

Ginger

by Mark Lyons

markielyons@yahoo.com

OVER BLACK:

A door CREAKS open and tiny footsteps SHUFFLE on a carpet.
Someone startles awake with a deep breath, and then silence.

JILLIAN (O.S.)
(whisper)
Are you up?

Another tiny footstep.

JILLIAN (O.S.)
Did you hear that?

A blanket ruffles and someone grunts.

JILLIAN (O.S.)
Did you hear that?

GREG (O.S.)
(lethargic)
Hear what?

JILLIAN (O.S.)
Turn on the light.

After a moment, adult footsteps walk across a carpet and the light turns on.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

GREG, 30's, stands by the lightswitch.

JILLIAN, 30's, is already sat up in bed. Her wheelchair sits beside her.

Jillian gasps at an infant standing in the corner.

JILLIAN
Holy shit!

GINGER, a seven month-old baby, stands straight up beside the dresser. She doesn't hold on to anything.

Greg shields his eyes from the sudden light and sees Ginger.

GREG
What the hell?

Ginger walks, strong, to her mom.

Jillian lunges her arms out as best she can, expecting Ginger to fall.

But she doesn't. The baby stands upright in front of her mother, staring at nothing.

Ginger's eyes are far and away as Jillian watches her.

EXT. FRONT YARD - DAY

A tiny two-ring wading pool is set up in the large yard.

GABRIELLE, 8, splashes in the pool by herself.

Jillian and MEGHAN, late-20's, lay out in folding chairs close by, soaking up the strong country sun.

Jillian's wheelchair rests an arm's reach away.

MEGHAN

-- She's not even strong enough.

JILLIAN

I'm telling you, she walked into our room last night. She was standing right in front of me.

Ginger lays on a towel next to Jillian, smothered in sunscreen. She giggles and grabs at her feet.

MEGHAN

She's barely crawling yet.

JILLIAN

She was standing on her own two legs by herself. She walked right over to me, no help or nothing.

MEGHAN

I've heard of babies sitting up or trying to crawl in their sleep before, but never of them actually walking. Especially if they haven't learned yet.

Jillian runs her fingers through Ginger's bangs, then takes a sip from a cup of lemonade.

She stirs the ice up with a straw.

MEGHAN

I didn't think it was possible.

JILLIAN

She did it last night.

MEGHAN

Right out of her crib?

JILLIAN

She had to've. It'd be the only way she could get out.

MEGHAN

Were her eyes closed?

JILLIAN

They were open, but they were blank, like she wasn't staring at anything. Just far away.

MEGHAN

I don't know what to tell you, Jilly.

From the pool, Gabrielle notices a golden retriever across the street at a neighbor's house.

Gabrielle gets out the pool and politely walks over to them.

GABRIELLE

Mommy, can we go see Rose? Rose is out across the street.

JILLIAN

Okay. Give Aunt Meghan and me a couple minutes and we'll go over, okay?

GABRIELLE

Can I go by myself? I'll look both ways.

JILLIAN

Remember, sweetheart? We don't want you going that close to the ditch by yourself. Daddy saw a snake there the other day and we don't want you to get bit. Just give us a couple minutes.

Content with that, Gabriel runs back to the wading pool and jumps in.

MEGHAN

How old was Gabrielle when she started walking?

JILLIAN

Almost fourteen months.

MEGHAN

Wow. And Ginger's walking at seven.

Jillian lifts herself into the nearby wheelchair.

JILLIAN

Only last night, when she was sleeping.

Meghan helps thrust Jillian's limp legs into the stirrups and picks Ginger up.

Jillian sets her lemonade and straw beside her in the chair and prepares to take Ginger.

MEGHAN

I can talk to Dr. Braxton at work tomorrow, but I don't know if he can be of any help.

Meghan gently sits the baby down into Jillian's lap.

Ginger immediately eyes the cup full of lemonade, almost in arm's reach.

JILLIAN

I'd appreciate it.

Gabrielle walks over to them and they all make their way down the gravel driveway and across the street to Rose.

Ginger still tries to reach for the cup.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jillian wakes and reaches for the wheelchair by the bed.

Greg startles in his sleep next to her.

GREG

You okay, sweetheart?

JILLIAN

Yeah. It's just pee.

GREG

Want me to help you?

Jillian scoots herself into the chair.

JILLIAN

I got it.

Greg turns his pillow over and lies his head back down on the cool side.

Jillian wheels herself out.

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Jillian wheels in and, using the sink as support, plops herself onto the toilet seat.

She scoots her panties down and, after a moment, tinkles.

She hears a faint thud and listens close.

Tiny footsteps scurry in the hallway and Jillian gasps as the bathroom door thrusts open.

Ginger pushes herself through and walks straight to the bathtub, unaided.

JILLIAN

Ginger!

Ginger reaches for the hot water tap and spins it on.

The seven month-old baby leans over the tub and watches the water pour out from the spigot.

JILLIAN

No, Ginger. Greg!

Jillian reaches out to pull Ginger away from the steaming faucet, but falls to the floor because of her useless legs.

She pulls herself over to the standing infant.

JILLIAN

Come here, baby.

Ginger turns without losing her balance. She stares straight at Jillian with urgent eyes.

GINGER

(piercing, garbled voice)

Get them off her! You have to get them off her!

Jillian pulls her arms back away from her baby, scared.

JILLIAN

Greg!

Greg rushes in and freezes when he sees Ginger standing over Jillian on the floor.

Ginger doesn't take her eyes off her mother.

GINGER

The alkaline!

Jillian, lost, shakes her head and closes her eyes.

GINGER

Punch her in the throat! Punch a hole in her throat!

Ginger calms and just stands still, her eyes far away.

GINGER

(a garbled whisper)

Breathe for her.

Greg bends down and pries a straw out of Ginger's clutched hand. The same straw that was in the lemonade earlier.

Greg sets it aside on the sink and leans back down to Ginger and Jillian.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Ginger sits in her bouncee, quiet. She plays with an over-sized set of color-coated plastic keys.

JILLIAN (O.S.)

She's fine, now. Her regular self.

Ginger throws the keys on the floor and forgets about them.

A moment later, she hears a ball bounce somewhere and looks around for it.

JILLIAN (O.S.)

I don't know. Who else can we call? He doesn't know anybody who can help?

GABRIELLE (O.S.)

I'm going to play outside, mommy.

JILLIAN (O.S.)

Okay. Be careful, honey.

Gabrielle skips in from the kitchen carrying a tennis ball.

She stops, picks the plastic keys off the carpet, and sets them back in front of Ginger.

Gabrielle walks out the door. Ginger watches her and the yellow fuzzy ball disappear.

Ginger remembers the keys and picks them up again.

EXT. FRONT YARD - DAY

Gabrielle tosses the tennis ball as high as she can into the air and attempts to catch it.

She tries again.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Jillian, in her wheelchair, cradles the phone in her shoulder and peels vegetables over a garbage can with a sharp paring knife.

JILLIAN

All right. I'll call you again after supper.

She lets the phone slide down onto her lap and continues to peel and chop the vegetables.

EXT. FRONT YARD - CONTINUOUS

Gabrielle tosses the ball just high enough to catch now.

She sees the golden retriever outside across the street and smiles.

GABRIELLE

Hi, Rose! Hi pretty girl!

Gabrielle inches her way to the edge of the yard, by the ditch, admiring the dog.

Rose looks back at her, dreary.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Jillian lays the cutting board on the counter and puts the phone back on the cradle.

She rolls herself over to the sink and washes the paring knife and sets it aside.

She washes her hands.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ginger throws the keys on the floor.

She looks at the front door for Gabrielle to come pick them up again.

EXT. FRONT YARD - CONTINUOUS

Gabrielle still stands in the same spot staring at Rose, who's laid herself down on the cool gravel driveway.

Gabrielle tosses the ball lightly into the air a couple times.

She smiles at Rose and drops the tennis ball.

She bends down to pick it up and stops mid-way.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

A blood-curdling scream freezes Jillian and she looks into the living room.

The scream doesn't stop and Jillian wheels herself into the-

LIVING ROOM.

Ginger watches her mother frantically wheel her chair to the front windows and look out.

Greg hurries in from a hallway.

GREG
What's the matter?

JILLIAN
I don't know. She's just standing
there.

Greg looks out the window.

Gabrielle just stands, facing the house across the street.
She screams and screams.

The tennis ball lays on the ground in front of her.

Rose, alarmed, barks at Gabrielle from across the street.

GREG
Shit, she's by the ditch!

EXT. FRONT YARD - CONTINUOUS

Greg bursts out the house and rushes to Gabrielle's side,
cautious of any slithering in the grass.

Gabrielle still screams. Rose still barks.

GREG
Did you get bit, sweetheart?
Where'd it go?

Gabrielle just cries and screams louder.

Greg looks at the dark tennis ball in front of her and leans
closer to it.

Red fire ants smother the yellow fuzz.

He looks at Gabrielle's feet. She stands on a dirt patch.

Hundreds and hundreds of the tiny red razor insects envelop
her bare legs.

Her face turns red from screaming.

Greg grabs her and tosses her into thick green grass. He
brushes and swats the ants away, but there's too many.

He picks her up and rushes her towards the house.

JILLIAN
What's wrong with her?

GREG
Fucking ants all over her!

He rips Gabrielle's clothes and shoes off before she's even in the house.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Gabrielle screams and kicks her legs violently in the bathwater, trying to get the ants off.

Greg still brushes at them.

They drown in the bathwater.

Jillian sits anxious in her wheelchair, a large towel at the ready in her arms.

Greg lifts Gabrielle out of the tub and swipes the last few clinging ants back into the water.

He sets her on Jillian's lap and she dries her.

Gabrielle still kicks her legs a little from the pain.

Round red irritation bites pockmark her calves and thighs.

JILLIAN

I don't like how swollen she is.

GREG

I'll put some calamine on her, and
I'll take her to the hospital.

Jillian nods and hugs Gabrielle close to her.

Greg opens the medicine cabinet and Gabrielle starts to convulse lightly in Jillian's lap.

JILLIAN

Honey?

Soon, Gabrielle's eyes roll back into her head and she begins to seizure.

JILLIAN

(pleading)

Baby, relax!

Greg bends down and tries to hold Gabrielle steady.

JILLIAN

Gabby?! Gabby? What's wrong?

Gabrielle's eyes come to and she begins shaking, her muscles locking together. She sweats profusely.

She tries to talk, but nothing comes out.

JILLIAN

Honey, she's allergic.

GREG

She's in shock.

Gabrielle's eyes roll back into her head again and her face turns blue.

JILLIAN

Baby, her throat!

It's swollen thick.

Gabrielle fights for air and Greg and Jillian can only hold her tight.

JILLIAN

She can't breathe!

Greg panics. He holds Gabrielle's face close to his.

GREG

Relax, sweetheart. Please. Relax.

Jillian cries, helpless.

JILLIAN

Baby! Do something.

Greg looks around and his eyes fall on the straw on the sink from the night before, the one he had pried out of Ginger's clutched hands.

He looks back at Gabrielle's swollen throat.

Greg races out of the room.

Jillian holds Gabrielle close and kisses her forehead.

Gabrielle's eyes swell, too.

Ginger happily rolls her bouncee into the doorway, but stops when she sees Jillian and Gabrielle.

Ginger senses something wrong.

Gabrielle starts turning blue. She's not getting any air and her chest doesn't rise anymore.

JILLIAN

Hurry! She's not breathing!

Greg scoots Ginger out of the way and hurries in. He holds the paring knife Jillian was peeling vegetables with.

He bends down and tilts Gabrielle's head back as far as it will go.

Jillian cries in her wheelchair, holding Gabrielle on her lap. She shakes her head no.

JILLIAN

Honey?

Jillian wants to stop him, but can't. Gabrielle's turning purple.

Greg slowly presses the paring knife into Gabrielle's throat, just underneath the adam's apple.

It punctures her skin and Greg presses the blade further in to make a small incision.

He pulls the paring knife back out and quickly dabs the little bit of blood around the wound.

Jillian shields her eyes as Greg gently pokes his finger into the incision to open it.

He reaches out and grabs the straw off the sink.

Keeping the wound in Gabrielle's throat propped open with his finger, Greg presses the straw in.

Gabrielle's hole quickly clogs with blood and broken flesh and Greg jams the straw into her windpipe before it can clog any further.

He holds the straw gently out of her throat and waits.

Gabrielle still doesn't breathe.

Greg looks behind him at the doorway.

Ginger still stands in her bouncee, watching them.

Greg takes a few breaths, leans over, and blows gently into the straw sticking out Gabrielle's throat.

He waits a moment, then blows again.

Gabrielle's chest rises with every breath, but only from Greg's air as he blows.

He breathes for her a few more times before she finally kicks and begins to breathe on her own.

She struggles, but Gabrielle's breathing finally regulates.

Jillian cries and dabs a little more blood that seeps.

Greg tries to catch his own breath and he looks at Jillian, confused and fatigued by everything.

GREG

I'm going to go call the ambulance.

JILLIAN

Baby? What's going on with Ginger?

Greg looks at Ginger, then back at Jillian and Gabrielle and her homemade trache.

He shakes his head.

GREG

I don't know.

Greg hurries out of the room.

Jillian holds the straw out of Gabrielle's throat for her and waits.

She looks at the ant wreckage in the bathtub. Red abdomens and thoraxes float in the water.

Some are still alive and try to climb up the slippery bathtub walls.

Jillian looks back to Ginger in her bouncee.

Ginger, not sensing their fear anymore, holds out the color-coated plastic keys and giggles.

Jillian tries to smile.

She looks back down at Gabrielle to make sure she's breathing out the straw.

She rubs her fingers through Gabrielle's bangs and bends down to kiss her swollen eyes.

FADE