



## Rose City Sisters

Flash fiction + Microfiction

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# Downsized by Janet Aird

I'd always thought of Albert as a fairly predictable person, so when I came home from work one evening and found the living room drapes missing, I assumed he'd taken them to the dry cleaner.

He's been stressed these last few months, ever since he was laid off from his job as an engineer at Caltech in Pasadena. A loyal, if unimaginative, employee for nine years, he hadn't seen it coming, although almost half of his department had already gone.

I hadn't realized how much of a shock it had been, though, and what effect it would have on me.

I have to admit, at first I enjoyed his being home during the day. He did all the cooking, and when he cleaned the house, he swept the cobwebs hanging from the ceiling. He even moved the furniture when he vacuumed. Except for our dwindling bank account, I'd have to say that the quality of my life had definitely improved.

Until I found out he'd sold the drapes on Craigslist.

"We can use the money," he said. "Besides, I kept an extra set of sheets. I'll hang them up instead."

The next day he donated all the magazines I'd been meaning to read to the library. Then he went down to the thrift store with a load of clothing that I would have fit into as soon as I lost ten pounds.

One evening I came home to find pictures from our photograph albums scattered over the dining room table. “If we just keep the best ones we’ll only need one album,” he said, dropping a handful into the trash.

He gave away scraps of lumber we’d been saving for the day we might want to build something, and all the boxes we’d kept in case we ever moved. Then our furniture began to disappear. First, it was a few chairs we never used, then two ugly lamps, and then everything in the spare room. He threw out battered pots and pans, slightly worn clothing, shoes and sports equipment, anything scuffed, smudged, torn or loose. People from Craigslist were coming to the door at all hours of the day.

“You have to get out of the house,” I urged him, listening to my voice bounce against the bare walls. “You need to find a new job.”

He shrugged. “I can’t,” he said. “I’ve sold all my suits.”

I couldn’t leave the man I loved, although I had begun to dread coming home from work, wondering what else would be missing when I got there. I tried to talk him into seeing a therapist.

“I’m not the one who needs help,” he insisted. “I’m just trying to simplify our lives. It’s people like you, who need to be surrounded with clutter, who have a problem.”

A few days later as I pulled into the driveway after work, I noticed a rectangular shadow in the porch light. Wouldn’t you know it, he’d saved one last suitcase. And everything I owned fit inside.

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Janet Aird writes technical and business articles about the environment for landscapers, arborists, farmers and professional water managers, but her true love is writing about relationships between people. Her articles, essays and short stories have been published in magazines and newspapers in the United States, Canada and England. “Downsized” was published in Stoneflower Literary Journal.