

PHOTOGRAPHS

An Animated Short

by

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"PHOTOGRAPHS"

FADE IN:

EXT. MEADOW - DAY

A meadow, mid-afternoon in high summer. The sun glints in a bright blue sky, turns everything glaringly beautiful. Birdsong and distant laughter fill the air.

A small girl, LUCY, crouches over a daisy. She wears a white dress, almost painfully bright to look at, and a straw hat. Around her neck is a battered old Polaroid camera on a crackled leather strap.

With a whirr-click, she takes a photograph. She shakes it, looks at it with a smile and then tosses it over her shoulder, discarding it.

It lands on the grass behind her. The photograph is beautiful - perfectly framed, balanced and focussed. She ignores it, goes to take another.

KEITH, a young boy in shorts and a stained shirt, watches her from a distance. He shields his eyes from the sun, sees the photograph on the ground. He watches it as it flutters away towards him in a light breeze. Dashing towards it, he catches the picture and stares at it.

Lucy has moved on, leaving a trail of photographs behind her. She moves from plant to plant like a butterfly, pausing only to take a picture before moving on to the next.

Leaving space between them, Keith begins to follow her, to collect the photographs. He crams every one he finds into his pockets. She doesn't notice.

INT. KEITH'S BEDROOM - DUSK

An attic room, battered furniture. At a desk below an open window, Keith looks through the photographs. He spreads them out over the desk, caresses them with his fingertips. He lifts a photograph of a ladybird to his face, closes his eyes and sniffs it.

There is a jam-jar of wilted flowers resting on his windowsill. He reaches for them, manages to nudge them down. He takes a battered daisy, compares it with the photograph and finds it wanting.

He strokes the petals and crushes them with clumsy fingers. He tips the jar into the bin, flowers, water and all.

EXT. MEADOW - DAY

Lucy is hunched over a fallen tree, photographing the bugs that crawl from the inside. She grins, pokes the dead wood with a twig and watches them emerge, taking photograph after photograph.

Keith approaches her from the path. In his hands he holds the photographs, fanned out. He taps her on the shoulder.

She looks up at him, then at the photographs. She smiles, dismisses them. He holds them out again.

She pulls him forwards to look through the viewfinder on her camera. He takes a photograph, with her guidance. She hands it to him, smiling. He looks down at the photograph - clumsy, slightly fuzzy but not terrible - and then at her.

He snatches the camera from her, breaking the strap. He runs and runs.

Lucy stares after him, bewildered. She begins to cry.

EXT. MEADOW - DUSK

Keith, reaching the other side of the meadow, slows to a stop. He pants, leaning his hands on his knees to gulp in air.

He looks down at the camera in his hands, smiles and strokes it with a finger. A dandelion catches his eye and he crouches in front of it, takes a photograph. He waits for it to emerge from the camera and then shakes it, impatiently.

The photograph is a blur. He shakes it again in case it needs more developing but nothing changes.

He takes a photograph of a nearby tree, waits for it to develop. It is wonky, badly framed. He takes another and another, discarding every one in frustration. Each is worse than the last.

Holding the strap he slings the camera onto his shoulder, starts walking.

EXT. BRIDGE - DUSK

Babbling water - a river. Keith, walking over the bridge, is startled by the beauty of the sunset. He looks up at it, marvelling, then raises the camera. Whirr-click - he takes a photograph.

The photograph is terrible. It ruins the beauty of the evening. Bursting into angry sobs, he flings first the photograph and then the camera into the river with a splash before running from the scene.

From the banks, Lucy watches him.

When he is gone, she hitches up her dress and wades into the river. She digs in the mud with her hands, fishing for the camera.

She slips, half-falls into the water. Her white dress now filthy, she stands up again. Caught in some nearby debris, she sees her camera. She pulls it from the tangle.

She tips it and a stream of water pours out. She presses the button and the camera emits a miserable whirr. She sighs.

Defeated and barefoot, she clammers onto the bank and begins to walk home, dangling the camera by its broken strap.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Lucy's kitchen. The camera is dissected, spread out in pieces on newspaper. A crackling fire renders the components a glinting, flickering orange.

INT. FIELD - DAY

Another glorious afternoon. Lucy, wearing a blue cotton dress, holds her camera again. The strap, taped back together, is wound repeatedly around her wrist.

She crouches over a butterfly, photographs it. The photograph whirrs from the camera. It is just as beautiful as any of the others she has taken.

From the branches of a tree, Keith watches her. She puts the photograph into her pocket and walks away.