

## **How To Reverse Gravity**

By Sylvie Haisman (New Zealand)

I am Alejandro. I'm only three feet tall, though I hope to be taller soon. My mother says I must accept my height, now that I'm forty. She's a good woman—I see her point of view. But I remain optimistic.

She doesn't understand that I'm unusually susceptible to gravity. It's gravity that thwarts my true height, compressing my body into this unnatural size. In hot weather the downward force grows fierce, telescoping me in on myself so violently that I wonder what I've done to offend it.

My mother rolls her eyes and throws herself upon the sofa. 'Gravity treats us all alike,' she says. 'For pity's sake Alejandro! It is too hot for such rubbish.' She says gravity's an impartial force, bent only on pulling our bodies into the earth. She tells me I'm the proper size and everyone else is grossly overgrown.

'You're perfect my dear,' she cries. 'So conveniently close to the ground!' In her enthusiasm she flings a cushion into the air. It sails up to the ceiling and plummets down again, hitting me on the head.

Although I greatly respect my mother's opinions, I believe she'd think differently if she suffered this terrible pain. It's always with me, in my joints—sometimes a dull ache, sometimes a shooting pain so sharp I must cry out. But my mother doesn't want to think about that, and who can blame her?

Invisible knives skewer my limbs as they strive for their rightful length. Determined to remain cheerful, I stand as tall as possible, smiling and looking forward to gravity's defeat. To hasten that end I take remedies: Goliath's Patent Growing Pills, Ezekiel's Elongation Extract, Wrigley's Herculean Increasing Powders. So far they do not help, but as I tell my mother, today may be my lucky day. She watches from the sofa as I open a small bottle plastered with wild typography. Wax Colossal Overnight. Guaranteed Expansion of Up to Twice Previous Size. Wincing a little, I raise my arm and slug back the contents.

'Just you wait,' I say. 'By tomorrow I'll be so tall you'll need binoculars to see my face.' 'Oh no dear,' she says. 'My sight-seeing days are over—you've driven me stark-staring mad.'

Smiling, I take my aching body outside and lower it onto the grass, stretching out my arms and legs like the points of a star. Having reached the end of my patience, I make my resolve: today must be my lucky day. Lying exhausted on the lawn, I will my stunted limbs to grow.

How to reverse gravity: gaze skywards for a very long time, lie absolutely still. Don't twitch your aching muscles—just watch the sky and wait. Wait until you're on fire with pain, until pain's replaced by something darker, ranker, altogether more disturbing.

'Perhaps it's the heat,' says my mother, walking across the grass with a full watering-can. 'It's the heat that makes you such a fool.'

No matter how bad your torment, remain still. Gather all the movements your body wants to make: huge urges, tiny unbidden jerks and flickers. Pull the motion up from your feet and fingertips, along limbs, spine, and up behind your face. Pour it out your eyes into the bold blank sky, filling the blue until heaven and earth slowly revolve and you are high up under the earth, looking down at invisible stars.

My mother waters the wilting flowers and parched herbs, sprinkling the last of the water over me. High up underneath the globe, I'm Atlas Alejandro: I carry the world on my back, spitting in Newton's face.