

### [A Small Thing](#) [1]

April 23, 2014 [Flash Fiction](#) [2]

**By Missy-Marie Montgomery**

**Finalist for the 2013 Talking Writing Prize for Flash Fiction**



**It was nothing, really.** But still, it's funny how I can so easily recreate the day. All of us sitting and watching my husband Howard play in the over-fifty community softball league, the four of us whooping it up, understanding that we were being silly, and tritely American, and sappy. We were the only spectators the team had that evening, and so we made lots of noise. The kids were all getting along, the brutal humidity of Indiana July abating just enough that we were really enjoying ourselves, cheering there on a splintery bench behind the junior high. My grown son was home for a two-week visit from graduate school and at the last minute had decided to come along with us. He was now looking over with a sweet, adultish look of amusement at his young half-brother, who was keeping the official score, calling out the lineup by the grown-up players' first names—"Listen up! Bob! Katie-on-deck! Howard! Ruthie!"—with such seven-year-old authority that even the umpire grinned.

After the game, all of us—even my teenaged stepdaughter and her friends—went out together for ice cream. Then we all

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walked across the street to the college greenhouse, where we'd heard that the famous rare corpse plant (the *Amorphophallus titanum*) was in bloom for just this one night and that we could see it after hours in the window. And when we got there, the guy in charge of the place was just returning to check on his prized plant once more, and he good-naturedly opened the greenhouse for the little crowd of us who'd gathered, so we could actually see that flower up close, could each put our noses to the four-foot-high, hideously beautiful, putrid thing and breathe it in. It smelled like dead meat. And how humorously the man answered all our questions about pollen and sperm and how *big* it all was, and how the adults laughed, and how the kids wandered around in that darkening garden of flowers until it was finally time to leave. And driving back home, me sort of basking in it all, thinking, *Yes, this is sweetness at its finest.*

Later in the kitchen, after the kids had dispersed, I teased Howard, who had been a little quiet: "Did you mind that I yelled 'Great catch, darlin!' so loudly?" I just knew he'd say, in fact, how proud he was to have such a loyal cheering section, how pleased he'd been about that particular catch, how fun the whole evening had been for him. But instead, he winced for a second and then confessed to feeling irritated about the cheering. Especially, it turned out, about being called "darlin'" by me in front of people. Said it was embarrassing. And then I could see it all differently—could see how the whole scene distilled for him in that few hours was not remotely similar to my own. How I had been savoring the simple, pure orchestration of the moment, all of us together and happy. Maybe feeling for a minute that I was a prize—so obviously devoted and still sort of pretty, even. Cheering for this geeky bald guy playing softball with a lot of other middle-aged, oddly shaped human beings.

And how quickly, just like that, I felt all the air come out of the day. Surely a shortcoming, a huge shortcoming on my part, that something so small, almost nothing at all, could affect me so deeply, could seem like a sudden window into a room I had not looked in.

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### Art Information

- "[Inside the Corpse Flower](#) [3]" © Erin Kohlenberg; Creative Commons license.



Missy-Marie Montgomery is a humanities professor at Springfield College in Springfield, Massachusetts, where she teaches environmental writing, creative writing, and composition. Her work has appeared in over 25 literary magazines, including *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Connecticut Review*, *Poetry International*, *Rattle*, *Pearl*, and *Cimarron Review*.

Her manuscript *Half-life of Passion* was a finalist for the Zone 3 Press First Book Award and a semifinalist for the Kore Press First Book Award, the Crab Orchard Series in Poetry First Book Award, and the St. Lawrence Book Award. Her manuscript *The Fish Beneath the Words* was a semifinalist for the 2013 Crab Orchard Series in Poetry First Book Award.

Learn more at [Missy-Marie Montgomery's website](#). [4]

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