

Irreversible Dad

by Kenton K. Yee

I noticed Dad shrinking when I was in third grade. He could no longer pull books from the top shelf and his pants mopped the floor. I wanted to tell Dad to see a doctor, but Mom told me to let him be. "He is what he is," she said.

By the time I reached high school, Dad was the size of a teddy bear. Fortunately, Dad had academic tenure, so his condition was not a problem at work. The morning after I got my driver's license, I threw a blanket over him, locked him in a cat carrier, and drove him in for testing. "Collapsing wave function," the man wearing the stethoscope said.

"It's irreversible."

Dad continued teaching until a student nearly stepped on him. By that time, I was packing for college and Dad was smaller than a mouse — a baby mouse. We kept him in a gallon mayonnaise jar with two cotton balls. He licked one for water; the other absorbed his excrement.

I had to squint to resolve him during my first visit home. We sat in the kitchen. I munched a donut and flicked specks of powdered sugar into his jar. He chased after the falling flecks like a goldfish gobbling feed flakes.

"Be nicer to Mom," I said. "Changing your soggy cotton balls through the mouth of a mayo jar with tweezers is making her twitchy."

He cupped both hands over his mouth and shouted, but all I could hear was the quiet of cotton.

A few days later, Mom phoned to say she could no longer find him. I rushed home and took his jar to the research hospital, where they stuck it into an electron microscope. The computer screen flickered a black and white image of Dad sitting on a molecule of atoms, his legs crossed, an elbow on a knee. Engrossed in the undulations of a proton wave, he was as I had always imagined: the tall physics professor who reached up to the top shelf and pulled down books for me; the skinny graduate student who worked up the courage to ask Mom out on the final day of class; the little boy who stayed alone during recess in his second grade classroom to read about subatomic particles in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

