

Teacup Breeds

Leisha buys a breed of tiny dog with the sole intention of carrying it in her enormous purse. She drives five hours to pick her up from the breeder. She leaves her in the tub when she goes to work, and the dog's fur is smeared with feces by the time she gets home. This happens every day. And every day, she washes her in the sink. She doesn't want her purses getting dirty.

One time Leisha comes home and the roommate is sorry, but she pitied the dog and let it out and it peed on the couch while she was trying to diaper it. The diapers are miniature puppy diapers, with a finger-sized hole for the tail.

But what can Leisha say? Pets aren't allowed in the apartment. The roommate knows this, and she hands Leisha a rag and an anti-odor spray. Leisha ineffectually rubs at the couch with the rag, waiting for the roommate to leave so she can quit. "And besides," the roommate says from the door to her room, "those diapers you got are too big."

Soon, Leisha realizes the dog has been shrinking. Leisha could wash her in a tea kettle now. Once, because the sink is too clogged with toothpaste, she does wash her in a kettle. It is the roommate's kettle, a sophisticated contraption of springs and brushed steel, but the lid is removable. Leisha does not mention the bath to the roommate, nor does she wash the kettle afterward.

The dog keeps getting smaller. "Stop shrinking," Leisha whispers to the dog in the night, when only her small black nose peeps out from under the blanket. The dog will only be useful if her cute fuzzy head can be seen in the mouth of the purse. The dog whines in her sleep, high and buzzing as a mosquito.

At work, Leisha hands room keys to guests and fields calls for fresh towels and more pillows and wonders if she should get a smaller purse. Business travelers and tourists call from their rooms and seem to think that Leisha personally broke the hair dryer in the bathroom or the blinds on the window. She wonders if she should start plugging the drain in the tub. The other girl at the desk refuses to answer the phone because of germs. Leisha wonders

if she should worry. She stops for dog vitamins on the way home. She tries to determine which ones she needs, whether the formulas for strong bones or healthy growth or glossy coats, but she tires of reading the labels and buys all of them.

The dog laps the pills down like they're treats, crunching the colored ovals happily, not even waiting for Leisha to hide them in her dollops of food or massage them down her thimble-sized throat. For a few days she is sick, huddled in the corner of the tub when Leisha gets home, lethargic when she takes her out to try and get her just a little more house-broken. During this time, the dog stops shrinking. Leisha calculates how many extra shifts she must beg from her boss to pay for a vet appointment, but suddenly, the dog is better again, frisking and yipping like she did before. And she is shrinking again. Leisha could wash her in a tea cup. The roommate asks if she got a different dog.

Leisha can tell the roommate judges her for leaving the dog alone every day. But if she didn't leave the dog, she could not afford the vitamins, or the puppy food, or the mitten the dog now sleeps inside at the corner of the bed. She could not afford the apartment, with the tub the dog soils and wriggles about day after day. She could not afford a tea cup for her to fit inside.

The roommate starts the argument about the air conditioner again. The roommate thinks it is more efficient to keep it blasting on high all the time. This makes no sense, but she refuses to listen. She says it's important that the apartment *always* be a comfortable temperature for *everyone* living there, or perhaps not everyone will be able to live there any more. Leisha is unsure whether her roommate is threatening to report the dog or to move out. Either would be a disaster.

The tub has become a vast, shining valley to the dog. Leisha scatters wadded up socks for her to romp in like snow drifts. Her tail is the size of a pinky now. She wags it each and every time Leisha comes home. She vibrates with joy. She must stay. Leisha cranks up the air conditioner.

This dog is the tiniest dog. She would never fit in the purse now. She would get lost in a pocket. Leisha shops for silk coin purses instead.

Her whisper in the night changes. "It's okay to be small," she tells her.

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