

Mark Crimmins

Little Baby Bananas

My girlfriend had to have them. *Look*, she said in the store. *Look at these cute little baby bananas! There must be twenty of them in each bunch!* I looked at the baby bananas. Sure, there were quite a few of them. I didn't count them, but I could see clear enough there were plenty to keep a man busy. Plenty. And yeah, you guessed it, after I bought them—the baby bananas—they sat there on the counter not getting eaten for three days. Then my girlfriend went back to her place. She still hadn't eaten any of the baby bananas. I mentioned it to her when she was leaving with her little suitcase on its wheels. *Why don't you take the baby bananas with you?* She said she'd look nuts taking a bunch of baby bananas across an international border. What the hell was she going to say to customs? *Alright, then*, I said, *at least eat a few of them before you go.* But no. She didn't feel like eating any of the baby bananas. How about that? I bought the goddam things. I lugged em home. I took them out of the bag and put them on the counter, feeling like I was being a good boyfriend. I'd even gone to the trouble of buying the best bunch.

In the store there were, I dunno, something like five six of these bunches of baby bananas. They were so small they almost didn't look like bananas. I remember thinking they looked like something else. Not like bananas. But what was it that I thought they looked like when I saw them on the fruit stand in the store in the basement of the mall? It's like I have to climb into my own brain and clamber around to figure it out. Not that it's important. What do a bunch of baby bananas look like? Well, they look like different things to different people, obviously. Everybody has their own opinion. But me, when I saw them in the store, I remember I stopped and looked at them for a minute. It was like I didn't recognize them as bananas at first. I guess because they were so small. And now it's just three days later and I'll be damned if I can even remember what it was they looked like. It was something to do with how closely bunched together they all were. They made two perfect little rows. Maybe it was teeth they looked like. Dinosaur teeth it could have been. Or shark teeth. I'd seen a dinosaur head in a museum not too long before I bought them. I think it was a T Rex. It wasn't the biggest teeth of the dinosaur that the baby bananas reminded me of, I now remember. It was the dinosaur's back teeth or maybe I should say side teeth. I don't even know if that's a word—side teeth. But these teeth on the dinosaur, they weren't the great big front ones that look like they could bite right into a car and puncture a

hole in the roof. Maybe they could even punch a hole in an airplane's fuselage. I think that's what it's called. *Fuselage*.

Hot damn! That must be the fanciest word I know right there. French, I think it is. Or maybe it's German. Languages aren't my strong point. I mean maybe *fuselage* is a Greek word—how about that? I only know how to spell it because of the band. I don't think it's Russian. I'm pretty sure it's not Chinese or Japanese or any of those Asian languages. Maybe *banana* is, though. It wouldn't surprise me if it was—banana an Asian word. After all, they have a lot of bananas in that part of the world, I think. Asia—bananas: I'm sure there's a connection. Anyway, you take a word like that, a word like *banana*, and you really look hard at it like I'm looking at it now as I'm writing it down on this piece of paper, and you can see it's probably not an English word at all. Maybe that's what was unusual about these particular bananas I'm talking about. Maybe they were Asian bananas. Say, Vietnamese bananas. Maybe bananas are just a tiny fruit in Vietnam. How would I know? How would I know a thing like that? What am I gonna do? Look it up in the encyclopedia? *The Encyclopedia of Bananas*? Or maybe they're Thai bananas. That would sound right to me, and maybe *banana* is a Thai word, but I'll say this: *fuselage*—I'm pretty damn sure that's not a Thai word, even though I can't even count to one in Thai. It's just a hunch I have.

So anyway, out the door she goes without eating a single one of them goddam little baby bananas. I just let em sit there on the counter for a coupla days. What was I gonna do with a bunch of tiny little bananas like that? It made me tired just looking at them.

Oh—I remembered what it was they reminded me of, the bananas, when I was standing in the store and my girlfriend was egging me on to get the goddam things. It's funny how you start using food words when you don't even mean to. Like when I said she was *egging* me on back there. She was *egging* me on to buy bananas. What kind of a statement is that? I think there's a name for it. But I wouldn't know what it was. I'm not what you'd call *a word person*. Then again, I spose it's obvious I'm also not *a baby banana person*. But who is? But then again all over again, some people must be. There must be *baby banana people* out there. Otherwise, how the hell would the baby bananas even have got grown in the first place, much less put on a fruiterer's shelf? Not that these bananas were on a shelf. Like I said, they were on a sort of platform thing covered in fake grass. Not AstroTurf exactly but something similar. Fake plastic grass. A fruit stand is what I'd call it. But I'm no expert. I really don't know. Not just the name for what the little baby bananas were on but the names of a lot of things. The world's full of the names of things like that, and me? I don't have the time or patience to figure em all out. So yeah—

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but whoa: I see I've forgot to say what it was the little baby bananas reminded me of. Maybe they reminded me of the side teeth from a T Rex dinosaur or a really big shark, a great white shark, say. I think they reminded me of that too. But when we were standing in the aisle of the supermarket, if it was actually the aisle of the supermarket we were standing in, and my girlfriend saw the baby bananas and went over to them, the first thing I thought was that they looked like a necklace. A really huge beautiful necklace. How do you like that? A necklace of bananas!

It's funny the things your mind comes up with sometimes. I mean, what could be more ridiculous than a necklace made out of two semicircular rows of baby bananas? Maybe it was some kind of fancy African necklace I'd seen in a museum, made out of gold, except this one was made out of little baby bananas, but they made the same pattern, the same shape as the African necklace in the museum. That was it! That's exactly what they looked like sitting there on the fake grass stand or platform or podium or whatever the fuck you call it. A necklace. In fact, maybe the dinosaur or shark tooth thing was at the same time. I think it was—yes, that's it: the double bunch of baby bananas looked like a really beautiful necklace made out of huge curled yellow dinosaur teeth. The baby bananas all made a sort of pattern. Like a fan. A fan's a strange thing to compare bananas to, I know. But oddly enough the pattern the baby bananas made all looked like they had been put that way by a jeweler of some kind. Just to make the pattern. I actually looked the baby bananas over when I was buying them. I remember it clearly now. I looked underneath them to see if somehow the grocer had arranged them in that pattern. But no—it wasn't the grocer. It was Nature. The baby bananas had all grown in that perfect pattern like a double necklace.

I mean, when I write it now, it's making me feel a bit silly. Partly because my mind has started making pictures of women wearing these necklaces of bananas. It would be an odd fashion trend, sure enough. But you never can predict what strange things can come out of the fashion industry. Look at some of the outfits you see the models wearing when they cruise down the runway! I don't know how they keep their faces straight. They may as well be wearing baby banana necklaces. The strange thing is if they did, I don't think anyone would bat an eye. Not after some of the things they've seen waltzing down the runway of that industry. A banana necklace would probably be regarded as too conservative. Too old fashioned. I suppose they'd be fine anyway for a coupla days—the banana necklaces. As long as the bananas were firm. I mean, who'd want to wear a necklace of mushy squishy decaying bananas? It wouldn't exactly be attractive, would it? I mean it would make you look nuts. Maybe you'd look nuts even

if the bananas weren't too ripe and dark and smushy and squelchy. But here's the thing: maybe you'd look nuts anyway, even without a banana necklace of any description. Maybe. It could even become a kind of saying to show that you thought someone was nuts. *Nuts*—there it is again! You talk about food, and you start using food words without even realizing it. It proves that our minds are working in ways we can't see. Picking out words because we're hungry, for example, when we—inside our heads—don't even know we're hungry. But anyway, yeah, it could become a saying. *She was so nuts she may as well have been wearing a necklace of baby bananas!* Something like that. Not a proverb exactly. More just a way of saying someone was crazy. *If she keeps talking that way, they'll be fitting her up for a baby banana necklace!* That kind of thing. You could even use it to talk about degrees of madness. *She already had a couple of baby bananas in hand—all she'd need was a few more and she'd have her a whole necklace.*

And that brings me back to number. These baby bananas, I just left them on the counter there. I'd say rotting away, but that wouldn't be right. These baby bananas weren't rotting away. Not anytime soon. Maybe that was the secret of their success. Maybe baby bananas like this—maybe they didn't go rotten so easy. Maybe they kept for a long time. I mean, if that wasn't the case it was hard to see what the benefit of them was. Why even have them at all, unless, like I said, that was the only kind of banana that would grow in, say Thailand or Indonesia or one of those places. What would I know about it? I had no frame of reference. That's what my boss Bill would say. Whenever he's stumped, he just leans back, cocks his head to the side, and says he has *no frame of reference*. I think he thinks it makes him sound intelligent. What it's supposed to mean I'm sure I don't know. Like I said, words aren't exactly my thing.

But then again, neither are baby bananas. I let them sit there, anyway, these baby bananas. A day went by. Two days went by. I'd come and go from work and such. Make coffee. Wash a few dishes. It was like I worked around the baby bananas. I didn't know what to do with them. In a way, I spose, they made a perfect pattern just the way they were. Maybe that was why someone had invented them in the first place. It was impossible to say just from looking at them, though I will say the necklace pattern seemed like a sort of clue. But here's the thing: it was like the pattern of the baby bananas was a clue, but I had absolutely no idea what the hell they might be a clue to.

Anyway, I'd read somewhere that bananas were actually going to become extinct. Maybe I saw it on the news. *A world without bananas*. Something like that it was. Maybe it was *National Geographic*. They're always doing stuff like that. *Save the Bananas*.

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That kind of thing. Maybe the slogan should be *Save the baby bananas!* You could put it on T-shirts. Maybe somebody already has. But yeah, I'd read it or heard it on TV for sure, on *Nat G* or somewhere else. The grim news. Because of some weird reason all the bananas in the world were going to die out. Like the dinosaurs. It wasn't in fifty million years, either, like most of those scientific predictions. And it wasn't global warming or pollution or overharvesting or anything like that. If you can overharvest bananas. I mean, what would I know about it? But look at fish is what I mean. You can overdo things sometimes. Like in Canada where they just kept catching all the fish and eating all the fish and then—bingo: there weren't any fish left. They'd just eaten the whole sea out of fish. God knows they must've been bursting out of their clothes after eating that many fish. Thor himself couldn't have done it. But anyway, this banana apocalypse wasn't *way in the future* when there's no human race or anything because we've all been burnt to a crisp and are long gone, etc., because of some scientific law some fancypants discovered. No. This was like in sixty years. I remember it was very close. It was a strange thought. Living in a world without bananas.

I remember seeing a neighbor's kid running across a parking lot and thinking that the kid was about six and that therefore when that little kid was an old man there would be no more bananas. He'd be living in a world without bananas. Maybe he'd tell his own little grandkids what it was like back in the day when they still had bananas. Or maybe his grandkids would sit on old Grandpa's knee—this little neighbor six-year-old all grown old—and ask him what bananas were like. And maybe he'd have a hard time telling them. Food can be hard to describe to people who haven't eaten it. Or maybe he'd get a glow in his eye, this little kid, sixty seventy years from now when he was an old man, and tell his own grandkids that were the age he was now when I was seeing him out the window and thinking about this, thinking, to be honest, less about the kid really than the bananas themselves—tell them amazing stories about how delicious bananas were and how the world wasn't as good a place now that bananas were no longer a part of it. Who could say? It was a strange thought, anyway, this idea that one day we'd all just wake up and there'd be no more bananas. Maybe they'd have a picture of the person in the paper who had eaten the last one. Or maybe they'd have a special banquet at which the last banana would be eaten, and people would have to pay a thousand bucks each just to have one tiny ice cream sample plastic spoonful of the last banana in the world. And maybe someone would paint this touching scene and the painting, and the painter would become famous. *The Last Supper of the Banana*. Something like that. Myself, I found it all a bit hard to imagine. But then again look at the

dinosaurs. If they were wiped out, with those teeth and hides of theirs, what chance did the humble banana have of surviving? But then again, the banana had survived, hadn't it? I mean, there aren't any more dinosaurs and yet there are bananas, right? So, bananas must have been doing something right. Right? Anyway, whatever they'd been doing right hadn't been enough, according to the scientists. No sir. Nothing the humble banana could do could save it from extinction. The banana was doomed. One day it would happen: the end of the world for bananas.

And these baby bananas, now that I think of it, maybe they were some sort of sign themselves. Maybe bananas all over the world were shrinking. I mean, what did I know about it? I wasn't a bananologist, was I? Far from it. Maybe everywhere bananas were shrinking, and they would just get smaller and smaller until finally they were just so small it wasn't worth eating them at all. Little itchy-bitsy bananas the size of grains of rice. I mean, how would you even get the peels off? If you ask me, the baby bananas themselves were already well along this road. I mean, when I finally did mosey on over to the counter and tear one off the bunch, I found I'd eaten the whole thing in about a bite and a half. What kind of a banana is that? I broke another one off. Peeled it. Chompf. Chumpf. It was gone in two bites. I broke a third one off. The skin was thin, and these little baby bananas were a bit harder to peel than ordinary bananas. I ate a fourth one. There were little banana skins all over the counter and still I hadn't eaten enough banana to keep me satisfied. I counted the bunch and the discarded skins. There were twenty-one of the little bastards. Eleven in the sort of inner part of the necklace and ten on the outer. Depending, of course, on which way it was you looked at the baby bananas from. I think I'd eaten eight of the little things before I realized how labour intensive it all was. I figured, to get your regular hit from a regular banana you had to peel the banana. Okay. That was par for the course. Parkour. Whatever. But you got to chomp on the banana, depending on the banana, for a while. But these little baby bananas—to get the same quantity of banana you had to do a lot more work. You had to put in a huge amount of labour, I guess you could say, in order to get your banana fix.

And that got me thinking. It intrigued me. So, I pulled out the little food scale I keep in the back of the cutlery drawer. I don't use it for much. Occasionally I weigh an almond or a peanut or something like that. A Froot Loop. That kind of thing. Not that the information is very useful. I mean, what the hell's the use of knowing that a Froot Loop weighs a tenth of a gram? Who the hell can make any use of that kind of information? It's not exactly rocket science, is it? Not what the Russians are trying to steal with their spies. *Secrets of the Froot*

Loop! But that's the thing about me. My old girlfriend—the one before the girlfriend of the baby bananas—used to say it about me all the time: I didn't make any sense. And I suppose I didn't. I mean here I am repeating it, so it must mean something, right? Right. So, I broke another baby banana off the bunch and stuck it on the scale. It weighed fifty-six grams. Two ounces. I was eating, or I would soon be eating—because the thing about these baby bananas was that they never seemed to fill you up no matter how many of them you ate—a two-ounce banana. But I didn't have a regular banana to weigh for comparison.

So, believe it or not, I walked down to the corner to the convenience store and bought a bunch of regular bananas so I could weigh them and compare. I'm *obsessed with measurement*, that's what my girlfriend (the baby-banana girlfriend) says. So back up the street I came with that little bag of regular bananas, and I was thinking that one day, if the scientists were right, nobody would be able to do that—just walk up the street with a bunch of bananas in a little brown paper bag. It gave me a funny feeling. I wouldn't call it sadness. Who ever heard of being sad for bananas? You'd have to *be bananas* to feel that way about bananas—ha ha! You'd have to have gone *nuts!* Been driven *nuts* by *egging* the *banana* on to beat its own extinction!

Okay. So, I got home and picked a nice grand old specimen out of the bag of regular bananas and put it on the scale. It was a primo enough banana that I had trouble fitting it on the scale. It came in at exactly a pound. So now I had it, didn't I? I had a perfect ratio of one to eight right there. Eight baby bananas fit into one big banana. The numbers were so round and perfect you could almost use them to teach kids their numbers. *Eight little baby bananas makes one big banana*, etc. I didn't know quite what to make of it actually. You could say I'd never thought so much about bananas in my whole life. And it had all come out of having that strange little bunch, the double African necklace of dinosaur side teeth bananas sitting on the counter and trying to figure out what to do with them and when to eat them and what they were all about and so on. And the funniest thing about it was that I didn't care a damn for the baby bananas myself at all. Remember, it was my girlfriend who was so hip to the bananas that she had to have them and then she went away and didn't eat any of them and left them for me to eat, which, thanks! But it wasn't any hardship, was it, exactly? I mean, it didn't take any hair off my chest eating the little bastards, except, like I said, for the sort of hard work it ended up being, if you added it all up.

I wanted to time it and try to sort of estimate what the relative labour was. Between peeling a regular banana that weighed a pound, for example, and then peeling eight little baby bananas. What would the proportions be, etc? That kind of stuff fascinates me. Then there

was another problem almost immediately that also required some research on my part. This being so obvious the reader has probably already figured it out. But it takes me a long time to notice such things. Namely, the data relating to the relative weights of the little baby bananas *after* they had been peeled and the sort of Big Brother banana *after* it had been peeled. That would have been a very interesting little set of numbers to have, I don't mind saying. But I didn't end up doing that further research for reasons I won't go into. Basically, though, I had figured out that I was eating eight little baby bananas every time I was hungry enough to eat one big or one regular (if substantial) banana. And that was pretty much all there was to say or think about it as far as I could see.

Although, true enough, the more I thought about it, the more I realized it was possible to think about them, these little baby bananas. But it wasn't like they were the aurora borealis or the moons of Saturn or anything, was it? I mean all they were at the end of the day was a bunch of little baby bananas. And here I was eating and monitoring and weighing these bananas and writing about them and thinking about them like I was the president of the Baby Banana Fan Club of America or something. Like it was my dream to think more deeply about little baby bananas than anyone else had ever done in the history of the human race. When really, I didn't give a shit about the bananas, the little baby ones or the big brother ones, about my eating or not eating them, or even about these deep thoughts I'd been having like a philosopher of baby bananas. And these words I had so carefully written down, too. Everything was in the same bag, so to speak.

