

Small Man

Meredith Alling

A small man walked out from behind my uncle's television once. He just walked out, my uncle says, and then walked down the hall. No big deal. I half believe this story because when I was a child I had a small plastic refrigerator, yellow and rounded at the edges. I used to put toy people or animals in there—maybe even a chicken nugget once, shh—and know that they came alive.

Sometimes when I tell the story about my uncle people think it's funny, but it's not. It's serious. Hello. A small man—uncle says about one foot tall—walked out from behind his television. My uncle was sitting right there in his brown corduroy recliner with a plate of potatoes. He was watching his show about a family of towers in Louisville and their drama and their highlighted hair and their dog Chipwich who had a seizure but is fine and wears a baseball cap with ear holes.

So the guy walks out from behind the television and my uncle just stares. Guy is a normal guy—not a gnome or troll or anything—just a little guy in normal clothes (though if you ask my uncle “what kind of clothes?” he just shakes his head like, “nope, can't remember that much.”)

The hall in my uncle's house is blue carpeted and the walls are paneled and covered in family photos. My cousin Byron's bedroom comes first on the left, followed by the bathroom (foamy toilet seat), and my uncle and aunt's bedroom beyond it. On the right side is my other cousin Luke's bedroom.

If you ask my uncle, he'll say he thinks the man went into the bathroom. But the hallway was dark—no one else was home—and it was hard to see. It was hard to focus, too. My uncle thought maybe he was having a stroke. He scratched his potato plate with his fork and then dropped the fork onto the carpet next to his suede slipper. Then he muted the TV.

He says he sat there for a few minutes because again, he thought maybe he was going through something. But after a while he got up and put the potatoes on the counter and turned on all the lights and walked down the hall and into the bathroom. And when he got there he checked everything—including the cabinet—and he didn't find anything, not a trace. He even checked the carpet for footprints.

So he went back to his television show and his potatoes and when my aunt

got home from her bridge game my uncle told her about the man. My aunt put her hands on her hips and frowned and walked to the bathroom. She opened the window and when my uncle heard this he got up from his seat and went to see about it.

“Maybe he jumped,” she said.

They both looked down onto the street at the empty sidewalks and their trashcans and the chain link fence with the bike lock stuck to it. My uncle took my aunt’s hand and squeezed it tight, he says. Squeezed it tight and then closed the window hard.

Meredith Alling was born in MI and lives and writes in Los Angeles. Her work appears or is forthcoming in *Wigleaf*, *DOGZPLOT*, *Pithead Chapel*, *Spork*, and others. Her website is meredithalling.com.