

Acting

By

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ACT I

Scene 1

SPEAKER

I want you to understand something.

I was what they call an early bloomer. Puberty struck young. The womanly figure you see before you has been with me since, I don't know, 12? When exactly did I stop growing? All I know is it was before many of my peers had even started.

This has an effect.

Now, you look at me, nothing special. I'm not saying I'm not gorgeous, which I am. You might look at me and notice my slender but curvy figure, and think "hot damn." But nothing about me screams abnormal.

In middle school I had huge breasts. Huge. I mean, really, these breasts on a 12 year old. Imagine. When everyone else was trying on their first bras, I was already verging on a D-cup.

That has an effect on a young girl's psyche.

I don't get harassed now. Walking down the street, no cat-calls dart after me, stares do not linger; there are assholes everywhere, but such things are not my norm.

My younger self lived in a world of menace. Not that I felt it fully--not that I realized what I felt. A 12 year old with a woman's body...I was a fascination, a creation for a lascivious nation to prey on. I was prey, my wide nipples targets for hunting eyes and "accidental" brushes. I was a small girl with big breasts who was taught daily by that man on the street and that boy in my class that my body is a commodity. An accessory to a man's salation or a boy's reputation. A thing that belongs to anyone but me.

I want you to understand the effect.

I wasn't raped or assaulted, nothing blatant caused me harm. I suppose I was harassed on the street and in class, but I want you to understand *it was nothing special*. Not once in all the years of taunting, of way too close, of hoping he'd listen when I said "stop, enough," not once did I think to myself, "this is abnormal." Not once did I think to myself, "boys being boys does not excuse violence," and no one told me either. They just said "boys will be boys."

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So I learned the rules of harassment: learned it is pointless to protest--he is so much bigger than you--learned to go with it is what's best--he is so much stronger than you--learned it's ok as long as he's just joking. Chill, relax, you're no fun, I'm just messin. I learned that men have the power to define me. And to act upon that definition. I learned my voice, my full, flexible, capable voice, was good for self-expression only. My words report experience, not shape it. Here I am, reporting. Reporting on the shape you have given me.

I'm a good student. Always have been. I learned the rules quickly, lived by them well. You listen to your teachers, especially when you have so many. You listen to what they do say, and what they don't. You trust them because you are taught that women should be trusting, should believe in people, in goodness; you are the pure good thing this world violates, and that's tragedy. How beautiful, that tragedy. You provide beauty. Thank you.

I am not going to tell you about the boy, years later, who violated me. The world's conduit. Because I don't consent to your commodification of my pain. I will tell you that the rules I learned left me voiceless, and the rules he learned told him that was ok. I will tell you that violence should not be defined by the aggressor. I know that now--that I have the right of definition. I know now that when rules institutionalize violence, we must make our own. I know about systems of oppression and privilege and intersectionality. I know the terms, I know the rules. I know how to live a life that condemns violence, grieves for and celebrates those who are victims--survivors of it. I hate that term, survivor. As if we're better than the ones who didn't.

I've spent years trying to untangle the web, terrified that when I do I will be alone. Unattached. Terrified of what binds me and terrified of being unbound. I have yet to discover a way to live that is possible. Yet I stand here, with all my contradictions, in a world of contradictions, in a world that makes my existence impossible and in which I state, without apology or justification: I exist. I act.