

CLAUDE OLSON

13 Considerations of the Holy Bug

I.

I AM OFTEN MISTAKEN for a tiny biting insect. No one cares to know my taxonomic name. The term “midge” will suffice. Any little two-winged fly can be a midge. There are highland midges and phantom midges, midges with affectionate nicknames like “punkies” and “no-see-ums.” There are midges that spread bluetongue disease and midges that pollinate cocoa trees. Midges live in mountains and mangrove swamps, among marsh marigolds and monkey flowers and spider lilies on the margins of standing freshwaters. A midge can be found just about anywhere, aside from barren deserts and the frozen tundra.

And yet, people are often surprised when they see me. Sometimes I am met with a look of fear, wide eyes, and a muttered “sorry” before I’ve had a chance to get in the way. Other times, astonishment. Children who ask how I can be so small, mothers who turn them away from my line of sight. Men who regard me as a rare and mythical creature.

2.

ALL I WANTED was a pack of sour gummy worms. All anyone wants when they go to a CVS is to leave as soon as possible. But I happened to look up at the man beside me in the candy aisle. His eyes were locked on me. It was disturbing, how little fear I saw in them.

“I’ve never seen a midget in real life before.”

I blinked.

“Only in porno.”

My body might as well have been on the shelf, sandwiched between the bright yellow packets of Peanut M&M’s and the stacks of King Size Kit Kats. A fly amongst the sour worms. An animal just the same.

3.

THE TERM “midget” returns five hundred sixty results on PornHub. There’s Midget Mouth and Midget Grannie, Midget Tiny Texie and Midget Girl Mary Jane. Midget Fucks Her Pussy On Webcam. Midget Gets Destroyed By a Big Black Cock. A midget can be found doing just about anything.

Any little person can be a midget. It’s not a medical term but instead a convenient, albeit derogatory, catchall for any person of unusually short stature. Unusual, as in a deviation from what is normal. Unusual, as in a spectacular curiosity. Horny Midget Having a Good Fucking Time clocking in at 5.9 million views.

4.

OUR BODIES WERE built to be worshiped. Before the Internet, we were the stars of circus tours and, before the invention of the wheel, we were among the ranks of Egyptian gods. Little people were seen as celestial gifts, bodies bestowed by the heavens. We were royalty, depicted on the walls of tombs and buried alongside mummified kings. We were actual gods, too. Bes was the dwarf god of childbirth and the protector of households, a squat man with a face so grotesque it could drive away evil spirits. Still, there is beauty in a body that can ward off all the world’s sorrow.

Bes was indeed a symbol of all that was good in the world. He could be found rendered in stone, tattooed on the thighs of dancers, painted in the hopes of healing the sick and barren. He was fertility and music and sexual pleasure, a deity with a cult of devotees. A body, indisputably holy.

5.

I KNEW I WOULD never have trouble finding a man to worship me. I could open up Tinder at any time, gather a few dozen matches, and wait for my inbox to fill with requests for explicit pictures, propositions for one-night stands, and open confessions that the thought of me was enough to bring on an orgasm or two.

The trouble comes when men begin to feel ashamed that they ever saw a body like mine as a sexual spectacle. I can lure them with my

siren song but I cannot keep them in a state of perpetual hypnosis. They inevitably wake in a moment of realization: I've drawn them to the traveling freak show.

6.

THE FIRST TIME I was with a man, he interrupted me mid-act.

“Are you legally able to consent?”

He had a twinge of fear in his eyes, like he suddenly snapped out of the spell I had put him under. The ruse could only last for so long. My body was that of a goddess's and then it was that of an insentient fly. I hadn't felt small until that moment.

I finished the act as a retaliation, some desperate attempt to reclaim whatever agency I had left. If I was a rational person, I would have kicked him out. No, if I was truly rational, I would have left him behind earlier that afternoon, when I entered his car and he asked if it was safe for me to ride in the passenger seat. I would have gone home alone and wished I stayed. Instead, he left and I wished I didn't feel so satisfied.

7.

GROWING UP, I never imagined that I could have sex with a man. I was four feet tall, rather chubby, and a lesbian, as far as I knew. Having unrestricted Internet access from an early age turned me off the idea of attracting men entirely, Google searches acting as a sort of reverse conversion therapy.

It does not take long to find a man burdened by his attraction to our holy bodies.

“How can I stop having a midget fetish?” one Quora user asks.

“You need to slip growth hormone into the food of the midgets you love,” another responds.

8.

THE WORD “FETISH” derives from the Latin *facere* and *facticius*, literally “to make artificial.” In order to have a fetish, in this sense, you must believe that an ordinary object holds supernatural power over you. My holiness, then, may be a delusion, entirely.

There is no official name for this certain fetish, only close approximations. Anasteemaphilia, an arousal to a person of extreme stature. Microphilia, a fetish for unrealistically tiny people. Formicophilia, a pleasure derived from insects crawling over one's body.

9.

IF YOU WANT to call a midge by its taxonomic name, you can look toward the name of its family: Chironomidae, derived from the ancient Greek word for "pantomimist."

Perhaps my attempt at being attractive in the secular sense is nothing more than an act of playing pretend. The men I have hooked up with may only remember me as a fulfilled item of a bucket list. They may talk about about our time together like it was an encounter with a cryptid, along the likes of Bigfoot or Mothman. It is entirely possible I was no more than a fetish to them. If so, should I be ashamed?

10.

IT IS NOT as if I could ever disentangle my conventional beauty from my physical deformities. I have a perfect button nose, virtually unblemished skin, and orthodontically corrected teeth, but none of that guarantees I will be seen as beautiful in my entirety. I will always have bowed legs, stunted arms, an uneven gait, and an unusually short stature. I will always be a spectacle. Maybe there is beauty in a body that can draw the attention of an audience.

11.

IN 2009, Cheng Mingjing, an average-sized man, constructed a theme park in China to house and employ about 100 entertainers with dwarfism. He named it "Kingdom of the Little People," envisioning it as a safe haven from the social and economic setbacks these performers faced.

While the organization Little People of America, among other human rights groups, condemned the park, its residents found within it confidence and community. They could spend their days dancing in elaborate costumes and singing on a stage designed to resemble a woodland garden. They could be spectacles on their own terms.

I 2 .

I DO NOT want to believe that there is something deeply wrong with those that admire our beauty. After all, our bodies have been worshiped for millenia. Our genetically mutated bones are a sight to behold.

I am reminded of Charles Sherwood Stratton, otherwise known as General Tom Thumb. At three feet and four inches tall, he was by far the most famous act of P. T. Barnum's traveling circus. Though his height was certainly an aspect of his appeal, Stratton was a genuine showman, able to act, sing, dance, and perform comedy routines to such an outstanding degree that he was regarded as a professional entertainer, beyond the ranks of the freak show circuit. He made a wildly successful career out of being an oddity.

I 3 .

THE WORLD STILL sees us as items in a curio cabinet, so I choose to believe this means our beauty is truly otherworldly. I think we deserve to be showcased in that way. We may be unusual, but we are not common flies. We are oddities, possessing the type of beauty that is loud and thunderous, resonating like the footsteps of dancing gods.