

The Fatal Sneeze

by Zombie Slave

1.

As her friend carried her in the palm of her hand, the one thing Heather realized was: she wasn't scared. No, not scared-- *pissed off!*

It had been well over three hours since Patricia had shrunk Heather and her roommate, Alice. Three damn hours! And there seemed to be no indication that Patricia was going to return them to normal any time soon. No, Patricia was having too good of a time, was having too much fun laughing and pointing and taking pictures and videos with her iPhone of her two tiny friends. Heather had felt helpless, humiliated, not to mention nervous. She and Alice were so damn tiny! Heather didn't know how tall she was but guessed she couldn't be much taller than a quarter of an inch. She and Alice were nothing but bugs, and Patricia was a colossal giant.

"Dammit Patricia, sometimes I really hate you," Heather said. She pounded a fist against the soft wall of Patricia's giant fingers which were curled around her. The hand carrying her gently rocked as the giant walked to--wherever she was going. Since she had been scooped up, Heather had been immersed in the darkness of Patricia's closed fist and had no idea what was happening.

"She can't hear you ya know," Alice said. It was too dark to see her roommate, but Heather sensed the girl sitting among the folds of skin of Patricia's palm.

"I'm so sick of this," Heather said. "Where do you think she's taking us? I think we left the house."

"For sure. I know I heard a car. She drove somewhere."

"But she'd been drinking!" Heather said, shocked. If Patricia had gotten into an accident--

"I know, but maybe her friend, Luan drove," Alice said. "I think we got lucky that Pat only called one of her friends over to "play" with us. It could have been so much worse. Oh God she better not post any of those videos she took to YouTube."

"Shit I didn't even think of that," Heather said, wiping sweat from her forehead.

"Wherever she's taking us, I hope we get there soon. If she doesn't open up her hand soon I'm going to suffocate in here."

Heather grunted an agreement. It was hot, damn hot, and to make matters worse, the palm of the hand she and Alice sat on was starting to get slick with sweat. It was disgusting. *Come on Patricia. Where the hell are you going? Heather thought. Put us down already!*

In the darkness Heather probed the smooth crevice between two massive fingers. She poked and pulled, trying to wedge her arms between the fingers to make them open up. It would be nice if Alice helped instead of just sitting there like a lump, but then again Alice had

never really been too keen on chipping in when there was work to be done. Her grades over the past few semesters of college had reflected that fact well. Heather grunted with effort, fresh sweat broke out across her forehead, sticking strands of loose hair to her face. This was pointless. She was nothing but a bug compared to Patricia's massive hand. She might as well try to move a mountain.

Exhausted, Heather lashed out in frustration and punched the wall of flesh in front of her. "Dammit I am so tired of being the butt of her fucking jokes!"

"Calm down Heather. What can we do about it?" Alice said. "We're just along for the ride at this point. She's at least stopped drinking and it must be after midnight by now. She's got to be getting tired. When she's ready to pass out she'll return us to normal size. Just look at this as a time we won't ever forget--you know, the time our roommate shrunk us and held us in the palm of her hand as if we were M&M's."

Heather didn't know what infuriated her more: one roommate shrinking her against her will or the other roommate who didn't seem to give a crap. Didn't Alice realize this was no joke? What if Patricia dropped them? Stepped on them? Or squeezed too tightly? Why didn't Alice get it? Heather didn't care if Patricia was drunk or not--this was some real bullshit. You can't just shrink someone against their will and carry them around like little pet prisoners--and where the hell had Patricia gotten that shrink-gun thing anyway? The school lab surely didn't have technology like that, so where did she get it? That question would have to wait until she and Alice were returned to normal size, and that gun better have a reverse setting!

Folds of skin and tree-like fingers suddenly started to shift. Heather shielded her eyes from the sudden light; Alice did the same. Noise assaulted Heather's ears. She heard people talking, loud rumbling voices that melted together to form low droning background noise. There was the clink of silverware hitting plates, the *thunk* of glasses being placed on tables, and the distant ding of a cash register. Heather let her eyes adjust to the light until she could make out hanging incandescent lamps above, beige and somewhat dingy walls with a red decorative runner at the ceiling, and high storefront windows. She recognized the place instantly, it was a place she and all of her roommates had eaten at many times on Friday nights like this one, after an evening of drinking and partying. She opened her mouth to speak, but Alice beat her to the punch.

"She took us to...Denny's?" Alice said, looking around at universe-like enormity of the restaurant.

A giggle, loud and booming like a movie theater sound system cranked way too high, sounded off above the two tiny girls. Another laugh joined in from behind them. Heather winced; damn that sound hurt her ears and gave her an instant headache! She looked up. Towering over her was her roommate Patricia, whose pretty face was smiling broadly down at her. Patricia's cheeks were flush from all the screwdrivers she had consumed, and her slightly disarrayed long dark hair hung down past her shoulders in silky strands. Her mouth was spread in a wide grin, flashing shiny white teeth. The sight of the two squinting bug-sized girls in

her palm must have been particularly funny to Patricia. She hitched her colossal head backwards and laughed. The bright lights of the restaurant illuminated the enormous pink cave of Patricia's mouth. Heather could see all the way back into her friend's throat. She watched in awe as Patricia's tongue and throat heaved and bobbed as she laughed.

"Whoa, damn!" Alice shouted. She must have been looking into Patricia's yawning chasm of a mouth as well.

Heather shivered. Looking into her friend's mouth made her feel... uneasy. It was just a mouth. Just teeth and a tongue—but it was so damn big! Looking in there made Heather feel dizzy, as if she would fall in and get lost—which was actually possible considering her size. With some effort she tore her eyes away from Patricia's massive face and looked back over her shoulder. Sitting at the table in the chair opposite Patricia was Patricia's friend, and the usual fourth person in their little crew, Luan. Luan was of Vietnamese heritage and although Heather didn't really know her too well, she seemed nice enough and had worked out well as a fourth roommate to share in the rent for the house they lived in just off campus.

Nice girl or not, Heather felt heat rise through her body as her anger grew. She had known and experienced Pat's practical jokes and nonsense for years, but where did Luan get off at sitting there and laughing at her like this? Heather stood up in the middle of Patricia's palm and pointed an accusatory finger up at her friend. "Hey! Quit it, this is not funny!" Heather strained her voice, not sure if the two giants at the restaurant table would even be able to hear her. Alice stood up alongside of her. She didn't say anything, not like Heather really expected her to, but at least she wasn't just sitting there.

The giant girls stopped their childish giggling. "Hey you two are so cute!" Patricia said, her voice still slightly slurred from alcohol, although not as bad as it had been earlier in the evening.

"Take us home Pat," Heather shouted. "This is not cool. Fun's over. You need to return us to normal size before you drop us or something. Hey don't smirk, we could really get hurt!" Heather knew this was the wrong tactic to take even as she was saying it. Patricia was no bully, but she had some of the same qualities. Telling her to take them home and return them to normal size was going to do about as much good as telling a bully to quit picking on you.

"Come on, this is fun guys. Right, Luan? See, we're having a great time. And you should be happy I brought you along with me. Would you rather I just leave you two at home in a jar or something with holes poked in the lid?"

"Uhhh, yeah...right," Alice said, crossing her arms under her breasts.

"Just relax," Luan said, her voice carrying only a slight Vietnamese accent. "We're just having some fun. Tell you what, maybe next week we switch it around and you guys shrink us."

"Ha, fat chance!" Patricia said. "There's no way I'm letting myself get shrunk. Better you girls than me." The two giant roommates burst into fresh laughter.

"I'm glad you two are having such a great time at our expense," Heather said, pushing the rage back down inside her. It would do no good to get so fired up. After all, there was nothing she could do anyway. She couldn't fight back; she was nothing but an insect, and she couldn't run away, there was no place to run *to*. She threw her hands up and shrugged her shoulders in defeat. "Fine. Whatever. We're your little tiny pet bugs. Just get your food and take us home. Just be careful with us, okay? We're fragile."

Patricia smiled, exposing those massive white teeth again. "Don't worry about a thing. We'll be--oh! Hold on!"

Fingers curled around Heather and Alice, plunging them into darkness once more. Muffled voices could be heard from outside the walls formed by Patricia's fingers. The waitress had apparently come by; Patricia and Luan were ordering their food.

"Ugh! She makes me so mad sometimes," Heather said as she listened to Luan order a Grand-Slam breakfast. "I just want this night to be over with. It's been hours—*hours*--that we've had to ride around in her purse or coat pocket, or in her hand. I'm sick of it. I just want to go home and go to bed."

"I don't know," Alice said. "I think it's kind of fun. I mean, who gets to do shit like this, ya know? Yeah she didn't exactly ask our permission, but I'm sorta glad she did it. It's a thrill, exciting and scary at the same time. Come on, you've got to admit it has your adrenaline pumping."

"Yeah you can say that again." Heather couldn't deny the fact that her heart was racing, but it wasn't due to any sort of excitement--just to the fact that the floor seemed to be a skyscraper's distance away.

Alice walked up closer to her roommate and put an arm around her waist. "Don't worry. Pat knows to be careful with us. She was drunk all evening and didn't let anything happen to us. She's sobering up now, and after she eats she'll be even better. Then we'll go home and she'll zap us back to normal size. I don't know about you but I can't wait to blog about this."

"I guess," Heather said. "It's just so frustrating though. And I don't care what she says, when I get a hold of that Star Trek looking gun of hers I'm shrinking her ass for a day, see how she likes it!"

After the waitress left, Patricia uncurled her fingers once more to admire her roommates. She kept her hand close to her face and would quickly close up her hand when a waitress walked by or if another patron happened to gaze over at their table. At this late hour there were not many people in the restaurant and concealing the tiny girls in her palm was easy to manage.

The girls, all four of them, made small talk, goofed around, and laughed. Heather did her best to join in. Patricia's huge, full lips were so close Heather could smell the alcohol on her friend's breath. The air rushing out of Pat's mouth as she talked even knocked Heather over on several occasions. It was like a warm breeze blasting forth from a furnace.

It was also hard for Heather and Alice to keep their balance on Patricia's hand. It seemed that Patricia didn't understand the concept of

keeping still so the tiny people she was holding wouldn't keep toppling over. The more the tiny girls shouted for Patricia to keep still, the more she would purposely tilt or move her hand.

"Ow!" Alice shouted as she fell down on her backside yet again after just having gotten back to her feet. "Come on now, quit it, you're making me dizzy! Keep still!"

Patricia's laughter had been gaining momentum each time she made one of the tiny girls fall over, and she let loose in a full open-mouthed laugh which the few other people at the restaurant easily mistook for the girl being drunk and giddy.

The view in front of Heather exploded into a vision of pink wet walls, slick glistening tongue, and an arched throat that heaved up and down as Patricia laughed. Heather snapped her head to the side, looking away from her roommate's huge cave of a mouth. "Aww, gross! Close your mouth! I can see your damn tonsils!"

Patricia stopped laughing, but kept her smile in place. "What? Does my mouth scare you? Haha, you're so tiny I could eat you right up. Watch out, don't fall in!" Patricia opened wide and stuck her tongue out until it fell over her lower lip. It was so long it almost touched her chin. "Ahhhhhh," she said as if getting her throat examined by a doctor.

"Holy shit, I always said you had a huge mouth, and this proves it." Alice said, apparently not bothered by the massive saliva coated tongue hovering only a few feet from her.

Heather, on the other hand, was having a different reaction. Her legs felt weak. Her heart was pounding faster and faster. Patricia's tongue was so slick and shiny. Heather imagined it scooping her up. It could happen--easily. Yes, it could scoop her up like a crumb of food and then--she could be swallowed whole and sent into that dark chasm deep in the back, right back there where that dangling ball hung between Patricia's tonsils. Or she could easily be placed on one of those rocky molars--her body could fit on one quite easily--to be crushed and chewed to a pulp.

The 'ahhhhhh' sound coming from deep within Patricia's throat stopped. Her tongue retracted back into her mouth where it belonged.

"Are you okay Heather?" Alice said, putting a hand on her friend's shoulder. "You're breathing really funny."

"I'm okay. It's just--I don't know, her mouth really scared me for some reason. I felt like I was going to fall right in and get swallowed."

"Yeah did you see that uvula of hers? It was as big as we are. We could probably grab onto it and swing like--oh, sorry, that's not helping is it? Just take it easy. Deep breaths. That's it. Relax, there's nothing to be scared of. It's not like she's going to eat us or anything. Don't you think that's silly?"

"Yeah I suppose so," Heather said, her breathing starting to return to normal. What the heck had gotten into her? It was just her friend's mouth for God's sake. It was something she'd seen thousands times without a second thought. Of course those times she was a normal sized human being--not a tiny insect that could fall into her friend's throat as if it were a train tunnel.

"You okay down there?" Patricia's voice boomed. "I guess that did scare you huh? Sorry about that. I didn't mean anything by it."

"It's okay," Heather said. She tried to smile. "Just don't do that anymore, it makes me feel like you're going to eat me."

"Gross," Luan said from across the table.

"Exactly," Patricia agreed. "I wouldn't do that. I don't eat little bugs, haha. Oh, speaking of eating, here comes our food."

Fingers curled around Heather and Alice once again in order to hide them from the waitress who had brought over two plates of steaming food. The scent of pancakes, eggs, sausage, and bacon wafted up to the two tiny girls. Heather's mouth started to water and her stomach grumbled. It had been hours since she'd eaten. She wondered if Patricia would tear off a tiny chunk of something for her to eat.

Patricia's hand opened again when the waitress left. The giant girl was already shoveling in a fork full of steaming scrambled eggs into her mouth. "Don't watch Heather," Patricia said as she chewed. "We don't want your imagination to run wild as I eat."

Heather made a rude gesture at her friend with her middle finger, and then stood there with her hands on her hips. She supposed it was pretty silly to get so worked up. When she had first been shrunk earlier in the evening she had been deathly afraid of being dropped onto the floor, then of being trampled underfoot, then of becoming lost and never found again--and now of being eaten. None of that had come to pass. Patricia had protected Alice and herself, kept them safe. Maybe it was time to just relax, to enjoy the world from this strange and extraordinary perspective--like Alice. Alice seemed to be having a great time, gawking at all the giant objects and people around them.

She sat down in the center of her friend's hand, among the faint age-lines. Alice joined her. The two tiny girls watched the two giant girls eat. Yes, everything would be just fine. As long as Patricia was holding them they had nothing to worry--

"Can I have them for a little while?" Luan asked.

"What?" said Patricia as she bit into a sausage.

"You've gotten to hold them all evening. Can I hold them for a little while? Come on please?"

Alarm bells went off in Heather's mind. Red flags started popping up in her imagination. Something deep in her gut told her to not leave the safety of Patricia's hand. She got to her feet. "No, no, that's okay. Just leave us here for now. We don't want to--"

"Well I guess I can let you hold them for a little while," Patricia said.

"But be *very* careful with them, and make sure nobody sees them. I don't want to have to explain tiny shrunken people to any of these strangers."

The ground below Heather moved. She and Alice both fell to the ground as they were passed across the table. Then Patricia's hand tilted to a sharp angle. Heather and Alice both cried out in protest as they fell head over heels from Patricia's hand onto the soft surface of Luan's outstretched palm.

"Ow!" Alice said, rubbing her shoulder. "You could have let us *walk* onto her hand!" Heather shouted her agreement as well. Both girls lifted

themselves up from the crumpled heap in which they landed and stood up once more. Patricia's face was gone, replaced by Luan's. The Vietnamese girl was extremely petite, with small breasts and a thin frame. Her face was wide, round, and framed by rigidly straight chin length black hair. A cute slender nose laid smack dab in the center of her face below two almond shaped eyes. Below her nose was a pair of huge, full lips--fuller than any of her other roommates'.

"Here we go again," Heather said as those massive lips parted to expose huge white teeth. They were slightly crooked and overlapped a bit, but not too terribly. Still, she could use some orthodontic work. Jaws opened and once again Heather was staring into another enormous mouth. A fork entered, carrying hash-brown potatoes, and settled on a purplish-pink tongue. Heather noticed that Luan's mouth was a much different color than Patricia's had been, and looked a hell of a lot wetter in there--if that was even possible.

Luan's mouth closed. The fork was yanked out clean, and she started chewing.

"This is not your day huh?" Alice said to Heather as the two tiny girls watched Luan chew, then swallow. A bulge moved down Luan's slender neck.

"You got that right. This is gross. She could at least keep her mouth closed all the way when she chews. Yuck!"

"Still scared?" Alice asked.

Heather thought about it for a second. "I'm doing okay I think. I guess I was just worrying too much before. Can you blame me though? It's not every day that you find yourself to be the size of a peanut."

"I know a way you can conquer your fear. You could change your major to dentistry. You know, we could be micro-dentists."

"And run around in people's mouth's all day?" Heather made a disgusted face. "Ugh, stop it!"

"Haha, just imagine," Alice continued. "You could run around in there with this huge drill, or a jackhammer, and fill cavities!"

Heather laughed. It was such an absurd thought, but considering the shrink-gun of Patricia's--it was actually a possibility.

"We could get all kinds of cool medical jobs," Alice said. "Just think of it! You could be a micro-proctologist and check out assholes all day. Excuse me sir, spread'em, I'm coming in."

Heather doubled over laughing. "Oh my God that's nasty, haha!"

"How about a toe-nail fungus cleaner?" Alice said.

"Or an ear-wax remover?" Heather countered.

"A nose picker!" Alice said, laughing hard herself now.

"Or a little gynecologist? You would totally do a little vagina-diving eh?"

"Hey!" Alice said and slapped Heather playfully across the shoulder.

The two girls, caught up in their game, didn't notice what was happening until it was too late.

There was a sudden sharp intake of breath. Startled, Heather and Alice looked up at the sudden sound. Luan was making a face--a very

strange face. Her lips were opened in a round circle, her nose was scrunched up, and her eyes were closed tightly. She was sucking in air in one huge intake of breath. She tilted her head back--

"Oh shit!" Heather said, realizing what was about to happen. The laughter died on her face. She threw up her hands as if she could ward off what was coming.

Luan sneezed. "*AHHH-CHOOOOO!*"

Heather had never felt something so powerful in all her life. A gust of hot, moist air blasted out of Luan's mouth with the force of a hurricane. Alice screamed beside her, and was suddenly gone--as was Luan's hand, the table, Patricia--everything. Heather's stomach lurched. She felt wind all around her body, swirling her hair around her head. She felt gravity pulling at her as she tumbled.

She was flying through the air.

2.

Marlene collected her tip from the table and waved as her latest customers, an elderly couple, headed out the door. She checked on the few remaining occupied tables assigned to her to see if they needed anything. Everyone seemed content, even those giggling college girls at the center table. If she was quick she could get in a speedy break and some food before anyone needed drink refills.

She walked over to the order pick-up window and took a plate of pancakes and scrambled eggs. She gave a quick thanks to Sam, the cook, who always took care of her this late at night, and took her plate to an empty portion of the dining room across a small waist high barrier that passed as the boundary to the smoking section. It wasn't a good idea to let the customers see you taking a break while they were eating.

A little pepper, a little salt for the eggs. Some syrup for the pancakes. Everything was--

"*AHHH-CHOOOO!*"

The sudden explosion startled Marlene and she spilled syrup on the table-top. That was one hell of a sneeze! "Oh my goodness, bless you!" Marlene said over the barrier. She heard a faint 'thank you' from a young lady, one of the college kids. There was something about her voice though. The girl sounded--shocked, or frightened. Naw, it was probably nothing. The girl was probably just surprised that someone said 'bless you' to her. These days you never knew how people were going to take that.

Marlene turned her attention back to her food. She lifted her fork and dug in. She would have to eat quickly and get back to her tables. People left waiting got pissed, and pissed off people left no tips.

3.

Luan stared at Patricia. Patricia stared back at Luan, a fork full of eggs held suspended halfway to her open mouth. Luan held her hand out, palm up, just like she had been doing before, except her palm was empty.

"Oh shit, I didn't mean to...where are they? What happened?" Luan said, stuttering.

"You idiot you blew them right off your hand!" Patricia said through gritted teeth. The tendons in her jaw stood out in from the effort of keeping her voice down.

"I'm sorry. I—"

"Shut up and look for them. They can't have gone far. Check the table first. Look on your plate. Come on, hurry!"

Luan moved her silverware, carefully lifted her napkin. She searched around her plate, on her plate, in her food. No sign of the two tiny girls. "Any luck?"

"No, keep looking," Patricia said as she used her fork to dig through her pile of hash-browns. "They've got to be here somewhere. Do *not* eat anything until we find them, and don't move your feet. They might be on the floor."

"Oh shit I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to--I wasn't paying attention--what if I...killed them?"

"Don't freak out. Did you check the container with the sugar packets? Okay well I don't see them anywhere on the table. Let's check the floor. Watch every single inch you step on. We've got to find them before somebody steps on them. If anyone asks, just pretend you lost a contact lens. Oh for God's sake don't start crying Luan! We'll find them, just help me look."

The two girls began their search of the floor.

4.

Heather braced herself for impact. Any moment now she would smash into the floor--or the wall--and everything would go black. There would be nothing left of her but a tiny stain. Her body would be swept up by one of those carpet scrubber things she saw people use in restaurants.

She was falling. She couldn't even scream. Everything was moving too fast. She saw the floor, tables, people, the ceiling, and then--

And then she landed in a mound of something soft and fluffy. She shook her head and tried to reorient herself and let the dizziness fade that was caused from her flight through the air. Where was she? Not splattered against the wall or the floor, so where?

She seemed to have fallen into the crevice of a mountainous pile of something yellow with black specks sprinkled here and there like dark snow. The smell was overpowering--the smell of eggs. Scrambled eggs with pepper to be precise. She was in someone's food!

As confirmation, a giant silver fork slashed through the air and impaled a chunk of egg directly in front of where Heather lay. She screamed as a pile of egg was carried away into the air.

"Shit!" Heather yelled. This was not good, not good at all. Why didn't Patricia stop eating? Didn't she notice that Heather had been blown off Luan's hand by Luan's sneeze? Or maybe this was Luan's plate. Either

way, she had to get moving, fast. If she stayed here she would be eaten for sure.

Her heart jumped into her throat. Adrenaline surged through her veins. She turned from where the fork had come down into eggs and started scrambling up the pile of the squishy, soft food. It was slow going. It was hard to get a foothold on the slippery surface of the eggs, and the pile kept shifting, making it difficult to reach the peak.

"Patricia! Luan! Stop eating! We fell in your food! Stop!" She received no reply except for the sound of a fork cutting through something soft and then scraping against the bottom of the plate. The smell of maple syrup and butter wafted across the hill of eggs from the pancakes that must be nearby.

This was another joke. Patricia was screwing around, she had to be. She must have seen Heather and Alice fall into one of the plates of food, and now she was toying with them. Heather tried to get angry, tried to summon up her rage, but the anger wouldn't come. She was too scared. She kept thinking about how utterly massive her two roommates' mouths were and how easily she could disappear into them along with a mouthful of food.

"Come on Patricia this isn't funny!" She climbed up the warm pile of egg, over huge flat folded pieces and large chunks, making her way to the top of the pile. "Luan? Luan is this your plate? Get me out of here before-"

Heather's sentence turned into a scream that issued forth from her throat. She had reached the top of the pile and saw two things that filled her with horror. One was Alice. Her roommate had landed in a tall glass of orange juice. She was kicking and struggling to stay afloat where she tread water--or in this case, juice. Heather's friend was stuck; the level of the liquid was too far below the rim of the glass for Alice to climb out.

The second horrifying thing Heather saw was a giant woman, seated at the table above her. The woman was attractive, and old enough to be her mother. The lady had on a uniform of some kind, a light beige shirt with a burgundy bow-tie-like decoration around the collar. Over the ample slope of her left breast was a billboard sized name-tag with the word 'Marlene' stamped on it. Her light brown hair was streaked with strands of gray and was tied back behind her head in a ponytail. Stray hairs fluttered around her head where they had come loose during her night's work.

This wasn't Patricia's food. Or Luan's. It was this woman's! Heather cupped her hands around her mouth and shouted up at the middle-aged woman who was even now reaching for her juice.

"HEY YOU, STOOOOOOOOOP!" The waitress lifted the glass from the table, oblivious to Heather's shout. The rim of the glass touched the woman's lips and she tilted the glass upwards. Heather ran her fingers through her hair and stared, shocked, unable to look away. She saw Alice, tiny arms flailing and splashing, slip between the woman's lips in a rush of orange liquid. Heather even thought she could hear Alice's screams as she disappeared.

"Oh my God no!" Heather said. She collapsed to her knees on the soft surface of scrambled egg. Wet moisture from the egg soaked into her

jeans. The giant woman above swallowed gulp after gulp of liquid. Heather watched the woman's throat muscles work as she swallowed each mouthful.

The woman replaced her glass back on the table. Heather felt numb. How could this be happening? Just a minute ago they were in the palm of Luan's hand and now...Alice was gone--swallowed whole. She was in that woman's stomach now, maybe alive, maybe not, swimming in a mixture of eggs, juice, and pancakes.

Her own stomach tightened into a ball and Heather felt like she was going to throw up. She felt the blood drain from her face; her legs and arms began to quiver. A massive fork lifted by a colossal hand descended once more. Sharp steel tines pierced a neatly cut section of syrup-drenched pancake and lifted it up into an open mouth above.

The woman, Marlene, chewed, swallowed, and then continued to eat from the plate of food where Heather had landed. Heather was frozen in terror. She tried to move her legs but they wouldn't obey her commands. She knew she had to get up and run. Her life depended on it. At any second she could be accidentally eaten--just like Alice had been.

"Come on, move! MOVE!" Heather yelled out loud, trying to spur her body into action. She lifted one shaking leg, pushed, and stood up. The plate of food stretched out before her, as big and round as a baseball stadium--or so it seemed. How the hell was she going to make it all the way to the edge before the woman finished her meal? It would be slow going, but she had to try.

Heather turned to start her sprint across the surface of the spongy eggs and that's when the fork dipped down beneath her. The pile of eggs moved, shifted, and lifted off the plate--carrying Heather with it.

Tears burst from the corners of Heather's eyes and streamed down her face. She screamed out in frustration. She hadn't even made it one step before she had been scooped up! The fork carried her like an elevator up past a long neck complete with faint age-lines, a chin, and up to a pair of lips that were opening wide.

The fork's direction shifted from moving upwards to moving forwards. Its tines pointed towards the waitress's gaping mouth. Heather's eyes grew so wide she could feel the skin of her forehead scrunching into tight wrinkles. She gritted her teeth; the tendons in her neck tightened into taut cords as her body tensed in terrified anticipation of what was about to happen.

In the span of one second Heather saw rows of white teeth, molars with black patches where cavities had been filled, a sloping wet tongue--with a faint center-line fissure running up the middle and tiny flecks of unswallowed egg stuck to it--and a shadowed, wide, tonsil-less throat.

The tip of the fork passed between the round opening formed by the waitress's lips. Hot breath that smelled like maple syrup washed over Heather's tiny body. With a scream of terror, Heather kicked out with both of her legs and jumped. She tumbled over the edge of the fork, taking a tiny chunk of egg with her, just as the fork disappeared inside the waitress's mouth.

"OOF!" Heather shouted as she landed spread-eagled on her back. Warm, thick, sticky liquid immediately swelled around her body, coating her completely. It felt like she was lying on a mattress, and that's where she wished she was--back home in bed. But judging by the thick brown liquid that surrounded her, Heather knew she had landed on the waitress's syrup covered pancakes.

Heather tried to lift an arm. It took a ton of effort to lift it off of the sticky surface of the pancake, and the pasty slime-like strands kept pulling at her body like glue. There was no way she'd be able to pull herself out of this mess to make a run for it. She let her arm flop back into the tacky goo. She was stuck.

A bitter laugh burst from Heather's mouth. This whole situation was absurd, crazy. She had been so worried all evening about the dangers of being so small. And hadn't she even been scared of this very situation just a little while ago when she saw how big Patricia's mouth was? "I told you this was dangerous Patricia," Heather said as she watched the woman above her continue her meal. "You stupid bitch, I told you this was dangerous. I TOLD you! How could you fucking do this to me? Now look at me. Alice is gone, and now I'm going to be eaten too. Patricia where the hell are you? Help me!"

Food was rapidly disappearing from the plate. Heather squirmed in the sticky syrup, her emotions alternating between horror, anger, and despair. It was strange, watching the waitress eat, knowing that she was about to be devoured by the older woman. At least she wouldn't be alone, not technically. Alice was inside the woman's body--somewhere--lying on top of a pile of chewed pancakes, or maybe fully absorbed by now. It was a gruesome thought, but Heather was glad she wasn't the only one who had to go through this.

Orange juice was guzzled. Eggs were swept away forkful by forkful until they were gone. The pancakes were cut and taken away, bite by bite. Heather watched it all happen. Jaws opened, closed. The waitress chewed and her neck bulged every time she swallowed. Heather felt oddly more and more calm as the minutes passed. Patricia wasn't coming to the rescue. Neither was Luan. This was just how it was going to be. The only person who could save her now was the waitress, Marlene. Hell, it was worth a shot.

"Hey, lady!" Heather shouted up at the woman, who was chewing a mouthful of pancakes. The waitress constantly looked around the restaurant, seemingly too distracted by not being caught on break by her customers to pay attention to what she was eating, "Marlene! Pay attention to what you're doing. Don't you see me down here? Heyyyyy, stop eating!"

The waitress didn't stop eating, not even for a moment. The reason the waitress didn't see the tiny girl in her food would remain a mystery; Heather's time to be consumed had arrived.

The waitress lowered her fork and used its edge to slice away an island of pancake that Heather lay on. The section of pancake lifted into the air.

"Wait--please--don't--!" Heather yelled as Marlene's face came closer and closer. Lips opened. Heather tried to scream through her clenched jaws and all that came out was a squeak. She saw massive teeth, a glistening wet tongue, and the archway of a hungry throat. The fork passed between the waitress' lips and Heather was thrust inside her mouth.

She doesn't even know I'm here, Heather thought desperately as the fork settled onto Marlene's tongue. The sudden jolt dislodged Heather from her sticky perch and she fell onto the soft surface of the woman's tongue. She quickly jumped to her feet in order to escape but the way ahead was blocked by a massive piece of pancake which was dripping syrup onto Marlene's tongue. The waitress' mouth closed around the fork. Heather watched, terrified, as the light of the restaurant disappeared.

Marlene extracted the fork from her mouth and immediately pitched her tongue to the left in order to push the pancake between her molars for chewing. The sudden movement of the woman's tongue caused Heather to lose her balance. She swung her arms crazily and took several awkward steps backwards due to the shifting floor beneath her feet. She took one, two, three steps and then—the floor seemed to disappear. Heather screamed in the darkness as she fell over the back of the waitress' tongue and down into her throat.

She landed on top of the waitress' epiglottis and dangled there precariously. The wet, mushy sounds of chewing could be heard directly above. On the one hand Heather was relieved she hadn't been pushed between the woman's teeth and chewed to a pulp. On the other hand that meant she was going to be swallowed any second now, and ending up in the woman's stomach may be a worse fate than being ground to a bits. Hardly able to believe that her worst fears of the evening were actually coming to pass, Heather clenched her eyes closed as tight as she could and waited for the inevitable.

It came a few seconds later when the waitress swallowed her mouthful of food. A sweet smelling wet mash of chewed pancaked descended down Marlene's throat and carried Heather along with it, down into the hot confines of the waitress' churning stomach.

5.

Having no luck finding Heather or Alice, Patricia had no choice but to come clean. Desperate to find her friends she had told the restaurant manager that she had lost her two tiny roommates somewhere in the dining area. The manager, of course, didn't believe her and threatened to have her thrown out, blaming her story on her being drunk.

Patricia and Luan had gone all the way back to the dorm, then all the way back to the restaurant. Patricia had brought the shrink gun and showed the manager how it worked.

The manager, shocked but now believing her story, had closed the restaurant and enlisted the staff to help look for the tiny missing girls. Hours passed, but no trace of Heather or Alice could be found.

Now, dawn was approaching and Patricia sat miserably in a booth, taking a short break from searching the dining room. A waitress came over and slipped into the booth opposite her.

"We'll find them, don't give up," the waitress, Marlene, said. "They have to be here somewhere."

"Yeah, I know," Patricia said gloomily. "I just don't understand where they could be."

The waitress, who had stayed to help well past the time her shift ended, was exhausted. She opened her mouth in a wide yawn. Patricia looked into the woman's gaping mouth momentarily, not thinking much of it, not realizing she was looking directly where Heather and Alice had disappeared.

"I better get back to looking," Patricia said, sliding from the booth. "Maybe they're in one of the planters. I don't think I checked there yet."

THE END