

'She is a gorgeous little girl, she just grits her teeth and doesn't complain'



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"Benson Tangou, headmaster of Sagali Central School, which has 220 students and 20 teachers, knows just how tough life has been for his star pupil, with children throwing rocks at Kylie and treating her differently.

"She can't keep up and play with the others. Sometimes she comes to school late because she struggles to get here and is very tired by the time she makes it.

"She gets upset sometimes because the other children pick on her handicap. She is very good at school, a fantastic active child who works very hard. She comes first or second in her class.

"A new leg will be very, very good and good for the entire community. It will help her and the other villagers and she will be just like the other people."

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WHEN Kylie meets Ian Torode for the first time it is a big moment for both, although Kylie is too shy to speak to the man she has waited all her life to see.

A veteran orthopaedic surgeon, Mr Torode has volunteered his services.

With a lack of X-rays or any medical history, Mr Torode has almost no idea what he has signed up for.

Slowly he talks about Kylie's new teddy bear Amy Lou; her new purple tracksuit; how cold it is in Australia. But the girl is no hurry to talk about herself.

Finally, her actions say what words cannot — Kylie shows Mr Torode how she walks, first a few paces across the small doctor's room in North Melbourne, then climbing up on an

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examination table.

The seriousness of the situation is beautifully lost when Kylie bursts into uncontrolled laughter as the surgeon touches her flimsy but ticklish leg.

Amid the chuckling, the first expert diagnosis of her condition is almost missed: "It is a wobbly old knee."

It seems little more than a throwaway line at first. But soon it is apparent this simple summary means much more than the sum of its words.

With little fanfare the examination is over.

Tough talk starts when the surgeon tells Lissing that the state of the knee makes it impossible for Kylie to keep her leg: it is so "wobbly" he has no choice but to remove it.

Lissing, Kylie and their carers are told the left foot will never grow away from her knee, that her leg has no chance of growing in proportion to the rest of her body and it will become harder for her to move.

"Eventually it will be impossible for her to walk," Mr Torode says.

"It's not really possible to lengthen this leg because her hip joint and her knee joint is too wobbly."

The news barely fazes Lissing, who is keen to discuss when and how her daughter will get a new leg.

Talk turns to what sort of prosthetic would be best.

When the grim reality of how dire the medical situation is at home — that there will be no chance of having her leg serviced or repaired — the need for the most simple prosthetic is agonisingly clear.

Instead of simply removing Kylie's leg and

giving her a complicated, state-of-the-art prosthetic that cannot be looked after in the depths of the jungle, Mr Torode instead forms plans for a complex operation known as the Van Nes procedure that will allow her to wear a more simple leg.

Technical talk of removing feet and turning them into knee joints follows, raising smiles and hopes about what modern medicine can do.

Lissing surprises her helpers by explaining in her own words, with absolutely no room for misunderstanding, that she realises Kylie needs an artificial leg, that she had always known there would not be enough bone to lengthen; and that she has accepted it.

All the while Kylie happily plays with a new book she is much more interested in — like her mother, she has been preparing for a new leg for years.

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BUT then tragedy strikes.

Rather than preparing for Kylie's operation, Mr Torode is forced to care for a family member who suffers a serious illness and he has to step away from most of his surgery commitments.

The delay takes a toll on Kylie's family. With no idea how long it will be before the operation, Lissing has to return to Pascaris to care for the rest of her family.

She knows Kylie is thriving while living at Children First Foundation's Kilmore farm. The delay is a blessing in disguise when Kylie is enrolled at St Patrick's Primary School Kilmore, where she makes new Australian friends and

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