

*Fatso*

Surprised? Of course I was surprised. You go out with a girl. First date, second date, a restaurant here, a movie there, always just matinees. You start sleeping together, the fucks are dynamite, and pretty soon there's feeling. And then, one day, she arrives all weepy, and you hug her and tell her to take it easy, that everything's OK, and she says she can't stand it any more, she has this secret, not just a secret, something really awful, a curse, something she's been wanting to tell you the whole time but she didn't have the guts. This thing, it has been weighing on her like a ton of bricks, and now she's got to tell you, she's simply got to, but she knows that as soon as she does, you'll leave her, and you'd be absolutely right, too. And as soon as she says that, she starts crying all over again.

I won't leave you, you tell her. I won't. I love you. You may look a little upset, but you're not. And even if you are, it's about her crying, not about her secret. You know by now that these secrets that always make a woman fall to pieces are usually something along the lines of doing it with an animal, or with a Mormon, or with someone who paid her for it. I'm a whore, they always wind up saying. And you hug them and say, no you're not, you're not, or *shhh*... if they don't stop. It's something really terrible, she insists, as if she's picked up on how nonchalant you are about it, even though you've tried to hide it. In the pit of your stomach it may sound terrible, you tell her, but that's mostly because of the acoustics. Soon as you let it out it'll seem much less terrible—you'll see. And she almost believes it. She hesitates a minute and then she asks: What if I told you that at night I turn into a heavy, hairy man, with no neck and a gold ring on his pinky, would you still love me? And you tell her of course you would. What else can you say? That you wouldn't? She's simply trying to test you after all, to see whether you love her unconditionally—and you've always been a winner at tests. Truth is, as soon as you say it, she melts, and you fuck, right there in the living room. And afterwards, you lie there holding each other tight, and she cries, because she's so relieved, and you cry, too. Go figure it out. And unlike all the other times, she doesn't get up and leave.

She stays there and falls asleep. And you lie awake, looking at her beautiful body, at the sunset outside, at the moon appearing as if out of nowhere, at the silvery light flickering over her body, stroking the hair on her back. And within less than five minutes you find yourself lying next to this guy—this short, fat guy. And the guy gets up and smiles at you, and gets dressed awkwardly. He leaves the room and you follow him, spellbound. He's in the den now, his thick fingers fiddling with the remote, zapping to the sports channels. Championship football. When they miss a pass, he cusses the tv; when they score, he gets up and does this little victory dance.

After the game he tells you that his throat is dry and his stomach is growling. He could really use a beer and a nice hunk of meat. Well-done, if possible, and with lots of onion rings, but he'd settle for some pork chops, too. So you get in the car and take him to this restaurant that he knows about and you don't. This new twist has you worried, it really does, but you have no idea what to do about it. Your command-and-control centers are down. You shift gears at the exit, in a daze. He's right there beside you in the passenger seat, tapping that gold-ringed pinky of his. At the next intersection, he rolls down his window, winks at you and yells at this chick who's trying to thumb a ride: Hey, baby, wanna jump in back so we can all have some fun? Later, the two of you pack in the steak and the chops and the onion rings till you're about to explode, and he enjoys every bite and laughs like a baby. And all that time you keep telling yourself it has got to be a dream. A bizarre dream, yes, but definitely one that you'll snap out of any minute.

On the way back, you ask him where to let him off, and he pretends not to hear you, but he looks despondent. So you wind up taking him back home with you. It's almost three a.m. I'm gonna hit the sack, you tell him, and he waves to you, and stays in the beanbag chair, staring at the fashion channel. You wake up the next morning, exhausted, and with a slight stomachache. And there she is, in the living room, still dozing. But by the time you've had your shower, she's up. She hugs you guiltily, and you're too embarrassed to say anything. Time goes by, and you're still together. The fucks just get better and better. She's not so young anymore, and neither are you, and suddenly you find yourselves talking about a baby. And at night, you and the fatso guy hit the town like you've never done in your life. He takes you to restaurants and bars you didn't even

know existed, and you dance on the tables together, and break plates like there's no tomorrow. He's really nice, the fatso guy, a little crass, especially with women, sometimes coming out with things that could just make you die. But other than that, he's great fun to be with. When you first met him, you frankly didn't give a damn about football, but now you know every team. And whenever one of your favorites wins, you feel like you've made a wish and it has come true. Which is a pretty exceptional feeling for someone like you, who hardly knows what he wants most of the time. And so it goes: every night you fall asleep with him struggling to stay awake for the Argentinian finals, and in the morning there she is, the beautiful, forgiving woman that you love till it hurts.

*Translated from the Hebrew by Miriam Shlesinger*