

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zQucWXWp3k>

“Shrinking Women”  
a poem by Lily Myers

Across from me at the kitchen table, my mother smiles over red wine that she drinks out of a measuring glass.

She says she doesn't deprive herself,  
but I've learned to find nuance in every movement of her fork.  
In every crinkle in her brow as she offers me the uneaten pieces on her plate.  
I've realized she only eats dinner when I suggest it.  
I wonder what she does when I'm not there to do so.

Maybe this is why my house feels bigger each time I return; it's proportional.  
As she shrinks the space around her seems increasingly vast.  
She wanes while my father waxes. His stomach has grown round with wine, late nights,  
oysters, poetry. A  
new girlfriend who was overweight as a teenager, but my dad reports that now she's  
“crazy about fruit.”

It was the same with his parents; as my grandmother became frail and angular her  
husband swelled to red round cheeks, rotund stomach  
and I wonder if my lineage is one of women shrinking  
making space for the entrance of men into their lives  
not knowing how to fill it back up once they leave.

I have been taught accommodation.  
My brother never thinks before he speaks.  
I have been taught to filter.  
“How can anyone have a relationship to food?” He asks, laughing, as I eat the black bean  
soup I chose  
for its lack of carbs.  
I want to tell say: we come from difference, Jonas,  
you have been taught to grow out  
I have been taught to grow in  
you learned from our father how to emit, how to produce, to roll each thought off your  
tongue with confidence,  
you used to lose your voice every other week from shouting so much  
I learned to absorb  
I took lessons from our mother in creating space around myself  
I learned to read the knots in her forehead while the guys went out for oysters  
and I never meant to replicate her, but  
spend enough time sitting across from someone and you pick up their habits

that's why women in my family have been shrinking for decades.  
We all learned it from each other, the way each generation taught the next how to knit

weaving silence in between the threads  
which I can still feel as I walk through this ever-growing house,  
skin itching,  
picking up all the habits my mother has unwittingly dropped like bits of crumpled paper  
from her pocket  
on her countless trips from bedroom to kitchen to bedroom again,  
Nights I hear her creep down to eat plain yogurt in the dark, a fugitive stealing calories to  
which she does not feel entitled.  
Deciding how many bites is too many  
How much space she deserves to occupy.

Watching the struggle I either mimic or hate her,  
And I don't want to do either anymore  
but the burden of this house has followed me across the country  
I asked five questions in genetics class today and all of them started with the word  
"sorry".  
I don't know the requirements for the sociology major because I spent the entire meeting  
deciding whether or not I could have another piece of pizza  
a circular obsession I never wanted but

inheritance is accidental  
still staring at me with wine-stained lips from across the kitchen table.