

Ethan Goffman

Alph and Omega

Alph the giant didn't think he was so giant. "It's not that I'm so big, it's that most everyone else is so small," he often muttered to himself. He wondered if there were some kind of mass birth defect that kept other people permanently shrunken, perhaps some radiation hazard or something in the air or water. Scientists ought to be investigating it, but he had always been too bad at math to be a scientist. He did like that he could dominate at pick-up basketball, although he was too uncoordinated to have become a professional or even to have played Division I in college. His size wasn't helping him get rich, just making him feel awkward, like people were always gawking at him.

Meanwhile, Omega the dwarf wondered why people were always gawking at her like she didn't belong on this planet, then glancing away. She knew she was the only correctly sized person around—most everyone else was a gargantuan monstrosity. She should be the one staring at people like the freaks they were, freaks who bumble obliviously, stomping on insects and small mammals. She was the one who didn't take up an inordinate amount of food, water, or space, lived in a small apartment and drove a tiny pink car, had far less of an impact

on the Earth's strained environment than the enormous entities around her. Small is beautiful, she thought.

Small is virtue.

One day at the supermarket, Omega was straining to reach a bottle of pickles when who should loom overhead like some gangly redwood but Alph. "I can get that for you," he said, grasping it gently in his enormous appendage, then crouching carefully so she could retrieve it. But the size difference was so great—and holding a jar that large was so awkward for Omega with even two hands—that it went bouncing to the floor. Fortunately, it had already been so low that it didn't break.

"Sorry," said Alph. "I'm kind of an oaf."

"I think you're wonderful," said Omega, scooping up the pickle jar and hoisting it like a trophy.

"Hey, want to go out for coffee some time?"

"Sure."

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Years later, somewhat happily married to another dwarf, Omega occasionally wished she had shown up at the coffee date or answered Alph's single phone call afterward. He, too, had given up rather easily. Would a giant and a dwarf have completed the universe? Or would people have stared, snickered, pointed, and gawked more than ever, transforming them into a kind of cosmic joke?

Pets Unlimited

I must have been imagining things about our local veterinary practice, Pets Unlimited, where we've taken our wonderful beagle, Oscar, for the past 12 years. As clear as yesterday, I remember that when new ownership took over, about five years ago, the two vets in charge proudly announced being a lesbian couple. Pets Unlimited's new mission was to remake the practice into a lesbian-gay-bisexual-other haven, with a staff that included a big-boned woman with a marine hair-cut and tattoos and a skinny, sensitive boy with a delicate silver earring of Christ splayed on the cross. Here in Bloomington, Indiana, a liberal bubble in a red state, must have seemed the perfect place for such openness. Still, a segment of the town is quite conservative, and at the time I wondered if being so openly LBGTQA might hurt the business.

Since then, the two veterinarians evidently had a change of heart at midlife, turned heterosexual, and married men. The website for Pets Unlimited now gives the husband of Dr. Ruth Levinsky as an organic farmer who raises sheep and the husband of Dr. Sandra Onassis as a police officer who volunteers for youth sports. Photos of the medical staff and receptionists have been scrubbed of butch women and fey men, leaving an array of squeaky-clean Hoosiers with neat haircuts and frozen smiles.

It might be that I completely imagined the LBGTQA version of Pets Unlimited, as my memory has always been poor and my imagination inserts various wrinkles, alterations, and sub-plots into ordinary situations. Or perhaps I have slipped into a different timeline in the vast multiverse.

In any case, it's a shame that a haven for the different, the despised, the socially outcast, has been disappeared.