

Shrinking

by Heather Fowler

I tell my husband we are shrinking. He does not believe me. Thumbing through the magazines for the Scientific American he will use as distraction as he shits, he says he believes in freeing caged monkeys more than supporting human freaks. Our house shows the signs. When I look around, it's as if everything here shrinks, save the children. All the doorways. All the love.

All love shrinks, except the love I have for the little compatriots, Jack and Jenna. They used my bones to grow their bones when they rested in my belly as parasites—we have bonded! Now they use cows to increase height. Vegetables. Dreams. Children grow. Adults shrink.

I have a new hypothesis: It's not just about our spines, which will compact, naturally, which will age-- but our whole life, which once included plans for trips to Spain, romantic getaway weekends to San Francisco, fantasies of buying that big house across from my grandmother's with the drug-dealers and white ceramic lions. The desire for our burb lovelife to match, at least once, the romance novels I read at age twelve.

I have long sought my handsome rogue, with a tender almost effeminate side. The husband is all man.

Today: "What will we do this weekend to keep the children busy?" is the new question, not an ounce of joy when issued by anyone, no matter who mutters.

"Park or zoo?" Him.

“Zoo. Hate the park.” Me. Or Him.

“Traveling next week. Will leave on Tuesday, be back Friday.”
Him.

“All right.” Him.

Even in bed he is smaller now, a shrinking penis. But I wonder if that's because I think of him less. Do objects or people shrink with less regard? I'm an American. A suburb mommy scientist. He is a fucking prick, a la pin in the ass cushion.

Lately, while he is upon me, in that way that men are upon women, I imagine him a pornstar with only one clip available for replay. Like I am a loop of a video girl below, taking it, maybe calling out in Russian. When I feel rambunctious, I imagine him as part of a rutting horde in the moment just before I pass out, used up and enduring my tenth man, who is him, who was also my third man. I imagine feeling passion; if feigning pleasure is desired, I will fake it. I will ask him to rip clothes. Mine.

To rip is satisfying. I hear something rip, I think: That must be passion. My clothes had to go. Somewhere. Oh, the destruction!

But I am practical. I wear ugly things to bed. Not what I'd save for my rogue. The ceiling fan is dirty. The smell of my children's hair is so sweet. The job I need won't go away—and neither the need. Unneeded, unwanted, he goes away but keeps on coming back. Boom, boom, boom. That's the door or his car or the door to his car or the headboard or my head into the headboard.

I am so much water, so much steam. I am a dream diffused into a nightmare. Afterward, when he stands across the room from me, when he strides away, I can pinch his distance between my thumb

and index finger. He is that small. I am that small for him too, at similar distances.

I am the tip of the thread that punctures the white space of a needle. He does not notice when I dye my hair. I put a beauty mark on for ten days once; he never remarked. I got a pimple there. He noticed that.

My children are enormous! Tow-headed marvels. Huger by the moment. They are large when I carry them to bed, gigantic when they cry.

The husband and I do not cry. Who is he?

We sleep. Sleeping increases the pace of shrinking, his shrinking, my shrinking, over which I obsess more and more and more. I am not so dumb as to tell anyone about this obsession, this constant fear that I will fall down the drain eventually where no one will find me, but if I stay here, I will. There was someone I could tell this to once, but he abandoned me, went away. You are here. I can tell you! Anyhow, when I keep shrinking, here's what will happen: You will walk by my window, a wind will blow me out, and I will land in your hair like a small flower from the tree owned by the city. I will have flown from my window. Maybe the husband will have flown from the window too.

If we live on two different sides of your head, we will never meet or see each other again. We may feel sadness. Or a loss. Vaguely. And relief!

Climbing up and down a single follicle will become our life's work. The wind will please and chill us. We will be naked with nothing to warm us but the soft wrap of your hair. Too small for clothes, like lice, we will be grateful.

Our children will keep growing. They will think they are orphans at their grandma's. Will you tell them otherwise, if I ever get down to your ear to ask?

I will know I am living on your head. It is a good head. And you, how big are you? In your own estimation, are you a giant or a dwarf? Careful. Be honest. I can pull your scalp. How big are you?

Not to brag or anything, but children are resilient. I'd bet my children, freaking giants, have outgrown you already. They are ready to take over the world of everything feeling. Or maybe you are shrinking too.

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