

Etgar Keret - From The Nimrod Flipout

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 sex is mind-blowing, and pretty soon there's feeling too. And then, one day, she shows up in tears, and you hug her and tell her to take it easy, everything's going to be OK, and she says she can't stand it anymore, she has this secret, not just a secret, something really awful, a curse, something she's been wanting to tell you from the beginning but she didn't have the guts. This thing, it's been weighing her down, 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'll be absolutely right to leave her, too. And then she starts crying all over again.

I won't leave you, you tell her. I won't. I love you. You try to look concerned, but you're not. Not really. Or rather, if you are concerned, 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 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. And if they don't stop crying all you can

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do is say *shhh*. 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 just acoustics. As soon as you let it out it won't seem anywhere near as bad—you'll see. And she almost believes you. She hesitates and then she asks: What if I told you that at night I turn into a heavy, hairy man, with no neck, with a gold ring on his pinkie, would you still love me? And you tell her of course you would. What else can you say? That you wouldn't? She's just trying to test you, to see whether you love her unconditionally—and you've always been a winner at tests. In fact, as soon as you say it, she melts, and you do it, right there in the living room. And afterward, you lie there holding each other tight, and she cries because she's so relieved, and you cry too. Go figure. And unlike all the other times, she doesn't get up and go. 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 five minutes you find yourself lying next to this guy—this short fat guy. And the guy gets up and smiles at you, and awkwardly gets dressed. 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 soccer. When they miss a pass, he curses the TV; when they score, he gets up and does a 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 big steak. Well-done if possible, and with lots of onion rings, but he'd settle for pork chops. So you get in the car and take him to this restaurant that he knows about. This new twist has you worried, it really does, but you have no idea what you should do. 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 pinkie of his. At the next intersection, he rolls down his window, winks at you, and yells at a girl who's trying to thumb a ride: Hey, baby, wanna play nanny goat and ride in the back? 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's 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 he'd like you to drop him off, and he pretends not to hear you, but he looks despondent. So you wind up taking him home. It's almost three a.m. I'm hitting the sack, you tell him, and he waves his hand, and stays in the beanbag chair, staring at the fashion channel. You wake up the next morning, exhausted, and your stomach hurts. And there she is, in the living room, still dozing. But by the time you've had your shower, she's up. She gives you a sheepish hug, and you're too embarrassed to say anything. Time goes by and you're still together. The sex just gets 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 fatso 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, a little crass, especially with women; sometimes the things he comes out with make you want to sink into the floor. Other than that, he's lots of fun. When you first met him, you didn't give a damn about soccer, but now you know every team. And whenever one of your favorites wins, you feel like you've made a wish and it's come true. Which is a pretty excep-

tional 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 Argentinean finals, and in the morning there she is, the beautiful, forgiving woman who you love, too, till it hurts.