

Little Animal

Short story from *It Sparkles*

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An extract

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I know a mother who's often cold under the covers at the end of the day. She'll shiver and draw her husband's attention. 'Don't be so dramatic,' he goes. But she can't help it. Because she's cold, and afraid sometimes. Afraid the little hair on her chin means she's growing a beard. Afraid the neighbour's iguana will crawl onto her balcony. Afraid she's caught some disease. Afraid someone will say: 'Sorry, out of stock.' Afraid everyone can smell her armpits. Afraid of cloudbursts. Afraid she'll mumble a name in her sleep. Afraid the children won't come home. Afraid because the cat never seems grateful.

As night turns into darkness, she wonders which she is most: child, wife, mother. Then he holds her tight. 'You're a little animal,' he says. 'I'm afraid of little animals with bristly coats.'

His hand rests on her belly. She hears his breathing, the breathing of a larger animal. 'A lovely, perfect little animal is what you are, no bristly coat.' She closes her eyes. Maybe, she thinks, afraid is just another word for alive. The other day, she told me she often worries about her defect before falling asleep, those two deep dimples in her right buttock, and about the confetti she keeps in them, in case there's ever a party.

'You alright?' I said.

We laughed. Long, hard, tears rolling down our cheeks.
