched like a snake, and bottom teeth rose from a pure black oval. There was something coming out of her. You tried to scream stop, but you were outside your body—the ceiling pulling you in. Then you heard Milly's voice in your head, and you flew to the backseat. The backseat is like a video game of yourself that you can't play, just watch.

Now you feel like it isn't fair because Milly is driving almost all of the time, and you have to sit back and wait because Mom always wants to talk to her. But in a way, it's much better now that Mom is smiling and walking around instead of laying on the couch all the time.

When Mom gets home Milly rushes to hug her. Mom sits dinner on the counter, pulls you into her arms, and asks, "Who's driving?"

"Milly," says Milly.

"Did you give your brother a turn?" asks Mom.

"Yes," says Milly, "he had school and then he played for a while when we got home."

Sometimes when you really have something to say, you can wrestle back control of your tongue. You say, "I only played for thirty minutes, and Milly said she was going to play for thirty minutes, and it's been thirty minutes, and she won't give it back."

"Thirty minutes isn't that long," says Mom. "Let Milly eat dinner with me, then you can drive during TV time."

Milly jumps in and says, “Okay,” which you agree with, even though you can watch TV whether you’re driving or not, as long as Milly is watching too.

Dinner is pasta with spinach and cherry tomatoes, and Milly eats around all the tomatoes even though you like tomatoes, and you try to tell her that since she’s in your body with your taste buds, she will like tomatoes too. She ignores you and the tomatoes sit there like half open lips. Mom scrapes the plate over the trash even though you and Milly both used to scrape your own plates. Milly stands at Mom’s hip and watches the tomatoes plunk into the garbage.

Milly goes to the backseat while you watch cartoons, and Mom unzips your backpack. Mom does all your homework now so you and Milly can play. Milly doesn’t usually come out during school because she doesn’t understand fifth grade work and also because she’s scared of it happening again. Sometimes you let her play during recess. She swings on the swings if no one’s using them but runs away or goes to the backseat if someone gets too close.

The other kids avoid you because they think your sister died and they don’t know how to talk to you about it, but they can’t think of anything else to talk about. It’s hard to be at school because it feels like you have a big secret. Mom told you never to tell anybody about Milly being inside you because they might call the police. At lunch you don’t know who to talk to, so you sit at the quiet table and talk to Milly.

Sometimes Milly tries to talk to you while you're in class, and you have to ignore her. Once you said, "Be quiet," out loud while the teacher was talking and he looked at you funny and later asked if you were okay. You said, "I'm okay. I'm sorry I said be quiet, but I wasn't talking to you." You stared at your desk, and the teacher glared at some other kids because they were whispering. It's better at home, where you have Mom.

After TV, Mom says go take a shower, and Milly asks if she can take it. She takes off your clothes and looks at your body in the mirror. She palms your short hair and digs up your nose, and she spreads your butt cheeks and swings your penis around like a tail. In the shower, she uncages your mouth to drink water and stands for a long time with one hand wrapped on your neck. You tell her to hurry up.

When Milly gets out of the shower Mom is sitting on your bed with a shopping bag and Milly's stuffed rabbit. "Who's driving?" she asks, and Milly says it's her. "Good," says Mom, "try this on." She takes out a blue dress with white flowers that looks too big for Milly but big enough for you. You want to say, "No, I don't want to!" but Milly snatches it up and Mom is smiling with her whole face.

It fits, and Mom says let me see, and Milly twirls around, and they both laugh. She jumps on your bed and lays in Mom's lap, and Mom strokes your hair all the way down to your neck and back where you don't have any hair but Milly used to. She kisses your neck. After a while, Milly's thoughts go quiet, and you get up.

“I think Milly’s asleep,” you say. “Do I still have to wear this dress?”

Mom holds you close and shakes her head. “No, but thank you for being accommodating. You don’t know how much it helps me.” And then she is crying again, but she says they’re happy tears.

The next day, Milly doesn’t wake up with you. In class, you keep asking if she’s there and tapping on your head, but she doesn’t respond. During recess you sit by yourself and ask Milly to please say something. She says nothing. You start crying, and your teacher calls you over to ask what’s wrong. You say, “Milly,” and he walks you to the counselor’s office. Mom comes and picks you up in her car. She asks why you were crying, and you don’t know what to say.

“Who’s driving?” she asks.

“You are,” you say, and she laughs and ruffles your hair, but her eyes are hard and worried.

“I mean who’s driving inside,” she says.

You don't want to tell her that Milly is quiet because you know what happened last time Milly was lost. You don't want Mom to go back to laying on the couch. You want her to keep laughing and bringing home dinner and doing your homework. You want her to hug you again like she hugs Milly—like she wants to keep you there.

“Milly,” you say, and Mom smiles.