

It all began with the feet

~2.000.000 BCE. Her life begins:

She is on all four. This is how she moves, how she walks, how she runs. Her hands are like two front feet, and her arms are like two front legs. Her hands are like two front feet, but they are not that, they are more nimble, more delicate, more attuned for precision, but she uses them for walking.

She grows up on the open plain. It is an environment that is mostly flat. The climate is mild and temperate, and sometimes it rains. She sleeps in a cave where a group of others like her sleep as well. The entrance to the cave is elevated and hidden out of sight. It provides shelter from the weather and the group provides protection from other groups and the occasional predators.

She doesn't have language. She can't use her mouth to speak, instead it is a multi-tool. Like a crane or a claw, it is good for grabbing and carrying things. Her tongue clicks, she growls and even hums, but she speaks no words. She can make a series of rhythmic noises that conveys something like danger, weather changes, presence of others, trust, need for help, or that she wants something.

Her mouth is good too for chewing and biting. She eats grasses, grains, leaves, stems, roots, flowers, berries, and seeds. Her taste buds are sensitive, some plants burn and some numb the tongue, some are sweet. But, whenever she uses her mouth to grab or hold on to something, she also tastes the dirt on it, what is growing on it, if it has gotten wet, if its rotting.

By adulthood, her face has become folded, wrinkled and cramped from looking down to the ground, her jaws are tight and worn out from carrying. She doesn't know what a smile is and she has no consistent expressions. Between her and the others interaction remains limited to eye contact and gestures that approximate meaning.

She retains little information about the world and the little she does, she doesn't know how to save or how to share. She understands that she can draw signs in the dirt, and she knows that she can represent the world around her in this way. But, her maps are never permanent. They vanish as dirt is blown around by the wind, or if the others walk over them.

She is stuck and distracted. The world happens to her because she has no way to hold it at a distance. Everything is an input. Everything is immediacy. Each morning as she exits the cave, she rehearses the range of tasks her mouth may need to perform. It's difficult and impractical to use the same organ for grabbing, holding, chewing, tasting, and vocalising.

As time passes this frustration settles deeper within her. Here it grows. Even though she tries hard to, she can't seem to figure out how to change her situation. She begins to feel isolated. She begins to sleep more and to sleep longer. Eventually she starts losing interest in staying awake. Her will starts to wane and one night she falls asleep not wanting to wake up again.

Her life ends.

1/0. Dreams begin:

She has dreams where she is in her body, dreams where she is in a different body, and dreams that she is not in at all. She has dreams where she is able to string sounds together into intricate patterns, she has dreams where she stands upright, balancing perfectly on two feet. She has dreams where she walks and carries things with her hands, where she has tools for gathering, connecting, tying, cutting up and sharpening.

Standing on two feet transforms her vision. It widens. Her face relaxes and her mouth slacks. Her utterances bloom into complex forms that she memorizes and combines. She hears new phonemes, and she makes structures for them. They mutate and meaning branch from one to the next.

The maps she draws grow larger and more varied, they lose their borders and extend further out into the world. Signs and directions overlay visual representations.

The others come to life. Their hands soften as they rise from the ground. She sees their fingers spread out and slim, their elbows widen and arms become slender. She sees their legs grow stronger and their backs straighten. She watches their features change and expressions emerge on their faces. Looking up and out smoothens their skin around cheeks and jaws. Their eyes sharpen and search.

She dreams she speaks, and that they answer and talk amongst themselves. Speech becomes reactions between them and group formations follow. They trace signs on trees, on rocks and cave walls, and this guides them.

They also idle. They play and invent games with no purposes and make noises and come up with words simply to hear what they sound like. They draw things, the world around them, and just forms, they do nothing. They listen to the wind, spend time feeling the temperature and sit in the rain.

It doesn't last. Her dreams keep unfolding. Her perception of time distorts, and again she watches them change, now more rapidly than before. They morph. What she sees is like a pulse, first they open up to the world before contracting inwards, as if their bodies are pulled in and shaped around a single infinitely heavy point.

Dreams end.

2051 CE. Her life begins:

She is sweating. She is in her bed with open eyes. She gets up and lights a cigarette, she smokes sitting on the bedside. It is still dark outside.

She gets up. She is wearing a grey tank top, nothing else. Beside her bed are a pair of jeans and black flats. Her back is hunched over, forming a rounded curve where the spinal bones press against the skin. A long, fragile neck extends from her shoulders. Her hair is cut short against her scalp.

The rest of her body is hairless and her skin is glossy. Her elbows are locked at right angles and her hands are like claws with bent and rigid fingers. She has two sets of eyelids, an outer layer that shuts entirely and an inner transparent membrane that blinks automatically, protecting the retinas from harsh white light.

Focused, her eyes flicker in discrete, rapid movements as if she is tracking something nanoscopic at high speed. Her tongue pushes against her cheeks according to precise patterns. She doesn't speak and except for the subtle wet licks of her saliva covered tongue flexing against the implants in her mouth, she doesn't make a sound.

She pulls on her jeans, steps into the flats and goes to the kitchen. Her gait is slow and restricted. It's barely dawn and the kitchen is still empty. A scent of ash and cigarette buds makes it out from underneath the sink. In the dark, she packs her bag and leaves the house.