

“Only Joking”

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<http://textshopexperiments.org/textshop05/weirdness-of-rhetoric>

TRANSCRIPT

[Will Bradley and His Orchestra’s uptempo jazz cover of Edvard Grieg’s “In the Hall of Mountain King” plays]

Voiceover: You are standing in a small clearing. In front of you is a small, white house.

You run toward it and open a door. You walk inside and find yourself standing in a kitchen. A frog stares at you from inside a glass teakettle on the stove. You open the refrigerator, which contains an untouched gallon of spoiled milk and a mostly consumed half-gallon of soy milk. You close the fridge, but realize you didn’t close the door you came in through. A woman with dark hair stands just inside it, her arms crossed.

“Found you.”

“I was only joking,” you say, and you try your best to make yourself look small and unassuming.

She takes a step toward you and produces a photograph from a shirt pocket.

“Tell that to her.”

You vaguely recognize the woman in the photograph. Where have you seen her before?

“I was only joking,” you say instinctively. You shrink back. The woman steps toward you, seeming taller than she did from a distance. “Only joking!” you say again, growing smaller. You wrack your brain trying to remember where you’ve seen the woman in the photograph before. Online, maybe? Someone’s profile picture?

You hear footsteps outside. “He’s in here,” shouts the dark-haired woman, and two more people run into the room.



“I was only joking,” you say as all three close in on you. They are silent, their lips pursed. You seem to be growing smaller and smaller, and your shirt slips off your shoulder, revealing a tattoo consisting of arcane numbers and symbols. “Really? Isn’t that a little on the nose?” says the dark-haired woman.

“I was only joking,” you say reflexively. The shrinking intensifies. You are three feet tall, two feet, a foot. As your clothing envelops you, you realize how you know the woman in the photograph. A writer, really not even a writer—a shill, a hack, who didn’t know how to compose a videogame review to save her life, and you let her know it.

You hesitate, but why hide it: “I meant it,” you admit. The shrinking slows. Louder, you shout, “I meant it.” You begin to grow larger. Your head emerges from the pile of clothes on the floor and rises back to the level of the room’s three other occupants.

“I MEANT EVERY WORD,” you laugh. They look mildly disgusted, but not especially concerned. “I meant it, I meant it,” you cry again and again as your loom toward the ceiling, but your voice begins to grow less distinct. You look down and realize your *body* is growing less distinct, growing paler and fainter. But you cannot stop yourself. It feels too good to drop the act and let these three know what you really think.

The shouting voice grows more distant, harder and harder to hear, as the once-human body swells, ghostly, fading through the walls and ceiling as it expands. The dark-haired woman nods to the others and returns the photo to her shirt pocket. The teakettle emits a harsh whistle, then it doesn’t. The three travelers shut the door and walk across the clearing. You dissipate in a light evening breeze, [music ends] unable to make a sound.

[momentary sound of vinyl hiss]