

Opposites Attract

I was having a late lunch at my favorite restaurant on a snowy Saturday afternoon. Surely you know the place, the one with the fashion-challenged polyester clown and the big golden “M.” I was one of over 74 billion happy customers served. To me it was like fast food heaven on earth, and I was loving it. It helped make me the man I am today.

I was sitting uncomfortably on the upholstered bench that stretches along the length of the inside wall. There was no way I could fit my body into one of those immovable table-and-chair combinations they bolt to the floor in mathematically predetermined positions. They were designed for normal customers, and I was far from normal. My tray was loaded with food: three large orders of fries, a super-size strawberry banana smoothie, and four, yes four, of the chain’s latest addition to the menu – the McBelly Buster Triple Half-Pound Bacon Cheeseburger Supreme™.

I should explain that I have an unusual addiction, which, like most addictions, has profoundly affected the conditions of my daily life. I can’t stop eating. I don’t mean that merely as a figure of speech to indicate that I have a big appetite or that sometimes I eat more than I should. No, I *literally* cannot stop eating. No matter how much food I cram into my mouth, I am never satisfied. My ravenous hunger leaves me hardly a moment’s peace. It consumes me, just as I consume. It keeps me from sleeping properly, so that each night I have to get up and leave my bed for repeated trips to the refrigerator. Because of my lack of sleep, I never have any energy during the day. I constantly feel dull, lazy, and unmotivated. I lost my last full-time job two and a half years ago (“performance issues,”

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they said). Now the bit of telemarketing work I do from home brings in just enough money to pay the bills and support my habit.

The effects of my addiction are plain for everyone to see. Over the years I have changed – from pleasingly plump as a little boy, to chunky as a teenager, to modestly fat in college, to obese as a young working adult, and finally, at the age of thirty-five, into a super-sized monster. Despite all the trouble it causes me, I have to confess that I love eating with a passion, the same way some people are passionate about golfing or bowling or bingo.

My small 5 foot 7 inch frame supports an incredible burden of 486 pounds of soft fat, and I expect to hit the benchmark of 500 in a mere matter of weeks, thereby joining the exclusive club of the fattest of the fat. Guinness-fat; circus sideshow fat. I am still mobile, but only barely, and standard-width doorways are becoming more and more of an obstacle for my globe-like shape. My doctor told me that my only hope was bariatric surgery, but I don't want to go under the knife just for the sake of losing a few measly pounds. The honest-to-God truth is that I enjoy being fat, in a self-destructive sort of way. On the increasingly rare occasions when I move my body and waddle a few steps here and there (it would be inaccurate to call it "walking"), I can feel my fat wiggle and jiggle in unusual directions, a sensation that I find intriguing and even, dare I say it, a little bit stimulating. I have to admit that deep in my heart of hearts, I have no real desire to change my accustomed way of life as a super fatty.

Because of my unique situation, I am able to provide gratuitous entertainment to the 99 percent of humanity that weighs less than me. It's awesome the way I attract attention whenever I'm in public. Old ladies stop what they're doing and stare, men smirk and shake their heads in disbelief, little kids point and giggle, and attractive young women cover their

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mouths with their hands and whisper to their friends. "Look at how *big* he is," I imagine them saying. I am pleased that I can be of service to mankind. Make them laugh and forget their troubles, if only for a little while.

My doctor told me that "aside from the obvious health risks," my extreme obesity was causing me to become socially isolated. He's right. I do indeed feel cut off from the lesser, lighter creatures that surround me, the ordinary-sized human beings lacking my special qualities. So what if they can do things that I can't, like tie their shoes, sit on a barstool, climb stairs, fit in the bathtub, or look down at their toes? What do I care? I don't need them and they don't need me, except as an object of their insults.

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Aside from a few employees standing idly behind the counter or servicing the drive-up window, the place was almost empty. It was probably because of the bad weather and the fact that this was the mid-afternoon lull between lunch and dinner. An elderly couple sat at a table near the windows, sharing a single cup of coffee between them. Two teenage girls wearing black lipstick with streaks of pink and green in their matching black hair were huddled together, engrossed in the content on the screen of their laptop. An unkempt man who appeared to be drunk was dozing over his meal at the far end of the room. The only other person I noticed was a very tall, extremely thin young woman sitting at a table not far from me. On the tray in front of her she had only a small paper cup, and I guessed that it contained nothing more than diet soda or ice water.

Actually, the poor girl wasn't just thin, she was emaciated. Perhaps she suffers from an eating disorder, I thought to myself. She was at least six feet tall, and she had a narrow face with long, stringy blond hair. Her complexion was almost deathly pale, like she had

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been very ill recently, and from the scars on her face it seemed to me that she had had a bad case of acne as a teenager. Her chest was as flat as an ironing board and her white skinny arms poked out like matchsticks from the sleeves of the floral print dress she was wearing. There wasn't anything the least bit attractive about her appearance and I felt sorry for her. After all, she was not the kind of girl any man would bother to look at twice. She would be doomed to live as a solitary spinster for the rest of her life: lonely, unloved, and childless.

I sighed and turned my attention again to those wonderful half-pound bacon cheeseburgers in front of me. So big, so round, so juicy – just like me. Now and then I would stop eating to rub my massive belly, which was gradually filling to capacity. Unconcerned about table manners, I noisily gobbled bite after delicious bite, savoring the taste and texture of the food in my mouth.

The next time I glanced up, I noticed the skinny girl looking at me. Not just looking, actually, but staring at me intently. *Okay, just like all the others. Go ahead, sister—watch the disgusting fat man eat like a pig, if that's what turns you on.*

I tried to ignore her, but her incessant staring was starting to make me uncomfortable. I shifted my big buttocks on the cushion, causing the wood underneath to make a creaking sound, and looked out the window at the falling snow. She was still observing me and I had the impression that she was fascinated both by the superhuman dimensions of my body as well as by the speed at which the food disappeared into the open hole of my doughy face.

After about five minutes, she did something that amazes me to this very day. Without any warning, she grabbed her paper cup, got up, and walked the few steps over to where I was sitting. She stood motionless two feet in front of me. Totally dumbfounded, I

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stopped eating and looked up at her. She smiled in an embarrassed way and asked in a quiet voice, “Do you mind if I sit down with you?”

Well, I can tell you that this is not something that happens to me every day. A real live person who actually *talks* to me without making crude jokes or insulting comments. That’s completely unheard of! I was so astounded that at first I was speechless.

After an awkward pause, I finally managed to answer her. “Why of course, you can sit with me if you want to.” She carefully placed her cup on the table and sat down quietly, her pale face revealing a slight blush.

I picked up a few french fries and munched hesitantly. She cradled her cup in both hands and took a tiny sip. I tried to keep on eating, but her rapt attention was cramping my style. I enjoy eating, but I don’t like it when someone *watches* me eat, especially the way she was watching.

“My name’s Stacey,” she said after awhile, as she reached out her bony hand towards me.

“I’m Jerry, nice to meet you,” and I briefly held her hand in my fleshy fingers. Her hand was like ice.

“Go ahead, eat. Please don’t let me bother you.”

I picked up my cheeseburger again and tried to eat. She just sat there, looking at me, raising the cup to her lips from time to time to drink. She shifted sideways and crossed her long legs. Other people would often stare at me in public, but this was different. There was a hunger in the way she looked at me. I wondered for a moment if there might be something not quite right about her – psychologically, I mean. She seemed to be drawn to the bulging rolls of fat that encircled me, enthralled by the drooping male breasts that

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stretched the material across the chest of my knit jersey, creating a distinct shelf, like a busty woman's. Apparently my sensational corpulence fascinated her.

"You're really, really fat," she finally remarked with a childish bluntness, not in a mean way, but merely as a statement of fact.

"I know. And you're really, really skinny," I replied. At this we both burst out laughing and I couldn't resist reaching out and touching her hand. It seemed warmer this time.

I chuckled at the absurdity of this ridiculous situation and realized that I had a funny feeling somewhere below my overhanging belly. I experienced an emotion that I had almost forgotten about.

Stacey smiled and then she reached over and picked up the half-eaten burger lying on the tray next to me. "Here, let me help you."

She slowly brought the cheeseburger to my lips and I opened my mouth and took a bite. She patiently held the burger to my mouth so I could take another bite, and then another. Before long the enormous burger had disappeared.

I sighed deeply and put both of my hands on the curve of my belly. Stacey unwrapped another cheeseburger, picked it up, and lovingly fed it to me like the one before.

I closed my eyes and ate, not gulping the food as I usually do, but chewing it slowly, enjoying it. When I opened my eyes, Stacey's face was radiant.

"Did you like that?" she whispered.

"Yes, immensely," I said.

"I like it when you eat," she said. "If it makes you happy."

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Stacey fed me the rest of the burgers, and then the french fries, until the tray was empty. For the first time in ages, I felt as though my hunger had been satisfied. It was as if a great emptiness inside of me had been filled.

I picked up Stacey's cup and let her take a sip of water through the straw. "How's that? Good?" I said and again we laughed. Stacey watched in awe as my fat belly shook.

"I hope you enjoyed it as much as I did," she said with a smile that suddenly made her beautiful. I saw a loveliness in her face that I had not noticed before.

I was slightly out of breath after finishing my enormous feast. Like exhausted lovers, Stacey and I sat together in contented silence, until she reached behind her for the tiny black purse she had slung over the back of her chair. She snapped it open and took out a pen and a scrap of paper. I watched as she wrote down a few numbers and pushed the paper across the table towards me.

"Call me sometime, okay Jerry? Promise?"

I picked up the paper. "Yes, Stacey, I will. I promise."

She stood up, put on her overcoat, and quickly walked out the door into the driving snow.