

“Julian”

He was meticulous. No. Obsessive. Julian was never one to do something casually. He either didn't do it, or he did it. With unwavering and un-withering commitment. That's why he was fat for so long. He wasn't ready to give up his nightly Dairy Queen blizzards or tubs of store-bought cookie dough. He never made anything from scratch. He was the embodiment of American convenience, known to often take advantage of the two-for-\$5.99 Domino's Pizza deal. With delivery. That's why everyone at home was shocked when he came home for spring break thirty pounds lighter.

He didn't lose the weight on purpose. In fact, he had never initially thought of himself as fat. It was his steadfast dedication to his new job that did the trick. He would skip breakfast to work an early morning shift. Or dinner to work in the evening. Sometimes, he would work the whole day having only had a small something to drink. But the comments were encouraging. *I didn't recognize you at first. Have you been working out?* Enabling. The positive attention gave Julian a thirst. He never wanted to be fat again.

Maybe it felt so good because, for once, he was impressive. He'd always felt underwhelming. The second funniest friend in the group. The second smartest kid in the class. The talent show runner-up. Whatever this new feeling was, though, he was addicted. And so it began.

Julian stopped showing up for meals at the university dining hall. He stocked his single dorm with condiments and berries and Jell-O cups and carrots. If he did stop in, he'd have a black coffee with a hard-boiled egg. Or the occasional Diet Coke between classes. If the menu looked extra good, he'd allow himself one meal for the day. He never overdid it. He was proud of that. No missteps or cheat days.

When his stomach would grumble, he told himself it was the fat burning. When he got dizzy standing up, it meant he was doing everything right. He looked great.

He hadn't gone out to any parties since it all started. His new body. And it felt sensational to watch people's eyes widen upon seeing him again while going to class or

walking the perimeter of campus. Was it the weight loss that surprised them or his presence? Nobody had really seen Julian for a long time.

Summer came, and it got more extreme. Julian learned of calories and began to measure his food. He would weigh himself every morning, eating fewer calories if the number rose. He didn't have a goal weight. Some magic number that would make him stop. He just wanted to be smaller.

He was still able to enjoy the little things. A skinny margarita on the Fourth of July. His brought-from-home butter-less popcorn at the cinema. He was happier this way. He was looked at differently. Treated a different way from when he was fat.

Then summer became fall. And fall started to turn to winter. Julian was cold. He'd never felt such a chill. Like wind was going through his bones. He'd bought a parka coat that went to his knees. In the past, he had rarely worn a jacket. He was still cold. That could have been what broke him.

Maybe he thought *I'm tired of being so cold all of the time or How am I meant to go on forever measuring everything I eat? Every gram of even salt and pepper?* But Julian decided he was done.

He looked in his mirror one last time. Should he take a picture? He looked like a model. The kind that was photographed sitting outside a cafe with a cigarette and a tortured expression. But Julian wasn't tortured. He felt spoiled. He had given himself an artful physique. He knew people loved to look at him. Everything looked good on him. Every shirt. Every baggy pair of trousers. His smile was skeletal. And he loved it. He had loved himself. He had never felt more confident.

But Julian was never one to do something casually. He either didn't do it, or he did it. With unwavering and un-withering commitment. That's why he had gone to the grocery earlier that day. When he bought bags of miniature chocolate donuts and gummy candy and hot chips and pales of ice cream and jars of peanut butter and a loaf of bread. He was done.

He sat there in front of the mirror. *Where should I start?* he thought. He smiled. He unrolled the bag of donuts, and he began to eat. He ate and he ate. At first, he was taking in every bit of flavor.

Every morsel of sweet and every tinge of savory. *Mmm*. Then, he stopped tasting. But he kept going. He didn't want to stop. It felt so good to eat. He watched in the mirror as his stomach swelled tighter inside his shirt. His behavior was indulgent. Hedonistic. But it was orgasmic. Julian felt truly free.

He'd eaten his grocery bags empty. He was sick. And so stuffed he could puke. He still wanted more. He stood from his spot on his bedroom floor and waddled to the pantry. Potato chips. Dry noodles. Cereal. Sodas. Chocolates. He'd had it all. *More*, he thought. *More*. Julian ate for hours, clearing the fridge and even the remnants of the sugar container. He drank sips of red wine between bites. He ate everything. And he still wasn't satiated. He had months and months of pent-up hunger that he'd been denying himself of.

There were no restrictions anymore. He bit into a wooden coaster he'd picked up from the coffee table. *This can do*. He ate coasters. He ate corks. He ate bits of tablecloth and napkins. Nothing was off limits. He ate as the sun went down and was still eating as it rose again. He was so full. He was hurting. But his body wanted to keep going. So he kept going. He ate bedding. He ate stuffed animals. He ate bits of fine jewelry. He chewed and swallowed the smooth plastic of his clothing hangers. And the oily wax of his scented candles. He ate houseplants. He ate glasses. He ate computer keys. And then, he felt it.

There was a ripping from inside of him. It felt like his belly was being slowly cut into with a surgeon's knife. He'd never felt such pain.

He tried to scream. But he couldn't. He was so stuffed. He was realizing he could hardly breathe. *Should I make myself throw up?* He poked his finger down his throat, but the trigger wouldn't pull. His breaths became faster. And shallower. His eyes welled with tears. What had he done to himself? He wanted to scream. He wanted to scream so bad, but there was nothing he could physically do.

His belly was going to split in half.

He wondered if he was going to die. He wondered what events in his life had all led him to this place, lying on the floor, surrounded by half-eaten objects. As the world grew dimmer, he wondered how he would be remembered. Would he be known for his body? For the tightness of his skin? And the looseness of his clothes? But nobody would remember Julian. After all, nobody had really seen Julian for a long time.