Flowers for Algernon

Daniel Keyes wrote little SF but is highly regarded for one classic, Flowers for Algernon. As a 1959 novella it won a Hugo Award; the 1966 novel-length expansion won a Nebula. The Oscar-winning movie adaptation Charly (1968) also spawned a 1980 Broadway musical. Following his doctors instructions, engaging simpleton Charlie Gordon tells his own story in semi-literate progress reports. He dimly wants to better himself, but with an IQ of 68 can't even beat the laboratory mouse Algernon at maze-solving: I dint feel bad because I watched Algernon and I lernd how to finish the amaze even if it takes me along time. I dint know mice were so smart. Algernon is extra-clever thanks to an experimental brain operation so far tried only on animals. Charlie eagerly volunteers as the first human subject. After frustrating delays and agonies of concentration, the effects begin to show and the reports steadily improve: Punctuation, is? fun! But getting smarter brings cruel shocks, as Charlie realizes that his merry friends at the bakery where he sweeps the floor have all along been laughing at him, never with him. The IQ rise continues, taking him steadily past the human average to genius level and beyond, until hes as intellectually alone as the old, foolish Charlie ever was--and now painfully aware of it. Then, ominously, the smart mouse Algernon begins to deteriorate... Flowers for Algernon is a timeless tear-jerker with a terrific emotional impact. --David Langford

Charlie Gordon is a mentally retarded man. He doesn't realize how broad life can be. Working in Donners Bakery is all Charlie knows. When Charlie is chosen as the first, along with a mouse named Algernon, to have an operation to increase hi IQ, his eyes open wider to see that life is as big as you make it. He learns all about the world and his scarring childhood.

Charlie soon learns that he is surrounded by narcissistic people, and even though it was Charlie who had made a breakthrough, those people were still going to take credit for his newfound purpose. So Charlie decides to go out on his own in New York City, housing Algernon. His IQ becomes high, but emotionally Charlie is trailing behind.
When his IQ reaches to a level that is above those who taught him, Charlie ends up isolating himself. While Charlie becomes one of the smartest men in New York, he still isn't wise enough to see life outside of his own little window. But what will become of Charlie when its time to hand his body back to the original Charlie Gordon?

Charlie experiences all of growing up, getting out on your own, experimenting with your sexuality, finding out who you are, dealing with incompetence, and finding it in yourself. Charlie must learn who he is before his hourglass empties.

Flowers for Algernon is a fabulous book. One to five, I give this book a six. It is recommended for anyone and everyone over the age of 12, because there are some explicit scenes. This book taught me what it's like to be an outcast, and in a quick changing environment. Also, I learned that who you are, is who you are. You can't change that, so don't even try. Daniel Keys is phenomenal at describing each scene. You'll think you're sitting in the laboratory or on Charlie's couch the entire time! Flowers for Algernon is good for both educational reading, and its great for pleasure.

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